

Controversial aspects in the lifestyle of undergraduate Nursing students

Aspectos controversos no estilo de vida de estudantes da graduação em enfermagem

Aspectos controvertidos en el estilo de vida de estudiantes de pregrado en enfermería

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to understand the controversial aspects related to university life and the lifestyle of undergraduate Nursing students. **Method:** qualitative study based on grounded theory and symbolic interactionism. A total of 18 undergraduate Nursing students from a public institution in Minas Gerais participated through online data collection, with semi-structured interviews conducted from September/2021 to November/2022. **Results:** the intervening conditions of university life/lifestyle of Nursing students and negatively impacting aspects involved pedagogical and financial issues, while positive aspects included a support network, institutional programs, among others. **Final considerations:** positive and negative, and therefore controversial, factors were identified regarding the intervening conditions related to the lifestyle and quality of life of the students. Furthermore, the need to revise the Course Pedagogical Plan was highlighted, with the aim of making it more humanized and focused on the care of the Nursing student during training, preventing negative consequences such as mental health problems resulting from excessive course demands.

Descriptors: Nursing; Students, Nursing; Life Style; Grounded Theory; Symbolic Interactionism.

RESUMO

Objetivo: compreender os aspectos controversos voltados para a vida universitária e para o estilo de vida dos estudantes da graduação em enfermagem. **Método:** estudo de abordagem qualitativa, sob referencial da teoria fundamentada nos dados e do interacionismo simbólico. Participaram 18 graduandos em enfermagem de instituição pública mineira, por coleta de dados *online*, com entrevistas semiestruturadas de setembro/2021 a novembro/2022. **Resultados:** as condições intervenientes da vida universitária/estilo de vida dos estudantes de enfermagem e aspectos que repercutiram negativamente foram questões pedagógicas, financeiras e positivamente rede de apoio, programas institucionais dentre outros. **Considerações finais:** identificou-se fatores positivos/negativos, portanto, controversos, das condições intervenientes relativas ao estilo e na qualidade de vida dos estudantes. Além disso, evidenciou-se a necessidade de revisão do Plano Pedagógico do Curso, com o intuito de ser mais humanizado e voltado ao cuidado do estudante de enfermagem durante a formação, prevenindo consequências negativas, como problemas de saúde mental por demandas excessivas do curso.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Estudantes de Enfermagem; Estilo de Vida; Teoria Fundamentada; Interacionismo Simbólico.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: comprender los aspectos controvertidos relacionados con la vida universitaria y el estilo de vida de los estudiantes de pregrado en enfermería. **Método:** estudio de enfoque cualitativo, basado en la teoría fundamentada en los datos y en el interaccionismo simbólico. Participaron 18 estudiantes de enfermería de una institución pública de Minas Gerais, mediante recolección de datos en línea, con entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas entre septiembre de 2021 y noviembre de 2022. **Resultados:** las condiciones intervenientes de la vida universitaria/estilo de vida de los estudiantes de enfermería y los aspectos que repercutieron negativamente estuvieron relacionados con cuestiones pedagógicas y financieras, mientras que los factores positivos incluyeron la red de apoyo, programas institucionales, entre otros. **Consideraciones finales:** se identificaron factores positivos y negativos —por lo tanto, controvertidos— entre las condiciones intervenientes relacionadas con el estilo y la calidad de vida de los estudiantes. Además, se evidenció la necesidad de revisar el Plan Pedagógico del Curso con el fin de hacerlo más humanizado y orientado al cuidado del estudiante de enfermería durante su formación, previniendo consecuencias negativas como problemas de salud mental derivados de las excesivas demandas del curso.

Descriptor: Enfermería; Estudiantes de Enfermería; Estilo de Vida; Teoría Fundamentada; Interaccionismo Simbólico.

INTRODUCTION

Health is defined as a set of factors that include physical, mental, and social well-being, rather than the mere absence of disease¹. A healthy lifestyle, in turn, refers to the management of behaviors that compromise an individual's health². Lifestyle (LS) includes various elements such as sleep patterns, stress-related exhaustion, mental health problems, and inadequate dietary choices, among other factors that influence mental, physical, and social health³.

