

Original Article

Investigation of the quantity and content of postgraduate theses in turkey in the field of mental health and psychiatric nursing

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this study is to examine the postgraduate theses in the field of mental health and psychiatric nursing in our country.

Methods: This is a descriptive study about postgraduate theses which were completed and approved between 1980 and 2018. The data for this study were collected by screening the National Thesis Database in April 2018. An advanced screening method was applied for the data examination process, as follows. For "Institute" we selected "Institute of Health Sciences." For "Department," we selected three choices: "Mental Health and Psychiatric Nurse," "Mental Health and Diseases Department," and "Nursing Department." "Psychiatry" keywords were used for the Department of Nursing. A total of 403 postgraduate theses were identified; 382 of these were found to be within the scope of the research and were selected for this study.

Results: We performed a statistical evaluation, which showed that 74.6% (285) of the theses were master's theses and 25.4% (97) of the theses were doctoral theses. It was determined that 27.7% of the theses' study designs were experimental, and 65.2% were quantitative and descriptive. Among the experimental studies, 19.4% were on psychoeducation, 4% were on counseling and psychotherapy, and 2.1% were on applications of complementary medicine. Among the experimental studies, 16.5% of the theses studied adult and child and adolescent with mental disorders, and 67.5% worked with healthy populations.

Conclusion: Our study found that the post-graduate studies in our country are mostly descriptive. They usually determine the current situation and most often focus on the field of preventive mental health with individuals without mental disorders. It is important that most of the theses are in the area of protection of mental health, but we also recommend that experts work more with patients in clinics to increase the presence of the field.

Keywords: Mental health and disease nursing; mental health and psychiatric nursing; postgraduate; thesis.

The extension of human lifespan, along with changes and improvements in healthcare and in the practices of nursing education, have generated major branches in nursing. One of these branches is psychiatric nursing.^[1] In 2007, the American Nurses Association described mental health and psychiatric nurse as intentional use of self in the art sense, and as a healthcare professional providing services and the use of

psychosocial and neurobiological theories, as well as research findings, and several roles of nursing in terms of science.^[1] In accordance with the clause stating, "Nurses completing a master's level education in a certain field are provided with the title of specialist nurse" in the Nursing Law approved April 25, 2007, nurses who complete postgraduate programs in Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing, Psychiatric Nursing, or Mental

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What is known on this subject?

- Postgraduate theses on psychiatric nursing have a major role in the care of individuals with mental disorders regarding their evidence-based progress in a scientific light based on theoretical frameworks.

What is the contribution of this paper?

- This research determined the current quantity and content of postgraduate theses carried out in psychiatric nursing in Turkey. It was also determined that most of the theses studied protective mental health services and 11.6% of master's theses and 75.3% of doctoral theses were experimental studies.

What is its contribution to the practice?

- This research is anticipated to guide and shed light on further postgraduate theses to be conducted on psychiatric nursing.

Health and Disease Nursing at institutes of medical sciences in universities are described as specialists in psychiatric nursing. In line with this, many subspecialties in psychiatry have been named as a result of the efforts of psychiatric nursing specialists and the Psychiatric Nursing Association. These include Chief Nurse of the Mental Health and Psychiatry Clinic, Emergency Nurse in the Mental Health and Psychiatry Clinic, Polyclinic Nurse in the Mental Health and Psychiatry Clinic, Emergency Psychiatric Nurse, Forensic Psychiatric Nurse, Alcohol and Substance Addiction Nurse, Geropsychiatric Nurse, Consultation-Liaison Psychiatric Nurse, Psychiatric Rehabilitation Nurse, Community Mental Health Nurse, and Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nurse.^[2] However, only five of the subspecialties were officially accepted by the Regulation on the Amendment of the Nursing Regulation, number 27910, published on April 19, 2011. Four of these subspecialties (Clinical Psychiatric Nursing, Alcohol and Substance Addiction Nursing, Consultation-Liaison Psychiatric Nursing, and Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing) were under the category of Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing, and one (Community Mental Health Nursing) was under the category of Public Health Nursing.

