

Profile and career of Nutrition graduates from Vale do Paraíba region, State of São Paulo

Perfil e carreira de egressos de Nutrição da Região do Vale do Paraíba-SP

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Abstract

Objectives: To investigate professional characteristics, including practices related to the updating of knowledge in the field of performance of Nutrition graduates. *Methodology:* Descriptive and cross-sectional study using a structured questionnaire composed of closed questions and an instrument for evaluating lifelong learning. The data were analyzed in a descriptive and analytical way. For the analysis of the difference between the prevalences in the different tertiles of the Jefferson Scale, the Chi-Square test was used. *Results:* Most graduates were women, the main area of practice and graduate course was clinic, the salary ranged between 2 and 3 minimum wages, with possible variation depending on the worked hours. The nutritionists with greater motivation and dedication to technical-scientific updating had higher salaries. *Discussion:* The use of a tool that proposes to measure lifelong learning has brought some interesting questions for reflection, such as the relation between greater technical and scientific improvement and the salary issue. *Conclusion:* Future studies, including the validation of the instrument used in this research, can bring great contribution and enable more consistent evaluations regarding the career of nutritionists.

Keywords: Nutritionists. Work Performance. Job Market.

Resumo

Objetivos: Investigar características profissionais, incluindo práticas relativas à atualização de conhecimentos no campo de atuação, de egressos de Nutrição. *Metodologia:* Estudo descritivo

e transversal com uso de questionário estruturado composto por perguntas fechadas e instrumento de avaliação de aprendizagem ao longo da vida. Os dados foram analisados de forma descritiva e analítica. Para a análise da diferença entre as prevalências nos diferentes tercis da Escala de Jefferson, utilizou-se o teste Qui Quadrado. *Resultados:* Identificou-se que a maioria dos egressos eram mulheres, a principal área de atuação e de pós-graduação foi a clínica, a faixa salarial estava entre 2 e 3 salários-mínimos, com possível variação para a carga horária trabalhada. Os nutricionistas com maior motivação e dedicação para atualização técnico-científica possuíam maiores salários. *Discussão:* O uso de ferramenta que se propõe a medir o aprendizado ao longo da vida trouxe algumas questões interessantes para reflexão, como a relação do maior aperfeiçoamento técnico-científico com a questão salarial. *Conclusão:* Futuros estudos, que incluam a validação do instrumento utilizado nesta investigação, podem trazer grandes contribuições e permitir avaliações mais consistentes a respeito da carreira de nutricionistas.

Palavras-chave: Nutricionistas. Desempenho Profissional. Mercado de Trabalho.

Introduction

Studies with the objective of analyzing the professional performance of any category are relevant since they can provide a better understanding of the market situation, pointing out challenges and trends.

According to Cerqueira et al.,¹ follow-up studies of graduates are a possibility of analysis about education and allow us to explore other issues, such as changes in the world of work, involving changes in nature and the work process, new forms of occupation and professions, besides continuity in the formation and professional development of the graduated student. This information allows increasing the offer of courses adapted to the real needs of society, identifying the professions with the highest demand and professional education committed to citizenship.

Results of studies with graduates can serve as a guide both for professionals, who can promote changes in their careers, and for educational institutions, which will have subsidies for updating their pedagogical projects.

As for the undergraduate course in Nutrition, there is no systematic and continuous assessment of graduates in Brazil, which would generate an excellent contribution to professional career planning and would also serve as a basis for changes in curricular guidelines and pedagogical projects.

Considering that the first course of Nutrition dates from 1939 (extinguished Faculty of Hygiene, current Faculty of Public Health / USP), that is, almost 80 years of creation,² and that data presented at the National Meeting of Professional Training - Federal Council of Nutritionists, points out 410 undergraduate courses in Nutrition in the country,³ the expansion of studies and the dissemination of data of this nature would contribute to better training and professional performance.

