

# The importance of the final undergraduate paper and its influence on health status: perceptions of nursing students

## A importância do trabalho de conclusão de curso e sua influência no estado de saúde: percepções de acadêmicos de enfermagem

## La importancia del trabajo de terminación del curso y su influencia en el estado de la salud: percepciones de academias de enfermeira

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**How to cite:** Ferreira WM, Silva ETB, Figueredo RC, Silva RS, Silva LS. The importance of the final undergraduate paper and its influence on health status: perceptions of nursing students. REVISA.2020;9(2): 271-81. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.36239/revisa.v9.n2.p271a281>

# REVISA

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Received: 18/02/2020

Accepted: 24/03/2020

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Identificar a percepção de estudantes de enfermagem sobre o processo de elaboração de trabalho de conclusão de curso e sua relação com seu estado de saúde.

**Método:** Trata-se de uma pesquisa de campo descritiva e quanti-qualitativa, que utilizou um questionário com questões objetivas e discursivas. Os dados da pesquisa foram organizados em planilhas utilizando do software excel© e analisados com base em estatística simples representadas por percentis e análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** Há percepções negativas e positivas equilibradas sobre o TCC, sendo que a grande parte julga como importante, mas de forma parcial. A atividade é considerada fator causador de estresse, podendo ser necessário apoio profissional, que poucos procuram. A maioria afirmou não fazer uso de medicamentos, porém 93% recorrem ao consumo de drogas lícitas. **Conclusão:** Os discentes acreditam que a atividade não deve ser considerada como base de avaliação de aprendizagem ao final do curso. Há uma compreensão deficiente sobre a pesquisa durante a formação profissional.

**Descritores:** Estresse; Enfermagem em saúde mental; Trabalho de conclusão de curso.

### ABSTRACT

**Aim:** to identify the perception of students about the elaboration process of the final undergraduate paper and its relationship with their health status. **Method:** It is a descriptive and quanti-qualitative field research, which used a questionnaire with objective and discursive questions. The research data were organized in spreadsheets using the software excel © and analyzed based on simple statistics represented by percentiles and content analysis. **Results:** There are balanced negative and positive perceptions about FUP, with most of them judging it to be important, but only partially. Activity is considered a stressor and professional support may be necessary, which few seek. The majority stated that they did not use drugs, however 93% resorted to the consumption of legal drugs. **Conclusion:** Students believe that the activity should not be considered as a basis for learning assessment at the end of the course. There is a poor understanding of research during professional training.

**Descriptors:** Stress; Mental health nursing; The final undergraduate.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** identificar la percepción de los estudiantes de enfermería sobre el proceso de preparación de un trabajo de conclusión del curso y su relación con su estado de salud. **Método:** es una investigación de campo descriptiva y cuantitativa-cualitativa, que utilizó un cuestionario con preguntas objetivas y discursivas. Los datos de la investigación se organizaron en hojas de cálculo utilizando el software Excel © y se analizaron en base a estadísticas simples representadas por percentiles y análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** Existen percepciones equilibradas negativas y positivas sobre la TCC, y la mayoría de ellas la consideran importante, pero parcialmente. La actividad se considera estresante y puede ser necesario el apoyo profesional, que pocos buscan. La mayoría declaró que no usaban drogas, sin embargo, el 93% recurrió al consumo de drogas legales. **Conclusión:** los estudiantes creen que la actividad no debe considerarse como una base para evaluar el aprendizaje al final del curso. Hay poca comprensión de la investigación durante la formación profesional.

**Descritores:** Estrés; Enfermería en salud mental; Trabajo de fin de curso.

## Introduction

During the professional training of nurses, conducting scientific research contributes to the development of their skills and abilities in order to improve their interdisciplinary critical sense and increasing their ability to carry out reasoned analyzes and interventions, as well as contributing to the advancement of the profession, care and health services.