Historically, there has been progress in mental health and psychiatric nursing. The first master's degree program in the world in psychiatric nursing was at Rutgers University. A massive increase was seen in the number of mental health and psychiatric nurses who completed their master's degrees between the years 1958 and 1988, and more than a hundred psychiatric nurses completed their PhD. However, in Turkey, psychiatric nursing courses came into service at the undergraduate level with the advent of the Nursing College in 1955;^[1] afterwards, a master's program and a doctoral program were opened in 1968 and 1972, respectively.^[3] Field-specific scientific activities started in the 1970s and increased rapidly, especially gaining momentum after 1980. In parallel with the increase in the number of field-specific studies and research projects,^[1] scientific activities increased qualitatively and quantitatively as a result of a scientific meeting, the Psychiatric Nursing Conference, which took place in 2007 and afterwards. The first field-related scientific media publication, *Journal of Psychiatric Nursing*, began in 2010 and broke a new ground in nursing in 2016 by being reviewed in the Web of Science. This journal is

published three times a year and continues publishing field-related postgraduate scientific research studies frequently.

Scientific research is one of the most important indicators of scientific development of a country.^[4] Most of the scientific studies in nursing are conducted as theses. These have an important role in the production of scientific and medical information, dissemination of science, and development of nursing as a professional field.^[5] Postgraduate theses develop nurses' skills in finding solutions for various problems, in critical and systematic thinking, and in allowing them to apply quality care methods and to contribute to the scientific basis of these methods.^[6] However, even if a large amount of improvement in psychiatric nursing has occurred as a result of postgraduate theses by the present day, information about the level of improvement is still limited in Turkey. In other words, there is not sufficient information about the number of the specialists and psychiatric nurses with doctorates at the national level, and there are insufficient statistics regarding postgraduate theses. In this sense, this paper investigates postgraduate theses in mental health and psychiatric nursing in terms of quantity and content in Turkey.

Materials and Method

Aim of the Study

This study was conducted to examine postgraduate theses in mental health and psychiatric nursing in terms of quantity and content in Turkey. It was designed to find an answer to the question, "What are the research designs, methods, and the number of postgraduate theses in mental health and psychiatric nursing in Turkey?"

Study Design

In this retrospective cohort study, postgraduate theses regarding psychiatric nursing subspecialties that were completed and approved between 1980 and 2018 were examined retrospectively. The data were collected from the Council of Higher Education National Theses database (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>) in April 2018. The data were obtained by evaluating postgraduate theses (master's and doctoral theses) retrieved after an online search using three different keywords in the advanced search system. Out of 403 master's theses, 382 were found appropriate for the study sample (Fig. 1).

Criteria for Including in and Excluding From the Study

The research was performed on psychiatric nursing studies in the Psychiatric Nursing Department, Nursing Department, and Mental Health and Disease Nursing Department in the Institute of Medical Sciences between 1980 and 2018, and all the theses found in the system with open identification were included (Fig. 1).

In the first search, "Institute of Medical Sciences" and "Psychiatric Nursing Department" were used as keywords for institute