The studies on Nutrition graduates in Brazil are descriptive, with analyzes focused on the geographical distribution of professionals, areas of activity, training time and / or insertion in the labor market, satisfaction with the profession, as well as other characteristics that aid the composition of the professional profile.⁴⁻¹⁰

From the perspective of analyzing the professional training and performance, the behavior against the need for constant updating also contributes to the understanding of the professional characteristics and performance, not to mention that the continuous technical and scientific improvement is one of the premises contemplated in the Code of Professional Ethics.¹¹

One of the tools that can be used to investigate the technical-scientific improvement in health professionals is the assessment of Lifelong Learning (LLL), which can be performed through the Jefferson Scale.^{12,13} It is a brief, self-filling scale, whose average time for the realization is 10 to 15 minutes.^{14,15} It includes the motivation, capacity and behaviors necessary to maintain and develop competences in knowledge, technologies and professional practices.

Originally aimed at evaluating physicians, the Jefferson Scale - LLL was based on an operationalization of the concept that aggregates the behavioral aspects, competences, predisposition and cognitive aspects of the individual.¹⁴

In addition to studies with physicians, there are studies on LLL with other health professionals, especially nurses. According to the authors of one of the studies with nurses, evaluating lifelong learning of this professional class favors care provided by professionals, as it can promote the search for professional and personal development.¹³

As a locus of this study, the Nutrition Course of the University of Vale do Paraíba (Universidade do Vale do Paraíba - Univap) started in 2005, being the fifth course of the Faculty of Health Sciences (Faculdade de Ciências da Saúde - FCS). It is based in Urbanova Campus, in the city of São José dos Campos-SP, region of Vale do Paraíba. It is the main city of the Metropolitan Region of the Vale do Paraíba and North Coast, and has a national industrial and technological pole with emphasis in four sectors: automotive, aerospace, telecommunications and beverages. This

region is characterized by the great concentration of industrial and commercial activities, with an evolutionary dynamic in several sectors, consequently demanding formal education. Tourism exploitation supports the economy of the other cities of the region, such as the Historical Valley (Banana, Arcias), Vale and Serrana Region (Campos do Jordão and São Luís do Paraitinga) and Serra do Mar (Ubatuba and Ilhabela).

The interest and the concern to offer a professional education committed to the society are issues that justified the accomplishment of this study. Although the Nutrition market has received graduates from Univap for only eight years, the frequent changes that take place in the area make it relevant to research the profile of professionals and their interests in the continuous updating regarding technical knowledge, professional practice, motivation and willingness to invest in lifelong learning.

Thus, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the Nutritionist's performance, this study aimed to investigate the professional characteristics of Nutrition graduates of a private institution in the State of São Paulo.

Method

Descriptive and cross-sectional study using self-filling questionnaires

Graduates of the Univap Nutrition course were contacted, from the first group (graduated in 2008), until the group whose graduation ceremony was in early 2015. The contacts of the alumni were obtained at the coordination office of the course, with the authorization of the coordinator.

To sensitize the participants, contact was made by e-mail, followed by a telephone call to reinforce the information. The e-mail contained explanations about the research, such as contextualization of the study, objective, method and expected results, in addition to the Informed Consent Term (Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido - TCLE).

When there was interest in participating in the study, one of the researchers made telephone contact scheduling the collection of the signed TCLE and the delivery of the questionnaire, printed and also in digital version, if the participant so preferred. At that time, in case of doubt, clarifications were also provided.

The questionnaire was composed of questions about the geographic distribution in the work, salary income range, type of employment bond, professional performance and technical-scientific improvement.

In order to investigate the technical-scientific improvement, the LLL analysis was used through the application of the Jefferson Scale, translated into Portuguese with minor adjustments in the

questions, specifically, replacing the term “doctor” for “nutritionist”. The scale is a four-position Likert type (1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - agree, and 4 - strongly agree). Particularly regarding the scale, the participant was informed that some questions were about the search for scientific contents, obtained from sources of scientific data. The data collected in the questionnaire were analyzed in a descriptive way and presented through graphs and tables.