The Final Undergraduate Paper (FUP) is a scientific study that aims to express acquired knowledge about a certain theme and to complement the student's Professional training. It is usually developed in the last year of studies, it is an obligatory evaluation and integrating criterion to the course, being defended orally or not to an evaluation committee, according to regiments of each higher education institution.<sup>1</sup>

In the field of nursing, the search for generalist, humanistic, critical and reflective professionals requires the student to have a holistic view and the ability to make important decisions regarding patient care, in addition to being the main responsible for direct care, and the development of prevention and health promotion actions for the population, there is a need for them to have knowledge from the most diverse areas, thus confirming the importance of research during their formation.<sup>2</sup>

The growing competitiveness within the labor market requires an endless search for the improvement of technical and scientific skills. Allied to this, the personal search for fulfillment requires, among others, the ability to overcome oneself, and once the daily demand load exceeds the limits of the organism, the individual starts to show characteristic symptoms of stress triggered by physical and psychological stress.<sup>2</sup>

Continued exposure to stressful factors such as course completion work makes the student susceptible to important behavioral changes such as anxiety, panic attacks, changes in sleep patterns, changes in eating patterns and cases of depression. These can also be influenced accordingly, with the individual profile of each academic involving socioeconomic factors, interpersonal relationships, housing and among others.<sup>3</sup>

From this contextualization of the theme, it is clear that the period of production of FUP can cause important biopsychosocial changes in students, that health status is one of the determining factors for success in the learning process, and that the students' poor perception of this activity can promote aversion or resistance, in addition to misunderstanding the real purpose of research in the professional training process. Therefore, the study has as a guiding question: what is the perception of the students of the nursing course on the importance of FUP and its influence on the health status during its production?

In view of the wide range of harms that can be generated from exposure to stressful factors, the present study is necessary to characterize the perception of academics around the topic, since these are directly related to the absorption of knowledge and your future as a health professional. It is then necessary to develop research that collaborates with the construction of knowledge and guides the formulation of health actions that aim to promote quality in the teaching-learning process.

This study aimed to identify the perception of students of the nursing course on the importance of FUP and the influence it can have on the health status during its production.

## Method

This is an exploratory descriptive study, with a quantitative and qualitative approach, seeking to better understand the phenomenon studied, guided by the question: what is the perception of nursing students about the importance of FUP and its influence on health status? during its production?

The field research was aimed at academics with no gender distinction in the bachelor's degree in nursing from a private higher education institution in the interior of Tocantins - Brazil, with the inclusion criterion being an academic regularly enrolled in the teaching institution and being attending the course "Course Conclusion Work", being excluded from the research all those who did not meet the inclusion criteria or did not accept to participate. Research had as an initial sample 27 (twenty-seven) academics able to participate in the research, however the final sample was composed of 19 (nineteen) academics, due to evasion of participation and disinterest.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Sciences of Tocantins - (FACIT) under protocol CAAE 22720119.5.0000.8408, opinion No. 3,650,835. Data collection was performed using a specific questionnaire with objective and essay questions totaling 12 (twelve) questions applied in October 2019, respecting the guidelines and ethical procedures supported by the CNS resolution 466/12.

Research data were organized in spreadsheets using the Excel © software and then, the objective data were analyzed based on simple statistics represented by percentiles and arranged in graphs and tables for a better understanding. The dissertation data were organized into three categories: "favorable, unfavorable and neutral responses", considering the content analysis proposed by Minayo<sup>4</sup>.

The following letters and numbers Acd1, Acd2, Acd3 and Acd4 were randomly assigned to the essay answers.

## Results and Discussion

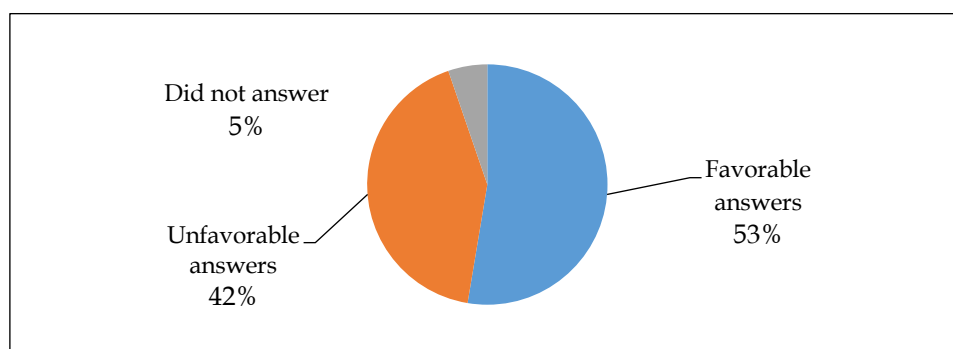
Questionnaire covered a total of 19 academics able to participate in this study. Initial questions aimed to characterize the participants regarding age and sex of birth, followed by the perception about FUP and its importance, the relationship between FUP and stress, the main biopsychosocial aspects affected, the need for professional support, and the use of psychoactive substances.

