

# Adolescent health and curricular integration in the Health Sciences

Saúde do adolescente e integração curricular nas Ciências da Saúde

Salud del adolescente e integración curricular en las Ciencias de la Salud

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To map the inclusion of content related to the specificities of adolescent care in the Pedagogical Projects of undergraduate courses in Health Sciences, with an emphasis on Nursing, analyzing their alignment with the demands of undergraduate teaching.

**Methods:** This descriptive qualitative research was based on document analysis of syllabi and teaching plans from two public higher education institutions. The institutions were intentionally selected because they are centers of reference, have prior integration of the topic, and constitute a study of exemplary cases. The procedure included the systematic identification of subjects, categorization of content, analysis of workload, and pedagogical methodologies, comparing the curriculum offered with the health needs of this age group as described in the literature.

**Results:** The findings show that the inclusion of specific content related to adolescent care is fragmented and mainly subordinate to the disciplines of pediatrics and primary care. Disparities were identified in the number of hours dedicated to the topic and gaps in the approach to skills focused on adolescent autonomy and subjectivity, highlighting that the topic still occupies a peripheral space in the curricula analyzed.

**Conclusion:** In the institutions studied, the curricular integration of the topic is partial, and the specific theoretical density is poor. A pedagogical restructuring is necessary to ensure the visibility of adolescent health as an autonomous field, thus promoting the training of nursing professionals capable of providing humanized and effective care.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** Mapear a inserção de conteúdos relacionados às especificidades do cuidado aos adolescentes nos Projetos Pedagógicos de Cursos de graduação em Ciências da Saúde, com ênfase em Enfermagem, analisando seu alinhamento com as demandas no ensino de graduação.

**Métodos:** Esta pesquisa de natureza descritiva, com abordagem qualitativa, foi baseada na análise documental de ementas e planos de ensino em duas instituições públicas de ensino superior.

A seleção das instituições ocorreu de forma intencional por serem centros de referência, com integração prévia do tema, configurando um estudo de casos exemplares. O procedimento incluiu a identificação sistemática de disciplinas, categorização de conteúdos, análise da carga horária e metodologias pedagógicas, comparando a oferta curricular às necessidades de saúde dessa faixa etária conforme descritas na literatura.

**Resultados:** Os achados mostram que a inserção de conteúdos relacionados ao cuidado de adolescentes é fragmentada e principalmente subordinada às disciplinas de pediatria e atenção primária. Foram identificadas disparidades na carga horária dedicada ao tema e lacunas na abordagem de competências voltadas à autonomia e subjetividade de adolescentes, evidenciando que o tema ainda ocupa um espaço periférico nas matrizes curriculares analisadas.

**Conclusão:** Nas instituições estudadas, a integração curricular do tema é parcial e a densidade teórica específica é pobre. É necessária uma reestruturação pedagógica que assegure a visibilidade da hebiatria como um campo autônomo, promovendo a formação de profissionais de enfermagem capacitados para um cuidado humanizado e efetivo.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** Mapear la inclusión de contenidos relacionados con las especificidades del cuidado de los adolescentes en los proyectos pedagógicos de los cursos de grado en Ciencias de la Salud, con énfasis en Enfermería, analizando su alineación con las demandas de la enseñanza de grado.

**Métodos:** Esta investigación de naturaleza descriptiva, con un enfoque cualitativo, se basó en el análisis documental de programas y planes de enseñanza en dos instituciones públicas de educación superior. La selección de las instituciones se realizó de forma intencionada por ser centros de referencia, con integración previa del tema,

## Keywords

Adolescent; Adolescent medicine; Curriculum; Nursing

## Descritores

Adolescente; Hebiatria; Currículo; Enfermagem

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## Data availability:

The study data are available in this article.

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configurando un estudio de casos ejemplares. El procedimiento incluyó la identificación sistemática de disciplinas, la categorización de contenidos, el análisis de la carga horaria y las metodologías pedagógicas, comparando la oferta curricular con las necesidades de salud de este grupo etario, según se describen en la literatura.

**Resultados:** Los hallazgos muestran que la inclusión de contenidos específicos sobre la atención a los adolescentes es fragmentada y está subordinada principalmente a las disciplinas de pediatría y atención primaria. Se identificaron disparidades en la carga horaria dedicada al tema y lagunas en el enfoque de las competencias orientadas a la autonomía y la subjetividad de los adolescentes, lo que pone de manifiesto que el tema sigue ocupando un lugar periférico en los planes de estudio analizados.