Lifestyle can be directly influenced by factors such as financial performance, gender, level of education, tobacco use, health promotion initiatives, and participation in activities focused on personal health⁴. Across studies examining

the lifestyle of university students, several risk behaviors are consistently highlighted, including limited engagement in physical activity, inadequate diet, alcohol consumption, and high levels of sedentary behavior. These patterns are reflected in changes in lipid profiles and weight gain in this population⁵⁻⁹.

Studies examining the LS of university students indicate a trend toward less responsible behaviors that may pose health risks^{5,8}. Research conducted at a university in São Paulo reports data on the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and hookah. In the Nursing program, 75% of the students interviewed reported alcohol use; 17.86% reported tobacco use; 87.7% of smokers used hookah; and 10.71% stated that they were not smokers but used hookah¹⁰.

Nursing students in Bahia demonstrate a deficient diet, marked by low intake of vegetables/greens (68.07%) and high consumption of sweets (25.21%) and soft drinks (23.53%). These patterns are reflected in weight gain (29.06%), along with low levels of physical activity and high sitting time (96.64%)⁶. In a comparison of the lifestyles of 400 university students from different class schedules, students attending evening classes were found to have a poorer lifestyle than those attending during the day. The lifestyle of these students was recognized as inadequate¹¹.

Health programs increasingly incorporate opportunities for reflection aimed at preparing students for practice in the health field, with an emphasis on disease prevention and health promotion. These efforts seek to counter the perception that university life contributes to student illness¹². Another factor that influences the lifestyle of Nursing students is the university experience itself. Throughout the undergraduate program, students face a range of positive and negative emotions, as well as the pressure to adapt to new information, academic routines, social relationships, and experiences involving death and dying, among other demands that affect them as a whole⁷. It is common for undergraduate Nursing students to engage in activities beyond theoretical and practical coursework, including internships in various settings that expose them to stressful events, limited time to complete academic tasks, and intensive workloads¹³.

When examining the LS of Nursing students, evidence from various regions of the world indicates that they primarily experience challenges in the environmental and psychological domains (as measured by the Fantastic Lifestyle Assessment instrument), as well as institutional issues such as high demands and a lack of supportive spaces for students. These factors can contribute to mental and physical health problems¹⁴. At the same time, the university serves as a key environment for generating content and promoting social, cultural, and political development, with the potential to positively transform individuals both personally and professionally⁷. Therefore, it is crucial to contextualize situations related to university life and the LS of undergraduate Nursing students, considering the existing gaps in the literature.

In view of these considerations, this study aimed to examine the controversial aspects related to university life and the lifestyle of undergraduate Nursing students.

METHOD

Qualitative study anchored in symbolic interactionism¹⁵ and in the Straussian strand of Grounded Theory (GT)¹⁶, following the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ)¹⁷. This excerpt is part of the doctoral thesis entitled: "Meanings attributed by undergraduate nursing students to lifestyle and their relationship with health".

Symbolic interactionism supports the understanding of human conduct and the ways in which individuals act during social interaction based on meanings. This theoretical framework was chosen for the discussion of LS among undergraduate Nursing students because it provides access to their lived experiences¹⁵.

Grounded Theory is defined as a method for constructing theory based on data derived from a specific reality¹⁸. It is applied cyclically, allowing the data to guide the development of concepts and theories, which in turn support the identification of a new phenomenon¹⁶.

A total of 18 undergraduate Nursing students were interviewed, selected through snowball sampling. These students were enrolled in the 5th to the 8th period of a public university in Minas Gerais. The number of participants was determined through theoretical sampling¹⁶, which involves the researcher's effort to seek data from individuals who hold knowledge about the reality under study until no further novel information emerges¹⁶.

Inclusion criteria were being over 18 years of age and being enrolled in the more advanced periods of the undergraduate Nursing program (from the 5th to the 8th period). Exclusion criteria included being on leave or having a medical certificate during the data collection period.

After agreeing to participate and digitally signing the consent form via a Google Forms® document, data collection began.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, along with participant characterization using structured questions. The interviews were held via video calls on WhatsApp due to the impossibility of in-person contact during the social distancing measures in place for the COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) pandemic. The audio from the video calls was recorded and securely stored by the researcher. Each interview had a mean duration of 44 minutes. Data collection occurred between September/2021 and November/2022. Students were identified with the consonant D to ensure anonymity.