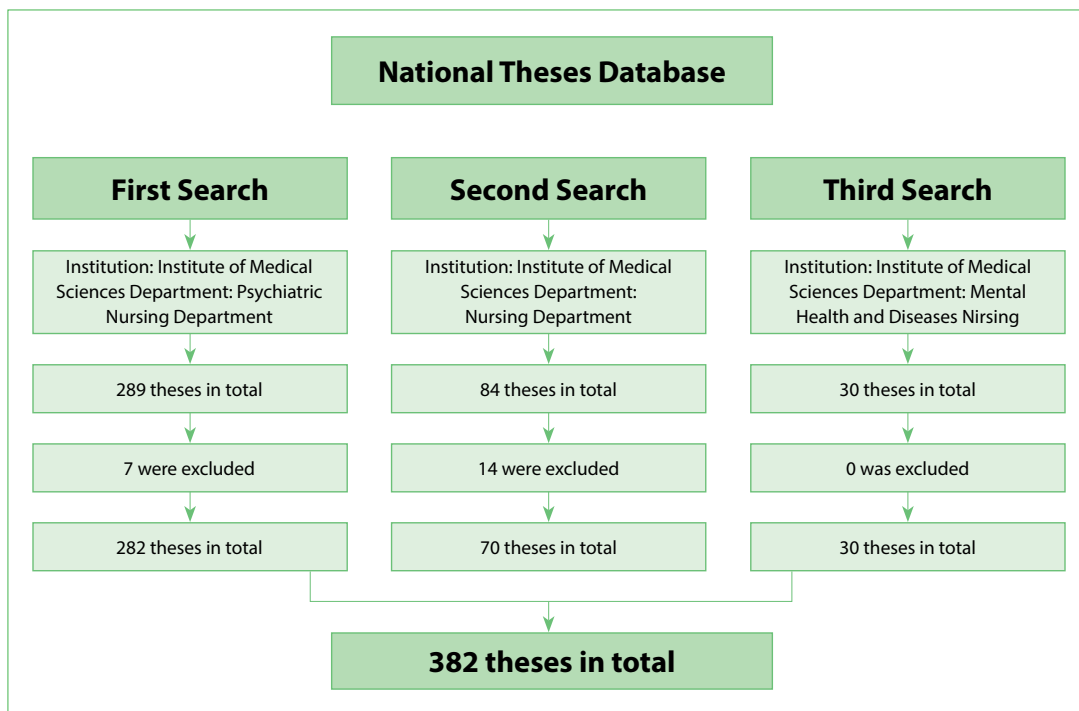


Figure 1. Theses included in the study.

and department, respectively. In total, 289 theses were found, three of which were excluded as they were about workplace nursing, and four were excluded since they were about teaching strategies. Consequently, 282 theses were included in the database from the first search (Fig. 1).

In the second search, “Institute of Medical Sciences” and “Nursing Department” were used as keywords for institute and department, respectively. In total, 84 theses were found. Six were excluded because they did not have identification, and eight were excluded as they were about the Internal Diseases Nursing Department. Consequently, 70 theses were included in the database from the second search (Fig. 1).

In the third search, the keywords “Institute of Medical Sciences” and “Mental Health and Diseases Nursing Department” were used for institute and department, respectively. In total, 30 theses were obtained; all were included in the study (Fig. 1).

The data included were analyzed using SPSS 22.0. Descriptive statistical methods (frequency and percentage distribution, mean, and standard deviation) were used in the data analysis.

Results

Information About Thesis Identification

Of the theses, 74.6% (n=285) were master's theses, and 25.4% (n=97) were doctoral theses. Of the 95.3% (n=364) theses that were completed in public universities, 73.6 (n=281) were conducted in the Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing Department, and 18.6% (n=71) in the Nursing Department. Of these, 96.9% (n=370) were carried out with a single supervisor, and 99.5% (n=380) were carried out with an advisor in mental

health and psychiatric nursing. Of the master's theses, 82.2% (n=240) were quantitative; 75.3% (n=73) of the doctoral theses were experimental studies (Table 1).

Information About Data Collection Tools for Theses

In all the theses completed, an information form that was prepared by the researchers was used to identify the studied group's characteristics. A standardized scale, the validity and reliability of which was measured in Turkey, was used to col-

Table 1. Characteristics of postgraduate psychiatric nursing

	n	%
Type of thesis		
Master's thesis	285	74.6
Doctoral thesis	97	25.4
Graduate school type		
Public university	364	95.3
Private university	18	4.7
Graduate institution program/department		
Mental health and disease department	30	7.9
Mental health and psychiatry department	281	73.6
Nursing department	71	18.6
Thesis advisor		
Mental health and psychiatry nurse	380	99.5
Physician	2	0.5
Second thesis advisor		
Yes	12	3.2
No	370	96.9

lect the data from 88.6% (n=253) of the master's theses and 76.2% (n=74) of the doctoral theses. After examining all the theses, we found that Beck's Depression Scale, the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Trait Anger and Anger Expression Scale, the Beliefs toward Mental Illness Scale, the Zarit Caregiver Burden Scale, the Multi-Dimensional Perceived Social Support Scale, the Ways of Coping with Stress Scale, the Family Assessment Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale were the most widely used standardized scales.