For the Jefferson Scale, the sum of the score by question was analyzed, as well as the result of the general egress score, distributed in tertiles for the analysis of the relation with the other study variables. The values described in the first tertile correspond to the questionnaires with the lowest score, and the values described in the third tertile correspond to the questionnaires with the highest score. The literature states that the highest values correspond to the best LLL.¹⁴

For the statistical analysis of the difference between the prevalence in the different tertiles of the Jefferson Scale, the Chi-square test was used with a significance level of 5%. The software used was IBM SPSS version 16.

The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee on February 24, 2015, registered under CAAE 40723214.3.0000.5503.

Results

Of the 84 graduates of the UNIVAP Nutrition course, 79 active electronic addresses and / or contact telephone numbers were identified. Of these, 40 graduates composed the study (50.6%).

It was identified that Nutrition graduates from Univap are concentrated between 20 and 30 years of age and are predominantly women (97.5%).

Regarding the academic characteristics (Table 1), it was observed that more than half of the sample sought continuity in their training, doing specialization or masters, especially in the clinical area.

Concerning the professional characteristics, it was observed that the work is concentrated in the clinical areas and in the collective feeding, working as freelancer and in private companies. When the egress did not work, the justification focused on the responses “newly formed” and “lack of job offer”. The salary range is concentrated between R\$ 1,501.00 and R\$ 2,500.00, with greater performance in the city of São José dos Campos (Table 2).

Table 1. Academic characteristics of the graduates of the Nutrition course / Univap, São José dos Campos-SP, Brazil, 2015.

Academic characteristics	Egresses (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Degree (n = 40)</i>		
Undergraduate	19	47.5
Graduate (specialization)	19	47.5
Graduate (Master's degree)	2	5.0
<i>Area of specialization (n = 21)</i>		
Clinic	15	71.5
Collective nutrition	3	14.0
Sports	2	9.5
Collective Health	1	5.0
<i>Reason for not taking a graduate course (n=19)</i>		
Lack of time	6	32.0
Monthly fee	6	32.0
Lack of interest	5	26.0
Other	2	10.0

Table 2. Professional characteristics of the graduates of the Nutrition course / Univap, São José dos Campos-SP, Brazil, 2015.

Professional Features	Egresses (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Professional performance (n=40)</i>		
Yes	31	77.5
No	9	22.5
<i>Area of performance (n=31)</i>		
Collective nutrition	10	32.0
Collective nutrition + Teaching	2	7.0
Clinic	12	39.0

continue

Professional Features	Egresses (n)	Percentage (%)
Clinic + Teaching	1	3.0
Clinic + Collective Health	1	3.0
Food industry	1	3.0
Nutrition in sports	3	10.0
Collective Health	1	3.0
<i>Reason for not working (n=9)</i>		
Newly trained	4	45.0
Lack of job offer	2	22.0
Unattractive Opportunities	1	11.0
Current in another area	2	22.0
<i>Type of employment relationship (n = 31)</i>		
Public - Statutory	1	3.0
Public - CLT	3	10.0
Private - CLT	11	35.0
Autonomous worker	12	39.0
Did not answer	4	13.0
<i>Salary range (n=31)</i>		
>R\$ 1,000.00 until R\$ 1,500.00	6	19.5
R\$ 1,501 to R\$ 2,500	14	45.0
R\$ 2,501 to R\$ >3,000	11	35.5
<i>Place of work (n=31)</i>		
São José dos Campos	16	51.5
Jacareí	3	10.0
São Sebastião	1	3.0
Other	11	35.5

In the analysis of the answers of the Jefferson Scale, the graduates scored with greater value the questions: (2) Lifelong learning is a responsibility of all nutritionists; (13) The speed with which changes in the health field take place requires constant updating of knowledge and the development of new professional skills; (16) I acknowledge my need to constantly acquire new professional knowledge. On the other hand, the issues that had lower scores, related to the situation of discordance, were: (9) On average, I make at least one presentation per year at a professional congress; (10) I develop research as principal investigator or co-investigator; (15) I publish articles in peer-reviewed journals (*peer review*) (Board 1).