In GT, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Analysis followed the stages of open coding, axial coding, and integration. All data analysis was conducted manually. After the interviews were transcribed, a detailed line-by-line analysis was performed as part of open coding. At this stage, preliminary concepts and codes emerged¹⁶.

In axial coding, the identification of intervening conditions, action–interaction, consequences, and related phenomena made it possible to connect subcategories and categories. Data integration was then conducted, the stage in which the central theory of the study is generated¹⁶. In this investigation, the intervening conditions led to the following phenomenon: “Determining the controversial situations related to university life and the lifestyle of Nursing students”.

Ethical and legal research criteria, as well as the General Data Protection Law¹⁹, were followed. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the participating institution and the co-participating institution.

RESULTS

Among the participants, most identified as female (14 students), were between 21 and 23 years of age, had graduated from private schools, and were financially dependent on their progenitors.

The phenomenon “Determining the controversial situations related to university life and to the lifestyle of Nursing students” captured the intervening conditions of university life and the lifestyle of Nursing students, encompassing aspects that had both negative and positive repercussions in these contexts during their professional training.

This phenomenon comprised seven categories: “Repercussions in student and social activities (pandemic)”; “Revealing the factors influencing the lifestyle of the students”; “Confirming the facilitators of university life”; “Discussing the relevant factors in the formative trajectory”; “Understanding the difference it makes as a Nursing student”; “Perceiving the differences in the social relationships experienced by the students”; and “Highlighting the controversial situations of identity with the course (Barriers to the initial start)”.

Repercussions in student and social activities (pandemic)

“Repercussions in student and social activities (pandemic)” was the first category to emerge from the data and highlighted the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the student activities and social relationships of Nursing students. Two subcategories were identified within this category: “Affecting social relationships (pandemic)” and “Modifying the student activities of the university”.

The pandemic period introduced multiple changes in students’ lives, particularly in relation to social interactions. It generated feelings such as fear and uneasiness toward social contact and led to distancing from family, friends, the community, and patients.

I still cannot, you know, I feel very insecure, although vaccinated, I was the first to be vaccinated among my friends, but I do not have that courage. So there are some disagreements like... if you do not want to see us, just say so, and I say, it is not because of that, it is because I really do not feel safe. (D1)

I think that before... the relationships were much closer. Then, with the pandemic... we became more isolated, and then some relationships started to grow distant. Now that we are trying to get closer again, my friends and so on, we are trying to get back into the rhythm, but I think it is not the same. It is a process for us to return to the routine. (D2)

An interruption of in-person university activities was also identified due to the suspension of in-person theoretical and practical classes. Initially, theoretical classes were offered online, and the return of practical classes occurred only at a later stage.

For example, today I have a few activities at the university at the undergraduate level [...]. (D1)

[...] generally, my class is in the morning (D2)

So, at the moment I am somewhat distant from the nursing school [...]. (D11)

During this period, COVID-19 and influenza vaccination campaigns were created, which were carried out voluntarily by Nursing students on the university campus. The vaccination took place using a drive-thru scheme.

[...] I have dedicated most of my time since the beginning of the pandemic as a volunteer in the vaccination campaigns against influenza and COVID. (D1)

[...] these new students who are joining the campaign as volunteers [...]. (D1)

Revealing the factors influencing the lifestyle of the students

The category “Revealing the factors influencing the lifestyle of the students” comprised the subcategories “Perceiving the negative factors that influence the lifestyle of the students” and “Recognizing the factors that positively influence the lifestyle of the students”. Both negative and positive elements of the lifestyle of the Nursing student were identified. The negative elements included an extensive course workload that generates overload, financial difficulties, pressure associated with certain subjects, a large volume of activities that leads to stress and the emergence of mental health-related disorders, and deficient self-care due to lack of time.