**Table 1-** Characterization of respondents regarding sex of birth.

Variable	N	%
<b>Sex of birth</b>		
Female	15	78,95
Male	4	21,05
Total	19	100
<b>Age group</b>		
Between 20 and 25 years old	18	94,7
Above 25 years old	1	5,3
Total	19	100

Corroborating with other studies, this shows the prevalence of females as students of the nursing course, making up approximately 79% of the class. Unfortunately, nursing is still a profession historically seen as an exclusive connotation of women. Regarding age, 18 (eighteen) corresponding to 94.73% are in the age group between 20 and 25 years old and only 1 (one) 5.26% was over 25 years old, reinforced the data from studies that demonstrate that the vast majority of academics in the field are young people. This entry into the career by young people brings with it a workforce and research of great expression, however the vast majority demonstrate the intention of hospital assistance.<sup>5-6</sup>

Students' perception of the course completion work was tabulated in 3 (three) categories, which were favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The percentage for each category is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1-** Academic perceptions of course completion work.

Data show that the course conclusion work is seen with a small difference as a positive or negative activity by academics, with 53% giving favorable responses. It is worth mentioning that the favorable responses also brought unfavorable points in their context, but these are not the central core of the speech, according to the more complete statements presented below:

Favorable answers:

Acd1: *An important job, but I feel extremely pressured in some moments although I find it not so difficult.*

Acd2: *Crucial method for assessing mastery and competence to complete a course, but very stressful and emotionally tiring.*

Unfavorable responses:

Acd3: *I think it is unnecessary to study 5 years to be evaluated at the end of the course for 1 assignment.*

Acd4: *Unnecessary work.*

The process of preparing FUP is understood as an exhausting period by the vast majority of students, due to unfamiliarity with the methodological procedures to be followed as well as the complexity of their production. It was evidenced a confused understanding of the respondents about FUP, as it is understood as an activity more important or relevant than any other developed during the course, being pointed out as a question that will evaluate the type of nurse that they will be, and that, if are not successful in their research, this will compromise all the learning acquired from the beginning to the end of the training.

This confused perception endorses the need to clarify the purpose of the research during the training, not only in the final stage. As well as its practice at the beginning, end and continuation of professional training.

The accomplishment of the research during the professional formation aims to allow that the varied readings and writings of the students in some way articulate with the experiences already lived, whether in the classroom, in practical classes and / or supervised internships, in order to produce a process redefinition of the values and knowledge accumulated during the course.<sup>7</sup>

From a professional point of view, this type of view demonstrates the lack of understanding of the importance of assimilating theoretical and practical knowledge acquired during the production of the research and its implication in the nurse's care or practice environment.<sup>8</sup>

The course conclusion work is perceived by the students as important for 58% and not important for 42%, being justified by the following statements:

Favorable responses:

*Acd1: It allows a better understanding of the importance of research for professional development, advancement of technologies and improvement in understanding and writing in cultured norms.*

*Acd2: An extension of the FUP, can be used for master's approval and the work can be published in scientific journals.*

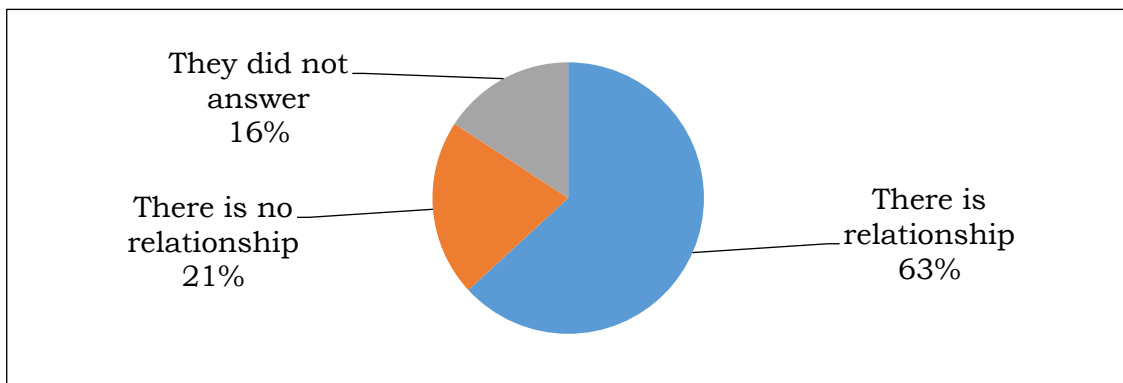
Unfavorable responses:

*Acd3: The FUP does not judge what I learned/understood during the 5 years of college.*

*Acd4: It will not influence me professionally.*

The development of FUP is the union of knowledge acquired during the undergraduate course, being an important curricular component within the teaching-learning process as well as for professional training, with the student assuming his / her learning in a significantly active way, giving him the opportunity to take initiative in the search for information; select, organize, compare and correlate data and information; making inferences; raise hypotheses; and complete the results.<sup>9</sup>

The practice of scientific writing instigates the student's creativity and proactivity, since acting as a researcher he/she has chances to know more closely the range of opportunities of professional performance, developing specific skills that allow him / her to complete his/her course with knowledge that will in addition to those obtained in the classroom, such as: scientific writing skills; more complex and logical reasoning; and greater facility to perceive and solve problems, in addition to facility in search of information.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2-** Relationship between stress and graduation work in the perception of nursing students.

Most students (63%) stated that there is a relationship between stress and the preparation of the FUP, and some justified the relationship in a divergent way, as shown in the following statements:

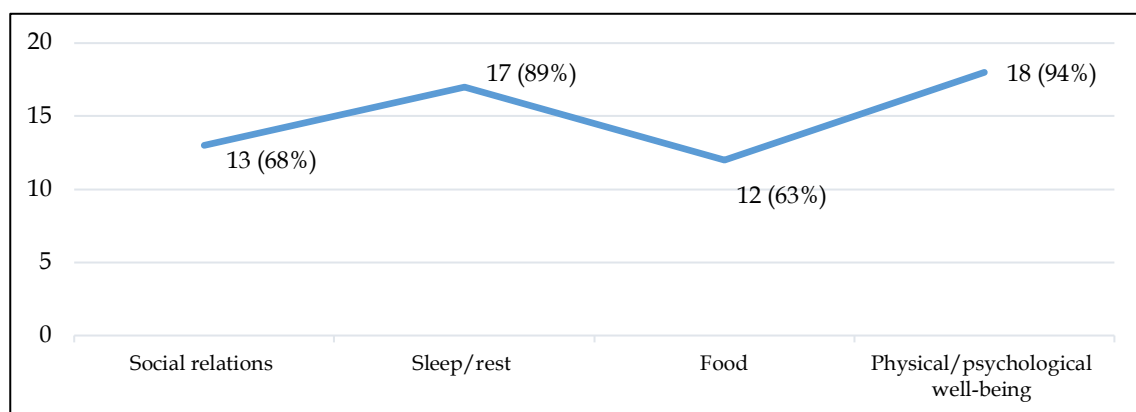
*Acd1: None, with organization does not need stress.*

*Acd2: FUP is very stressful because it is in the last period of the course when there is a lot of internship, report and being a complicated job.*

Since stress is a somatic or mental biological response to an individual's physical, mental and/or emotional demands, these can be experienced by anyone, regardless of age, sex. In the academic environment, high levels of stress can negatively affect the quality of life of students, interfere in the study scheme and become an obstacle to both student and professional performance.<sup>2</sup>

Studies carried out in recent years demonstrate high prevalence rates for symptoms of anxiety and depression in university students, many times higher than those found in the general population. And stress predisposes the individual to depression since about 60% of cases, depressive episodes are preceded by the occurrence of stressors, mainly of psychosocial origin.<sup>3-10</sup>

Based on this situation, academics were asked about which aspects of their daily routines were affected (Figure 3).



**Figure 3-** Main aspects of the daily routine of students affected by stress during FUP.

Aspects of sleep/rest (89%) and physical/psychological well-being (94%) were the most affected in the daily routine of the students who participated in the study. Aforementioned data corroborate with other studies that list psychological problems as a growing factor affecting physical, emotional, cognitive and interpersonal domains, negatively interfering with learning, eating and sociability, sometimes triggering other problems such as depression, seizures, anxiety, excessive alcohol consumption and use of other legal and illegal drugs.<sup>11-12</sup>

One of the studies published in 2016 by USP raises the idea of the need for a regular multiprofessional assessment of the health status of academics, highlighting, among its multiple benefits, the possibility of planning interventions directed to the specific needs of each user and/or in a specific way. collective.<sup>11-13</sup>

When asked if in the face of stress and impaired daily routine due to the preparation of the FUP, students realized the need to seek professional help, specifically a psychologist, the answers were not so discrepant, since 58% answered no, and 42% yes.