Board 1. Sum of the scores, by questions, of the Adapted Jefferson Scale - Lifelong Learning of the graduates of the Nutrition Course / Univap, São José dos Campos-SP, Brazil, 2015.

Questions	Score final (sum)
1. Searching for the answer to a question is, in and by itself rewarding.	114
2. Life-long learning is a responsibility of all nutritionists.	150
3. I enjoy reading articles in which issues of nutrition are discussed.	140
4. I routinely attend annual meetings of professional nutrition organizations and other areas related to my professional area.	104
5. I usually exchange emails / messages with profession colleagues with information regarding new knowledge in the field of Nutrition, research results, training opportunities, among others.	117
6. I read professional journals at least once a week.	111
7. I have a habit of searching databases to find out about new developments in my professional area.	111
8. I believe I would be harmed in my personal and professional development if I failed to keep up with the new developments in my profession.	141
9. On average, I make at least one presentation per year at a professional congress.	61
10. I develop research as a principal investigator or as a co-investigator.	69
11. I attend training actions regardless of whether they give me training credits.	95

continue

Questions	Score final (sum)
12. One of the important goals of Nutrition schools is to develop students' lifelong learning skills.	138
13. The speed with which changes in the health area take place requires a constant updating of knowledge and the development of new professional skills.	148
14. I always arrange time to update myself, even when I have a very busy schedule and other professional and family obligations.	110
15. I publish articles in peer-reviewed journals (<i>peer review</i>).	51
16. I recognize my need to constantly acquire new professional knowledge.	142
17. As a routine, I attend training courses aimed at improving the care provided to the patient.	90
18. I take every opportunity to acquire new knowledge / skills that are important to my profession.	125
19. My preferred approach to finding an answer to a question is to search the appropriate databases.	133

There seems to be a tendency for the relationship between the Jefferson Scale and degree: the higher the degree, the higher the scoring on the scale. In the first tertile, there is the highest concentration of graduate students; in the third tertile of the scale, the specialists and masters are better represented, but no statistical difference was identified ($p = 0.054$) (Graph 1).

In the analysis of the relation of the scale with the salary range, it was observed that the salaries of the graduates increase with the increase of the score in the scale. The prevalence of the best salaries happens with the graduates presenting the best values in the scale ($p = 0.02$), according to Graph 2.