**Conclusión:** En las instituciones estudiadas, la integración curricular del tema es parcial y la densidad teórica específica es escasa. Es necesaria una reestructuración pedagógica que garantice la visibilidad de la hebiatría como un campo autónomo, promoviendo la formación de profesionales de enfermería capacitados para una atención humanizada y eficaz.

## Introduction

Adolescence is recognized as a phase of human development with unique psychosocial and biological needs; its changes require a new epistemic understanding of care. These periods and their age ranges are differently defined by the World Health Organization (adolescence: 10-19 years) and the United Nations (youth: 15-24 years). Although such criteria are widely used for statistical purposes and in the formulation of public policies, they highlight the plurality of perspectives on human development and the need for assistance that transcends conventional pediatric or adult practices.<sup>(1-5)</sup>

In this scenario/context, a critical analysis of adolescence requires integrating theoretical elements that allow for a better understanding of its multiple manifestations. Care directed towards this group requires specialized attention in different environments (such as schools, primary health care units, and hospitals), where nurses are the protagonists. The interface between nursing and adolescent health is established in the ability of these professionals to articulate technical-scientific care and the sensitivity necessary to deal with the transitions of this stage. Understanding how professionals adapt their knowledge and practices to these multiple dimensions is essential to ensuring effective care that is centered on the subjectivity of adolescents.

The emergence and consolidation of adolescent medicine, an area focused on youth care practices (with historical roots in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), stimulated scientific reflection in the academic environment. This context fostered the development of nursing interventions and care models that integrate specialized knowledge with the historical and cultural framework of the profession.<sup>(3,4)</sup> However, the practice of adoles-

cent nursing still faces structural challenges, often being limited by academic training that ignores the autonomy and vulnerabilities typical of this population.

The rationale for conducting this study was the need to investigate how higher education institutions are preparing future nurses to work in this field. Identifying gaps in pedagogical planning tools is fundamental to strengthening the role of nurses as agents of change in adolescent health, ensuring that their technical training is aligned with current social and academic demands.

Therefore, the objectives of the present study were to map the inclusion of content on adolescent care in the Pedagogical Projects of undergraduate Health Sciences programs, with an emphasis on Nursing, and to analyze the alignment between the curriculum and the care needs of this population.

## Methods

This descriptive study, with a qualitative approach, used document analysis as its main methodological procedure. The investigation focused on syllabi and course plans in undergraduate Nursing programs to map the presence and configuration of program content on adolescent care, identifying whether the topic is transversally addressed or as a specific curricular unit.

The study was developed using data published by two public higher education institutions in Brazil. The sample selection was intentional and based on the criterion of exemplary reference cases. This choice was justified because the selected institutions have already integrated the topics of adolescent health and hebiatrics into their curricula. This methodological option allowed analysis of teaching strategies in scenarios

where the topic presents pedagogical maturity and serves as a parameter for identifying potential and structural challenges that can be transposed to other educational contexts.

In both institutions, the selection of curricular units followed the following two inclusion criteria: Thematic Relevance (units that explicitly mention the terms “adolescent health,” “hebiatrics,” or “adolescent care” in their syllabi or learning objectives) and Mandatory Nature (subjects that are part of the fixed curriculum of Nursing courses, ensuring that the analyzed content forms part of the basic training of all undergraduates).

The document analysis was guided by three guiding axes to verify the contribution of the research to pediatric and adolescent nursing: (1) Teaching and Professional Training (analysis of the strategies organized to enable students to manage the specificities of adolescents), (2) Field of Practice and Internship [identification of suitable environments (hospitals, primary care centers and schools) that allow adolescents to experience autonomy and identity] and (3) Development of Communication Skills (verification of activities aimed at enabling university students to communicate sensitively and effectively with young people).

**Table 1.** Characterization of the institutional curricular matrices analyzed.

Institutions	Total Course Hours (hours)	Completion Time (semesters)	Curricular Units with the topic of interest	Time Dedicated to the Theme (hours)
A	4,000	10	3	405
B	5,440	9	2	180

Finally, the study used only publicly available and unrestricted data owned by the institutions, without involving or identifying human beings.

Thus, in accordance with the National/Brazilian Health Council (Resolution 510; 07/04/2016), submitting this study to the evaluation of a Research Ethics Committee was not necessary.