I think that the course workload itself is very demanding [...]. (D2)

And the life of the student, in general, I perceive that it is stressful; those who are not experiencing anxiety are experiencing depression, when they are not experiencing depression, they are experiencing anxiety. And everyone is very unstable, which ends up with everyone being fed up, and everything is a bomb ready to explode, and everything is very scarce within this care itself, for oneself, right.. (D3)

[...] dependence on not having financial independence is something to consider [...]. (D4)

Workload, excessive work, it is an excess of things to do [...]. (D7)

It is... perhaps mental problems, mental health issues in fact; I perceive that there are many people who are experiencing a great deal of stress, and I was also noticing that the people I know who are taking antidepressants, I had no idea that this was at that level, you know. (D14)

The positive elements that emerged included the knowledge acquired during undergraduate studies, which encompassed topics such as disease prevention and health promotion and influenced the student’s LS; the presence of a support network near their place of residence; living in proximity to the university; and the campus environment, with its large green area used for student socialization, food, and the practice of physical activity.

The positive points, especially for those who live close to the university, include access to the resources the university offers, such as the UR (university restaurant), the campus itself, living near classmates and friends, and... our neighborhood is also very quiet, so this would be one of the positive points I can mention, good relationships in general, something that the university provides for us. (D4)

I believe that the knowledge we acquire throughout the undergraduate course is a factor that positively influences us. (D5)

Ok, my diet has always consisted of many, many fruits and vegetables (D4).

Regarding my diet, I have been improving it; sometimes I skip meals depending on the day. But I do eat... I have lunch, breakfast, and dinner, and going to the gym gives me a lot of appetite, so I eat a lot. It is not a completely healthy diet, but I am trying. (D6).

Confirming the facilitators of university life

In the category “Confirming the facilitators of university life” and in its subcategories “Considering that the resources offered by the university favor university life” and “Judging housing and transportation as facilitators of university life”, positive and important aspects for university life were identified. These included the UR, which encourages students to maintain a healthier diet; the communication present within the school and the university; student assistance programs; appreciation for the school; the tuition-free nature of the course; and the scientific and pedagogical projects offered by the university.

Well, regarding ease, I consider that... I like the university environment, I think it helps a lot. I like being there, I like studying. (D2)

I think that the greatest ease in my university life is communication; I have always greatly valued maintaining control of my academic and professional life in the area of communication. (D3)

I think that the facilitators... are... for those who attend a public university, the fact of not having to pay [...]. (D13)

It should be highlighted that many students were from other cities and chose to live close to the university, which helped with transportation. In addition, they lived with classmates from the same course or from other courses.

I think that for those who live here, living here makes it much easier because there are parents to take care of things. (D3)

The facilitators, as I mentioned earlier, would be living nearby, having someone who is in the same program living with me, someone who is right there beside me to help with anything, and, as I already said, the distance, living close by. (D4)

Discussing the relevant factors in the formative trajectory

The category “Discussing the relevant factors in the formative trajectory,” with the subcategories “Detecting the discrepancies in the teaching-learning process,” “Differentiating the methodological processes of teaching,” and “Reverberating in the psychological aspect of the nursing student (practical examination),” addressed aspects that had both positive and negative repercussions on academic life and on the teaching-learning process, with adversities predominating. Negative elements included the reduced value of student scholarships; the teaching methodology used by faculty members, which Nursing students described as outdated; and the relationship established by faculty and the institution with the students.

Additional negative points included the full-time structure of the program, which caused exhaustion and overload; the requirement to maintain a good Academic Performance Index (*Índice de Rendimento Acadêmico* - IRA); practical classes that involved long travel distances; mental disorders that emerged during the program or were pre-existing; and difficulties in systematizing university activities due to the volume of demands.

I think that a difficulty that I have is in relation to planning, because the more we are involved, the more demand they assign to you, and... the program offers many opportunities, but it also demands a lot. (D3)

I believe that some factors, such as our program being full-time, as I said, because it is both in the morning and in the afternoon, I believe that this is a factor that interferes [...]. (D5)

I think that the methodology that is employed at the university where I study is somewhat outdated. (D3)

There is always some problem regarding the coordination, or regarding the professor, or regarding the course [...]. (D7)

Perhaps mental problems, mental health issues themselves. I notice that many people are experiencing a great deal of stress, and I also realized that the people I know who are taking antidepressants, I had no idea that it was at this level, you know. (D14)

Positive aspects included the IRA (Academic Performance Index) and the methodologies used for administering practical examinations, such as OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination), clinical cases, the use of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures), and the completion of skills, among others.