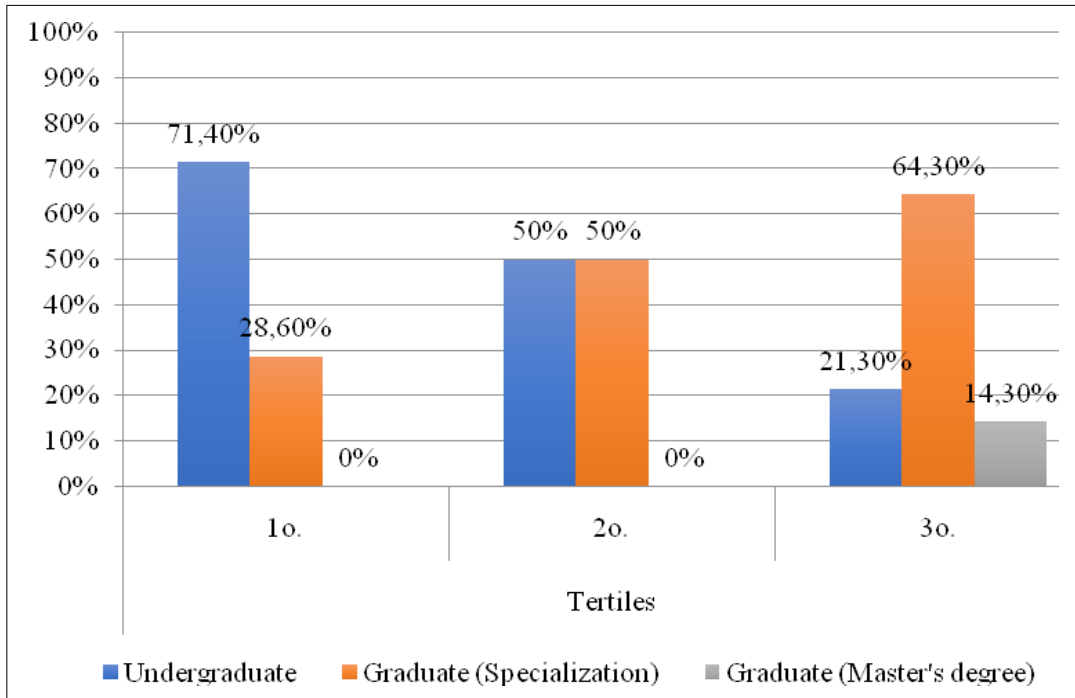


Figure 1. Distribution of the degree of graduates of the Nutrition course according to tertiles of the Jefferson Scale, São José dos Campos-SP, 2015.

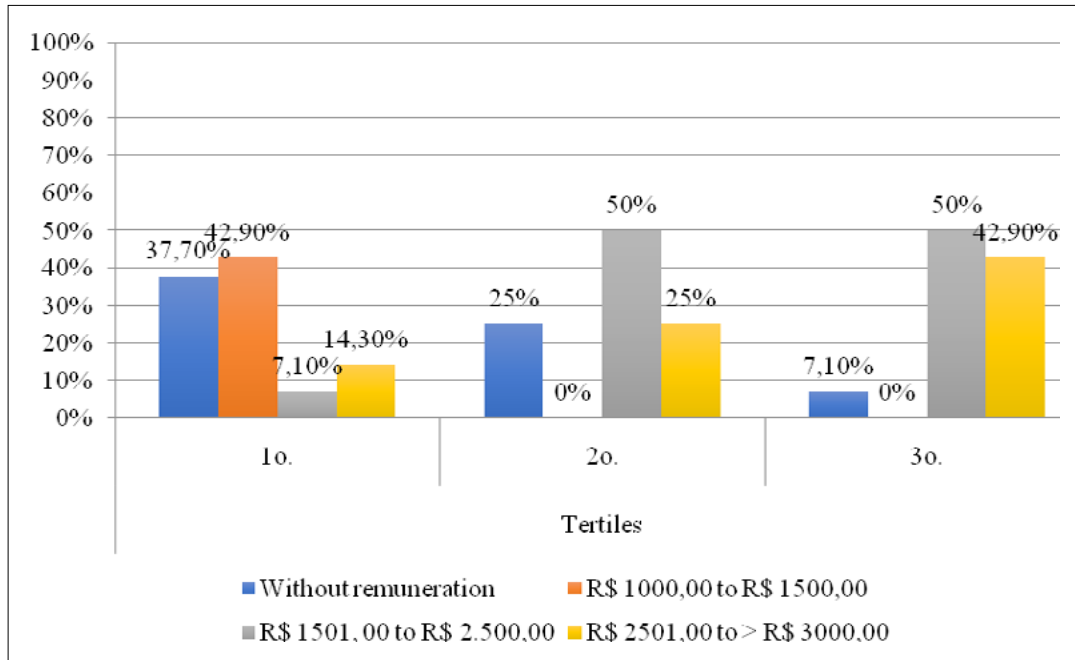


Figure 2. Distribution of the salary range of graduates of the Nutrition course according to tertiles of the Jefferson Scale, São José dos Campos-SP, 2015.

Discussion

As limitations of this study, it is important to highlight the regional coverage and the application of an instrument that has not yet been validated in Brazil. Nevertheless, information that advances beyond issues related to the academic profile and professional insertion, but which also includes attitudes, postures and practices before the profession, can arouse the interest of more researchers on the instrument used in this study, besides the possible contribution towards systematic and more complex evaluations of this professional category. It should also be noted that no instrument of evaluation of lifelong learning for nutritionists was found in the literature.

Research with graduates has shown to be an extremely rich methodological resource, even if complex and full of specific difficulties.¹⁶ In the present study, it was observed a similar value compared to other investigations of the same nature, regarding the adhesion percentage, between 40% and 50%.^{4,5,17-19} The non-adherence of half of the graduates may be related to the difficulty of contact with the professionals, because although the contacts were obtained in the institution's database, many were outdated and / or incomplete.