Psychiatric Nursing Subspecialties and Designs of the Theses

The study results showed that 44.6% (n=127) of the master's theses and 38.1% (n=37) of the doctoral theses were conducted on community mental health. We found that 14.6% (n=42) of the master's theses and 17.5% (n=17) of the doctoral theses were conducted on clinical psychiatric nursing. Of the master's theses, 11.6% (n=33) were experimental, and 84.2% (n=240) were quantitative and descriptive, while 75.3% (n=73) of the doctoral theses were experimental and 9.3% (n=9) were

quantitative and descriptive. Psychoeducation was generally used as an intervention in the experimental studies (Table 2).

Of the master's theses, 28.1% (n=80) were published in a periodical publication, while 44.3% (n=43) of doctoral theses were published. Most of the master's theses were published in national journals, whereas doctoral theses were published in journals scanned in international indexes (Table 2).

Information About Sample Groups Studied in the Theses

Of the master's theses, 35.5% (n=98) were conducted on healthy individuals and 14.6% (n=42) were on adults or adolescents with mental health disorders. However, 56.7% (n=42) of doctoral theses were conducted on healthy individuals and 17.5% (n=17) on adults or adolescents with mental health disorders. Of the master's theses, 4.9% (n=14) were conducted on individuals with more than one mental health disorder, 5.6% (n=16) on individuals with schizophrenia, 2.8% (n=8) on individuals with alcohol-substance addiction, 0.4% (n=1) on individuals with depression, 1.1% (n=3) on individuals with

Table 2. Characteristics of the methods of psychiatric nursing postgraduate theses

Type of thesis	Master's thesis		Doctoral thesis	
	n	%	n	%
	285	74.6	97	25.4
Study design				
Quantitative studies	240	84.2	9	9.3
Qualitative studies	4	1.4	1	1
Methodological studies (scale development)	7	2.5	6	6.2
Quantitative + qualitative studies	1	0.4	8	8.2
Experimental studies	33	11.6	73	75.3
Psychoeducation	20	7	54	55.6
Counseling and psychotherapy	5	1.8	10	10.3
Complementary medicine practices	3	1.2	3	3
Nursing interventions	5	1.8	8	8.3
Data collection tools used in theses				
Standardized scale	253	88.6	74	76.2
Introductory information form	22	7.8	5	5.2
Scale and introductory information form	6	2.1	2	2.1
Semi-structured/structured interview form	4	1.5	16	16.5
Psychiatric nursing subspecialties				
Clinical psychiatric nursing	42	14.6	17	17.5
Community mental health nursing	127	44.6	37	38.1
Consultation-liaison psychiatric nursing	57	20	19	19.6
Child and adolescent psychiatric nursing	35	12.3	14	14.4
Geropsychiatric nursing	11	3.9	5	5.2
Forensic psychiatric nursing	3	1.1	2	2.1
Alcohol and substance addiction nursing	10	3.5	3	3.1
Publication of the studies in periodicals				
Yes	80	28.1	43	44.3
No	205	71.9	54	55.7

bipolar disorder, and 15.4% (n=44) were conducted on consultation-liaison psychiatry patients. Of the doctoral theses, 2.1% (n=2) were conducted on individuals with more than one mental health disorder, 6.2% (n=6) on individuals with schizophrenia, 3.1% (n=3) on individuals with alcohol-substance addiction, 2.1% (n=2) on individuals with depression, 2.1% (n=2) on individuals with bipolar disorder, and 17.5% (n=17) on with consultation-liaison psychiatry patients.