At first, in one course, for example, we used the practical examination as the full execution of the SOP, without being able to make mistakes. And currently, with the use of a type of OSCE, they use clinical cases to evaluate us. (D4)

So we arrive there, and there is a clinical case with various elements, and we have to perform a procedure. I am referring more to one course. (D8)

There are some people around me who are concerned about this because it may be important for a résumé later on, whether for a résumé, for a monitoring selection, or for joining a league we are interested in. So we have this concern with the IRA. (D9)

Another issue identified as influencing the formative process was the repercussion of the practical examination on the psychological state of the student, generating feelings such as worry, anxiety, and nervousness, as well as a sense of pressure regardless of the pandemic. In some students, this further increased the difficulty of taking the practical examination.

I had difficulty with the practical examination when it was conducted in the laboratory; I became very nervous, and there is an issue with not taking the examination. (D2)

I become very...I have great difficulty; I become nervous during the practical examination. When I take the practical examination, I always leave trembling, with anxiety, crying, because I...I become nervous. I feel pressured, and I do not like to feel pressured. (D7).

Understanding the difference it makes as a nursing student

The category “Understanding the difference it makes as a Nursing student,” along with its subcategories “Recognizing the importance of improvement for professional training” and “Being a reference for society for being a nursing student,”

reflected how focused these students were on developing their nursing profile during the Nursing program. They consistently sought knowledge through reliable databases and scientific evidence to become nurses of excellence and to be regarded as a reference for the community, particularly in terms of knowledge and their future role as professional nurses. The Nursing school was identified as a key driver of learning.

Because I come from a generation that is used to constantly updating itself. (D1)

...but at the same time, it (the Nursing school) is good in the sense of really enabling more learning, gaining more knowledge, and developing skills. (D11)

So I think it also happens that we influence other people. (D12)

Perceiving the differences in the social relationships experienced by the students

In the category “Perceiving the differences in the social relationships experienced by the students” and its subcategories “Presenting difficulty in social relationships” and “Experiencing good social interaction,” the social interactions of Nursing students were examined, revealing contradictions within these interactions. Challenges were evident in relationships with faculty, with patients, particularly during initial contact, with colleagues from the Nursing program, and with family members.

[...] So, the first contact itself (with the patient) was very difficult for me as well, but later I managed to relax and felt more at ease. (D2)

I think my greatest difficulty is the lack of humanization from the professors and sometimes from the students, because it creates a very large distance between us, and even with our own colleagues. (D8)

Conversely, other students experienced positive social interactions with family members, friends, and colleagues, and belonged to various friendship networks, including university, religious, childhood, and practice field circles.

But I also interact well with my friends [...]. With my friends, I think I interact well. (D2)

Lately, I have been talking more with people from the university; it is inevitable. Usually, these are friends from practical classes and friends from academic leagues. (D3)

My relationship with my family is very calm. (D6)

Highlighting the controversial situations of identity with the program (barriers for the initial start)

The category “Highlighting the controversial situations of identity with the program (Barriers for the initial start)” captured the barriers experienced by Nursing students when beginning the program, including the conflicting perception of the nursing student as part of a spoiled generation, difficulties in identifying with the program, and challenges faced by students who had attended public high schools. The following subcategories emerged: “Rethinking whether the generation is spoiled or not spoiled,” “Having difficulty or not in identifying with the nursing program,” and “Experiencing difficulties in university due to having attended public high schools.”

A few students perceived their generation as spoiled, lacking effort, and showing little commitment. However, most recognized their generation as victorious, transformative, mobilized, committed to its principles, and progressive, particularly in technological aspects.

From the perspective of Nursing students, mental health problems are highly prevalent in this generation. Within the context of being labeled as spoiled or not spoiled, an erroneous societal view emerged that equates mental health issues with imbecility, leading to the labeling of students as spoiled throughout the interviewees’ statements.