## Results

The analysis of the Pedagogical Projects of courses and teaching plans from the two higher education institutions allowed us to identify five curricular units that met the inclusion criteria. In total, 585 hours (theoretical and practical workload) were analyzed; they were related to the topic of adolescent and child health in both institutions (Table 1).

The details of the syllabi and learning objectives show different strategies for incorporating the topic into the curricula (Chart 1).

At institution A, the topic is integrated and shared with the content of pediatrics and primary care. The topic of adolescents is included within a life cycle context without an exclusive curricular unit for adolescent medicine, although it has the highest absolute workload (405 h).

In institution B, there is a specific curricular unit for adolescent health (60 h). There is a pedagogical delimitation for adolescent medicine as a field of knowledge distinct from traditional pediatrics, although the total hours dedicated to the topic are less than those in institution A.

**Chart 1.** Detailed description of the curricular units related to adolescent health in Institutions A and B.

Institutions	Subjects related to adolescence	Total workload (h)	Semester periods	Objectives/Syllabus
A	Nursing in Primary Health Care	120	4°	To present primary care with a focus on the Family Health Strategy as the entry point to the Unified Health System (SUS). To address nursing actions in the lines of care for the health of men, women, children, adolescents, young people, and the elderly.
	Nursing in Child Health Care	135	6°	To study the biopsychosocial and cultural characteristics of children in different stages of growth and development.
	Nursing in Child Health Care (Curricular Internship)	150	10°	Care model centered on children, adolescents, families, and the community.
B	Nursing in Child Health Care I	120	6°	To provide nursing care to children based on the ethical, legal, and professional principles of the profession and the SUS.
	Nursing in Adolescent Health Care	60	7°	To provide nursing care to adolescents based on the ethical, legal, and professional principles of the profession and the SUS.

## Discussion

The disparity observed between the total course hours and the time dedicated to adolescent health reveals that the teaching of adolescent medicine occupies a peripheral space in undergraduate nursing curricula, even in institutions considered as the benchmarks. The findings indicate that the topic is integrated, but in a way that is subordinate to pediatrics or diluted in general primary care disciplines.

This subordination (observed especially in institution A) confirms the risk of “infantilizing” the care of young people. By maintaining adolescent medicine as an appendix to pediatrics, the Pedagogical Projects of Courses may limit students’ perception of the specific vulnerabilities of this phase, such as the search for autonomy and the complexities of sexual and reproductive health. For both pediatric and adolescent nursing, this fragmented model makes it difficult to consolidate the competencies necessary for care that recognizes adolescents as protagonists of their own health processes.<sup>(6,7)</sup>

On the other hand, institution B presents a strategic advantage by establishing an exclusive curricular unit for adolescent health. Although the absolute workload of 60 h is less than that in institution A, this delimitation favors recognizing adolescent medicine as an autonomous field of knowledge. Specific disciplines facilitate the development of sensitive communication skills and the handling of ethical issues (such as confidentiality and privacy), which are fundamental for qualified nursing care.<sup>(8)</sup>

By comparing curricula with practical reality, both institutions align themselves with public policies (such as the Health in Schools Program). However, the challenge of internship placements persists: the lack of inpatient units or dedicated outpatient clinics for adolescents forces undergraduates to adapt care in inadequate settings, which can compromise the application of specific care technologies for this age group.<sup>(9-11)</sup>

As limitations, we point out the intentional nature of the sample and the exclusive focus on documentary data from public reference institutions, which prevent generalizing the results. The analysis was restricted to the formal plan of the curricula and did not capture the actual pedagogical practices in the classroom; this suggests the need for future research, including the perception of teachers and students.

## Conclusion

The topic of adolescent care in Nursing Course Curricula is still associated with generalist disciplines of child health and primary care. In the institutions analyzed, the curricular configuration prioritizes a life-cycle-based approach, and the time dedicated to adolescent medicine is still subordinated to other fields of knowledge. Its inclusion occurs fragmentarily, although the institutions present the topic in their curricular matrices, highlighting a gap in the delimitation of specific content focused on adolescents’ autonomy and typical needs. Therefore, the current curricular offering still presents challenges to consolidate training aligned with the specific demands of adolescent nursing, even in reference scenarios.

## Contributions

Bismarks Rodrigues Lopes contributed to the study conception and design, data analysis and interpretation, and writing and critical revision of the manuscript.

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