Several authors suggest an increase in severe psychological problems in students of higher education in recent years, that being said, the optimization of the psychosocial well-being of students vindicates the role of psychologists in the context of higher education, since this professional can contribute for the prevention and solution of problems present in academic life, helping to qualify the teaching-learning processes and the appropriation of scientific knowledge by students.<sup>11-14</sup>

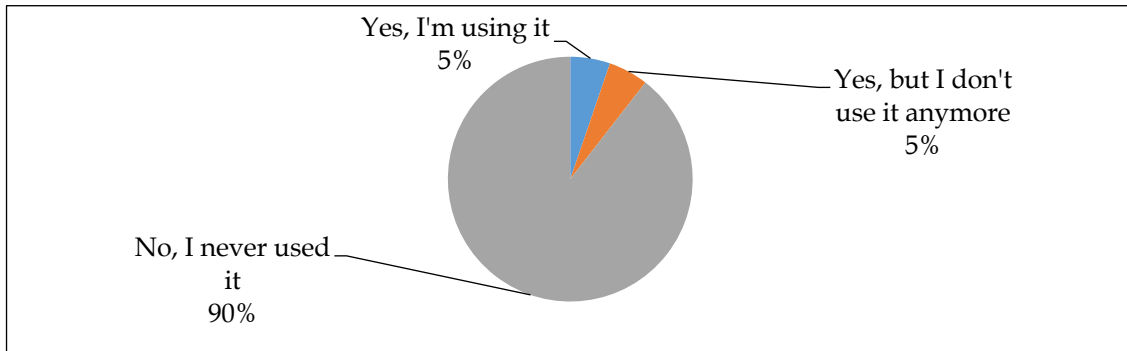
Of the 42% who stated that they perceived the need to seek psychological support, corresponding to 8 students, only 1 stated that they sought such support to face the research elaboration process.

In recent years mainly, higher education institutions have invested human and financial resources in the development of research aimed at identifying the academic support/psycho-logical intervention needs and developing new methods of intervention.<sup>13-15</sup>

Psychological assistance services for students have the objectives of meeting the difficulties experienced, supporting academic development and promoting the integral development of students. Based on these purposes, some activities are carried out to address the needs of students.<sup>15</sup>

A study carried out with 1,231 students, distributed proportionally to different areas of an educational institution, reported that 26.3% of the students surveyed sought, once in their lives, a mental health service to treat psychological and / or psychiatric problems. Of these, 25.5% stated that they were attended by the mental health service at the institution itself, which represented 8.1% of the total sample.<sup>16</sup>

In Brazil, it is estimated that, during academic training, about 15 to 25% of university students have some psychological disorder, in addition, it is known that the use of drugs without medical guidance is high mainly in the final stage of the course.<sup>17</sup> Although most studies claim that medication consumption is high during academic training, the majority of students participating in this study (90%) stated that they never used drugs during the preparation of the CBT, as shown in Figure 4.