I think we are a little... I think we are somewhat spoiled [...]. (D17)

Yes. Because if things are not done the way they want, they pout or think it is unfair, but they expect things to just happen instead of going after them. These people complain a lot despite having plenty. (D18)

So I think it is a generation that is learning a lot, a generation of change and learning. I do not think it is a spoiled generation. (D15)

I think this creates harm in society. Today, I joke that our generation has many psychological problems; it is based on psychological issues, and many people neglect this. (D15)

The ease and difficulty of identifying with the program were also evident. Ease was closely related to the fact that the program was the student’s choice, while difficulties were more pronounced during the initial semesters and decreased as the program progressed.

And difficulty... perhaps the greatest difficulty I have today is... I still have not fully identified with the program itself, the preparatory course. I think... what is missing is that love for the program. I think that would be my greatest difficulty. (D2)

At the beginning of the university, I had this difficulty; today I can already see myself in the field, so no, but at the beginning I had quite a lot. (D17)

No, I do not have this difficulty of feeling connected to the program. It is the program I chose, somewhat on a whim, but I do not have this difficulty. (D15)

Nursing students reported the challenges they experienced at university due to having attended public high schools and not having completed a preparatory course before their undergraduate studies. According to these students, there was little academic demand in public schools, and they considered the level of knowledge to be low.

So, I think that if you come from a public high school... I was not very challenged during my education from the beginning. Whether you like it or not, when you attend a public high school, you are there to get your diploma, and that is it. So, since I did not have that level of challenge, I went straight from public high school to university without attending a preparatory course. It was a very big shock, and it continues to be a very big shock [...]. (D3)

I did have difficulties at the beginning of the undergraduate program, yes, because I attended a public school and had worked a little beforehand. So, I had difficulty understanding the subjects because it is a program that demands more. (D15)

No, because I attended a preparatory course, but if I had not, I believe I would have experienced difficulties, because the demands in public schools are different from those in private schools [...]. (D18)

DISCUSSION

According to the findings of this investigation, several factors influence the lifestyle of Nursing students, including inadequate eating habits, generally involving the consumption of unhealthy and more caloric foods, course workload, and lack of time for social life and personal care, among others²⁰.

The COVID-19 pandemic was also a factor that affected students' lifestyles, directly impacting their academic activities and social relationships. During the pandemic, teaching shifted online, theoretical classes became asynchronous and/or synchronous using various methodologies, and practical classes were suspended²¹.

This change in routine and social restrictions had a strong impact on the psychological health of Nursing students, with increases in sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression²². In addition, COVID-19 negatively affected students' social relationships, particularly with friends and family, resulting in modifications to this social dimension²³.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, this social modification resulting from the pandemic indicates that the transition to the virtual world produced consequences for the self and for the restructuring of social arrangements arising from communication²⁴. This is explained by the understanding that the self is conceived as a product of the communication process²⁵.

Even before the pandemic, Nursing students perceived adversities in social relationships. Deficiencies were observed in their communication with patients, highlighting the need for further development of communicational and relational skills, including the use of verbal and nonverbal language²⁶.

Another relationship that supports the development of Nursing students is that between students and faculty. Dialogues that occur in the classroom, clinical placements, and other settings are considered opportunities to exercise and refine communication skills, thereby enhancing the teaching-learning process. This type of social interaction has a strong influence on students' professional training²⁶.

Positive social interactions among Nursing students, with friends, and with family members were also observed. It is essential that students learn to improve communication during their undergraduate studies to enhance their social relationships²⁷.

Nursing students also highlighted perspectives regarding university life. A national study with university students reinforced the importance of institutional encouragement of physical exercise and sports practice on campus. Furthermore, the study reported that students who engaged in physical exercise perceived improvements in both physical and mental health²⁸. Therefore, athletic associations offered by universities can be considered a factor that facilitates university life.

In relation to the formative trajectory, this study identified a need for faculty updating at the investigated institution. However, a divergence was noted, as some faculty members still resist transformations and the use of new methodologies,

such as active learning strategies, in the Nursing field, while others are already engaged and interested in employing these methodologies to promote student growth and development²⁹.

It was observed that faculty members at the institution used various methodologies to administer practical examinations. One method employed in Nursing education is the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), which is considered highly effective for assessing students' clinical skills³⁰.