The age group in which the graduates are concentrated was related to the age of the course. As it is a relatively recent course, created in 2004, and that has a significant percentage of young entrants, up to 20 years old, it was expected that the age of the graduates would be in a younger age group. Several authors also point to a sample concentrated in the youngest adulthood, between 20 and 30 years old.^{4,7,8,10,17,19,20} The study also followed the pattern with regard to the distribution of graduates by gender. There is a predominance of women graduates, as in other studies,^{8,10,17} also corroborating the research of the Federal Council of Nutritionists, which found 96.5% of female participants.²¹

Regarding this finding, it is important to note that although there have been important changes throughout the history of the career of the nutritionist, expanding the field of action, still the predominance of women is observed. According to Souza et al.,²² there is a relation with the first female university profession, nursing, strongly linked to the social need of care. Although the presence of men in Nutrition courses has grown in the last decades, they primarily seek areas of performance associated with attributes of masculine identity that value virility and physical strength, such as in gyms or sports clubs, while women remain active especially in the area of Clinical Nutrition or in restaurants, activities more related to caring.

It was identified that 52.5% of professionals are in search of improvement. However, an important question that should be investigated in future studies is the lower percentage of graduates who sought to continue their training in relation to the other studies.^{5,10,18-20} Despite this, the result evidences the same area of graduate preference of other studies, the clinical area.^{6,19}

As in the study of Rodrigues et al.,²⁰ among the reasons for not doing graduate school, there is the lack of money and time. The lack of interest was also cited by more than a quarter of the graduates who only have the undergraduate course, which may have some relation with the reduced offer of graduate courses in the area of Nutrition, in the region.

The results pointed out the concentration of action in the clinical and collective feeding areas, which was also identified by several other authors, sometimes alternating order, but in these two areas.^{5-8,19,20} Again, there seems to be a connection to the beginning of the nutritionist career: at the time of the emergence of the profession, the fields of action were in hospitals and in institutional feeding, which seems to indicate possible constancy in what concerns to the insertion of the nutritionist in the labor market, besides, also, technical valorization of the health more present in the clinical and food production areas.

Attention is drawn to the low performance in the area of Collective Health. We identified only 3% of graduates working in this area, a percentage lower than all other reference studies cited in this article.^{4,5,8,20} There is a need to reflect on the reduced insertion of nutritionists in this area of knowledge, since in recent years the spaces in this field have expanded. It would be expected that,

starting from the major frameworks for Basic Care in Brazil, such as the Family Health Strategy (Estratégia de Saúde da Família - ESF), the National Basic Attention Policy (Política Nacional de Atenção Básica - PNAB) and practically a decade after the creation of the Support Centers to Family Health (Núcleos de Apoio à Saúde da Família - NASFs), there were more Nutrition professionals occupying spaces in Collective Health.

Although the curricular matrix of the undergraduate course in Nutrition studied complies with the National Curriculum Directive with regard to the offer of contents that contemplate the social needs of health, with emphasis on the Unified Health System (Sistema Único de Saúde - SUS), there may still be a need for adjustments that favor the expansion of this area within the formation, thus allowing greater interest and insertion of the professional.

The regional characteristic of labor supply with concentration on industrial and commercial activities can also be questioned, favoring the insertion of professionals in areas other than Collective Health, which are basically offered by the private sector.

Considering that a significant percentage of graduates work in São José dos Campos, it should be pointed out that, to date, NASFs have not been implemented in the municipality, which could increase the number of vacancies for Collective Health work.