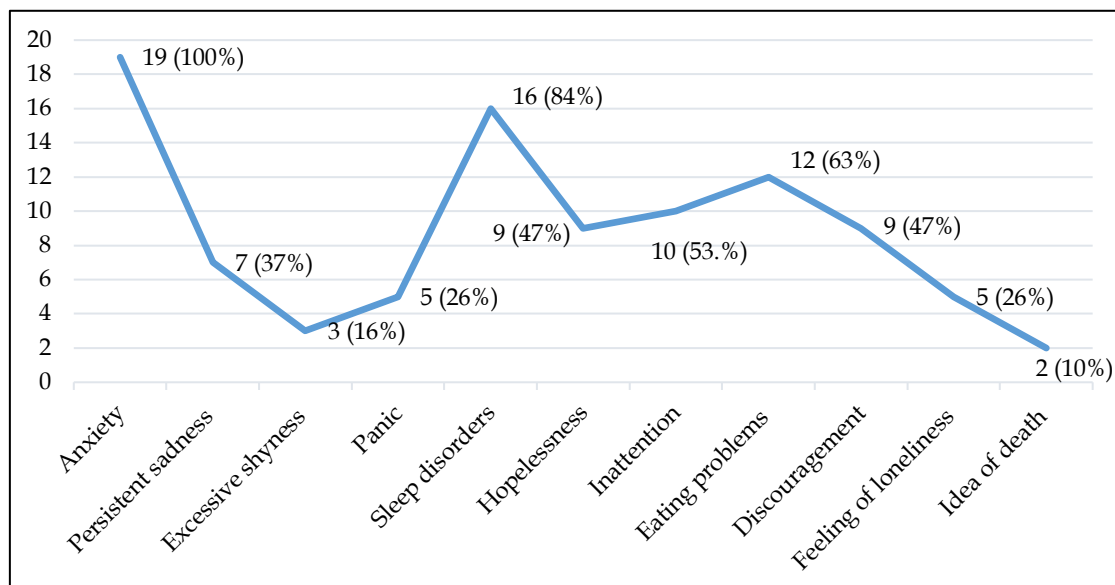


**Figure 4-** Use of medications during the course completion work.

Medicines are essential for the treatment of the most diverse organic changes, among which those that directly affect mood and behavior. Psychotropic drugs act on the central nervous system (CNS), when used for a prolonged period, cause chemical dependency, and indiscriminate use is one of the factors of concern to health professionals. However, the number of students using medications due to stress and anxiety acquired during graduation, attention to the risk of dependence, as well as episodes of withdrawal crisis and side effects of the medications is expressive.<sup>16-17</sup>

Regarding the means of medication, another study showed that 70.83% who used or were using it on medical advice, 14.58% who used it on their own, 8.33% based on recommendations from friends and/or family, 2.08 % was recommended by the pharmacist and 4.18 by other means.<sup>12</sup>

Faced with the changes suffered from the entry into higher education, the student goes through an adaptation process. Not only during this period, but also during graduation, he is prone to the development of psychopathologies.<sup>2</sup> Considering that the preparation of the FUP occurs in the final phase of the course, in which the student's concern is not only the conclusion of the course as also their entry into the labor market, it was questioned which are the main physical and/or emotional signs and symptoms considered harmful to health presented during FUP (Figure 5).



**Figure 5-** Main signs of physical/emotional symptoms affected during the preparation of the course conclusion work.



As shown in the figure, the signs and symptoms most frequently presented by the students were anxiety (100%) and altered sleep (84%). Inattention (53%) and eating problems (63%) affected more than half of those surveyed. And the least cited were excessive shyness (16%) and the idea of death (10%).

A study carried out in order to reflect on the work of psychologists in HEIs demonstrated that in the face of new demands and changes, university students may present psychopathologies, such as stress, depression, anxiety and eating disorders, and that in some cases, students resort to the use and abuse of legal and/or illicit drugs to face their difficulties.<sup>16</sup>

When you have control over these harmful health manifestations, many students look for ways to minimize their feelings, among these means the use of legal and illegal drugs is predominant. The national survey on the consumption of licit and illicit drugs shows that half of Brazilian students used psychoactive substances without taking into account the use of alcohol or tobacco, which is present in daily life of 86.2% and 46.2% respectively among the academics.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, students were asked about the use of licit and illicit drugs, in which 60% stated at some point in the preparation of the CBT that they had used one, among them, only two were mentioned, the most cited being the alcohol (93%), followed by cigarettes with 7%.

A study carried out on the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs among university students showed that 49% of those surveyed had already tried an illicit drug at least once in their lives; 86% of them had already drunk alcohol and another 47%, tobacco products; 22% are at risk of developing alcohol dependence and 8% of cannabis; about 40% had used two or more drugs in the past 12 months and 43% reported having used multiple and simultaneous use of different drugs throughout their lives.<sup>19</sup>

## **Final considerations**

The conclusion of the course work was not important for the majority of those surveyed, as well as showing different damages to the students' health status. Due to the variables as external factors, among them family, social and economic issues, it cannot be said that the data obtained by the research are exclusively related to the damage to the health of students with academic issues.

However, a considerable deficiency was identified in the students' perception of the importance and necessity of scientific research, mainly of the FUP for their professional training, evolution and valorization of nursing.

Therefore, it is necessary for educational institutions to clarify to students the importance and purpose of scientific research for professional advancement and social contribution. And that these can be better developed over the course of the course, with no justification for concentrating these activities in the final stretch, as it proves to be a potential factor of damage to health.

Therefore, it is also necessary that educational institutions and their teachers offer specialized support to students, mainly related to mental health, to assist them during the conduct of research and completion of the course.

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