Practical examinations such as the OSCE were reported by 33.1% of Nursing students in Oman as stress-inducing compared with traditional practical examinations, due to limited time and the examination environment³¹. Another international study found that the OSCE triggered feelings of stress, nervousness, and anxiety during administration, confirming that practical examinations generate stress in students and highlighting the need to improve these assessment processes³².

During this study, some controversial situations related to identity emerged concerning the Nursing program, indicating the need to include identity-focused courses in the early semesters of the undergraduate program to help students more easily identify with the program.

Another issue involves the difficulties experienced by students, particularly during the initial semesters and throughout the program, due to having attended public high schools. This suggests the potential need for a leveling course for these students and support from the Student Support Center in the School of Nursing.

Higher education should be structured through the implementation of institutional strategies grounded in policies that promote student health. The creation of a Student Support Center that provides assistance in various aspects, including academic and mental health, is relevant, as it fosters a welcoming university environment³³.

Mentoring groups represent another option. As a pedagogical strategy of continuous support, they promote academic guidance and the exchange of experiences, demonstrating positive impacts on student engagement³⁴.

Additionally, Integrative Medicine practices in the university setting, such as acupuncture, Reiki, floral therapies, meditation, and yoga, expand the repertoire of care available to students by integrating science, tradition, and innovation. The World Health Organization recognizes these practices as effective complementary resources and recommends their use in health promotion, disease prevention, and quality-of-life enhancement³⁵. The integration of these initiatives enhances the visibility of the teaching-learning process and supports the training of more aware, critical, and well-prepared professionals.

Study Limitations

Limitations included the difficulty in data collection, due to the students scheduling interview times but cancelling at the scheduled time. In addition, the study was conducted in a specific context, in a single public institution, requiring future generalization and expansion through the execution of new studies on the subject.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Several intervening and controversial conditions were identified regarding the lifestyle and university life of nursing students, involving positive and negative aspects of their training. The pandemic had repercussions on the academic and social life of these students, predominantly unfavorable, such as the abrupt interruption of social interactions, distancing from family, friends, community, and patients, and the suspension of academic activities at the school. The data demonstrated that the lifestyle of the nursing student is influenced by multiple factors, including pedagogical, financial, mental health, and self-care issues, which were predominantly perceived as negative.

As a positive aspect, vaccination campaigns provided students with extensive experience by allowing them to participate directly in this historical moment. Favorable factors influencing their lifestyle included the health-related knowledge acquired during the program, support networks, the university restaurant (UR), and the green area of the campus, which contributes to leisure and strengthens support networks. These findings indicate that university management must give attention to and invest in the university environment for the benefit of students. The university was viewed as constructive by students due to the UR, which encourages healthier eating habits, the student assistance programs, extension and scientific initiation activities, and the good social interaction that occurs between students and the school/university.

At the same time, factors related to the training trajectory emerged, highlighting the need to revise the Course Pedagogical Plan to meet the minimum workload required by the national curricular guidelines and to

adopt a more humanized perspective directed toward supporting nursing students throughout their training, in order to prevent negative consequences such as mental health problems related to excessive course demands.

It is important to emphasize the implementation of other institutional strategies to support the training trajectory, such as the creation of a Student Assistance Center in the School of Nursing, the development of a course focused on self-care, the formation of a Mentoring group, and the provision of activities by the university that include integrative medicine such as acupuncture, Reiki, floral therapies, meditation, and yoga, among others.

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Conceptualization, J.R.M. and G.V.V.; methodology, J.R.M. and G.V.V.; validation, J.R.M. and G.V.V.; formal analysis, J.R.M., G.V.V. and A.T.H.; investigation, J.R.M. and G.V.V.; data curation, J.R.M. and G.V.V.; manuscript writing, J.R.M, G.V.V., A.T.H, E.S.R.S.; review and editing, J.R.M, G.V.V., A.T.H, E.S.R.S.; visualization, J.R.M, G.V.V., A.T.H, E.S.R.S.; supervision, J.R.M. and G.V.V.; project administration, J.R.M. and G.V.V. All authors read and agreed with the published version of the manuscript.

Use of artificial intelligence tools

Authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the composition of the manuscript "*Controversial aspects in the lifestyle of undergraduate Nursing students*".