The types of employment relationship most cited are related to the areas of work of the graduates. The clinical area allows acting as an autonomous professional or in private companies, such as hospitals and private clinics; and the area of Collective Food is concentrated in private companies. Other authors also found these characteristics, with small variations, such as multiple links.^{18,20}

The salary range of the graduates was R\$ 1,501.00 to R\$ 2,500.00, which was a variation between 2 and 3.2 minimum salaries at the time of the study. Based on this principle, which considered the minimum wage of its respective study period, this study presented remuneration below practically all the studies surveyed.^{6,18,19} Only Miranda et al.⁷ found a concentration of remuneration in the range of up to three minimum wages, within the indicative wage floor - 2015-2016 period - in the State of São Paulo. In addition, it is also important to clarify that there may have been variation in the workday of the interviewees and it may impact on this variable. As in other studies, there was predominance of permanence in the city or region of formation.^{5,6,8,10}

For many decades, what was called *permanent education* was incorporated, hence the importance and the need for training not only to be understood as a pre-professional stage, but to assume an important role in the life and career of the people.²³ When analyzing the data concerning the updating of knowledge in the field of action, it was identified that the graduates seem to understand the importance of continuous and permanent formation throughout life. The highest scores in this study are related to professionalism, motivation and beliefs related to learning, as categorized

by Salgueira et al.¹² It was also observed that professionals have less planning in their careers for issues related to scientific production or academic activities, as the same authors have described.

Thus, it is necessary to reflect and promote new studies to understand how professionals sensitive to the importance of lifelong learning and the need for constant updating may not feel motivated to approach more scientific questions involving personal actions, such as participating in research groups and publishing abstracts / scientific studies.

In some ways, there may be some kind of relationship with data discussed earlier. There is an important percentage of egress who did not take a graduate course, and lack of money was one of the most prevalent justifications, which in turn may have a bearing on the issue of wage income, which fell short of several other studies.

Considering the analysis that related the final result of the scale with other variables, the graduates who obtained the highest score in the scale (belonging to the third tertile) are those who present the highest salary range.

It can be affirmed that greater motivation and dedication to the technical and scientific improvement contributed to the better salaries of the nutritionists who were part of this study.

The relationship between degree and income was studied in a recent report by the Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovations and Communications (Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia, Inovações e Comunicações - MCTIC). This report indicates that, in 2014, the average remuneration of professionals with Master's degree was R\$ 9,719.00, while the earnings of an individual with formal employment, regardless of their educational level, was R\$ 2,449.00. This means that a professional with a Master's degree received almost four times more than the average Brazilian workers. A doctor had an average salary of R\$13,861.00, that is, 5.7 times more than the average of the workers in the country.²⁴ Still on the analysis of the results of the scale, the study shows a trend that graduates with higher scores in the scale are those with higher degree.

Focusing on the characterization of the profile of nutritionists, Sabba et al.⁹ related the degree to the perception of the labor market and found that egress with graduate studies have a higher percentage of optimal perception of the labor market which, in some way, is related to the findings regarding higher scores in the scale versus higher degree.

Although in Brazil the discussion and application of scales that account for lifelong learning are small, this issue has received increasing attention recently from the educational and business communities.²⁵ It is suggested that its application can serve as a monitoring for educational policies and for the incentive of continuing education. Salgueira et al.¹² and Rodrigues et al.¹³ also point out that reflection on the decisions and choices that the individual has made throughout life, while discovering himself/herself as a person, promotes the discovery of the path of his/her formation process.

Conclusion

This study confirms the results of previous work. The majority of the egresses were women in the age group of 26 to 30 years old, with greater performance in the clinical and Collective Health areas; there are more graduates working in the city where they graduated. Lower salary concentration was observed than in other studies. The graduates with the highest salary range were the ones that presented the greatest investment in lifelong learning. In addition, there seems to be an indication that remuneration may be the link that involves motivation and dedication to technical-scientific updating.

The association of information related to training and professional performance with those of practices related to updating knowledge in the field of performance can contribute in a more qualified way to actions that aim at improvements in training and professional attitudes. Future studies, which include the validation of the instrument used here, may allow more consistent evaluations regarding the career of nutritionists.

Contributors

Soar C participated in the conception and design of the study, revision of the analyzes and interpretation of the data, besides the responsibility for the writing of the article;

Silva CAM participated in the work, conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data.

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