Examination of the sample sizes of the theses: the sample sizes of the theses did not show a normal distribution. On average, the master's theses were conducted with 223.52 ± 206.6 (min: 6, max: 1484) participants, and the doctoral theses were conducted with 119.41 ± 157.44 (min: 18, max: 987) participants. The average sample size of the 249 quantitative studies was 247.92 ± 210.77 (min: 30, max: 1484). The average sample size in the experimental master's theses was 52.33 ± 57.61 (min: 8, max: 272) in the experimental group, and 58.74 ± 64.98 (min: 8, max: 272) in the control group. However, the average sample size in the experimental doctoral theses was 39.69 ± 33.00 (min: 5, max: 213), and 39.19 ± 33.00 (min: 15, max: 214) in the control group (Table 3).

Discussion

Analyzing scientific theses conducted on a certain topic allows us to obtain in-depth information about it and formalizes our overall view of the studied field. From this point of view, based on the findings obtained from this study examining postgraduate theses in terms of quantity and content in the area of mental health and psychiatric nursing in Turkey, we observed that most of the theses in psychiatric nursing were master's theses. In a similar study investigating postgraduate theses, 3.8% of the sample consisted of theses in the mental health and disease field. It is remarkable that master's theses constitute the majority of the postgraduate theses conducted in all nursing departments.^[7] Although clinical nurses as well as academic nurses prefer doing their master's in order to be specialists, the nurses who do their doctorate prefer doing it only in order to become academic experts.^[8,9] Hence, the similarity between the number of the doctorate theses and the number of academic psychiatric nurses supports this approach.

Examination of the traits of the theses: nearly all of the postgraduate theses reviewed in this study were supervised only by an advisor in mental health and psychiatric nursing. A study

Type of thesis	Master's thesis		Doctoral thesis	
	n	%	n	%
Sample group				
Individuals with mental health problems	36	12.5	13	13.4
Children and adolescents with mental health problems	6	2.1	4	4.1
Patient relatives	29	10.2	9	9.3
Nurses	71	24.9	12	12.4
Individuals with physical disorders	45	15.8	17	17.5
Healthy individuals	98	35.5	42	56.7
Characteristics of the sample group				
Individuals with no mental health problems	195	68.4	63	64.9
Diagnosis of individuals with mental health problems				
Schizophrenia	16	5.6	6	6.2
Depression	1	0.4	2	2.1
Bipolar disorder	3	1.1	2	2.1
Obsessive compulsive disorder	1	0.4	0	0
Generalized anxiety disorder	1	0.4	0	0
Alcohol and substance addiction	8	2.8	3	3.1
Dementia	0	0	1	1.0
Psychotic and borderline	0	0	1	1.0
Conduct disorder	1	0.4	0	0
Mental disorder (all diagnoses)	14	4.9	2	2.1
	Mean±SD		Mean±SD	
Number of samples	223.52±206.6 Min: 6 Max: 1484		119.41±157.44 Min: 18 Max: 987	

SD: Standard deviation.

by Tel and Sabancıoğulları^[8] (2014) showed that 11.5% of doctorate thesis advisors were not psychiatric nurses. A study by Arslan et al.^[9] (2010) found that 20% of the advisors of postgraduate nursing theses were from different departments. This was said to cause difficulties in counseling. Based on the data we obtained, we found that in recent years more psychiatric nurses have provided counseling for postgraduate theses in mental health and psychiatric nursing compared to the previous years. Thus, important progress has been made in terms of mentoring.

In this study, most of the master's theses on mental health and psychiatric nursing were quantitative and descriptive studies. Ardahan and Özsoy^[7] (2015) included 42 master's and 9 doctoral theses on mental health and disease nursing. Of the master's theses, 47.6% were descriptive and 15.2% were experimental. Of the doctoral theses, 45.6% were descriptive and 16.2% were experimental studies. Similarly, in a study by Besen^[10] (2016) investigating postgraduate theses in nursing, 39.5% of all the theses were completed using non-invasive methods. In the study by Arslan et al.^[9] (2010) investigating master's and doctoral theses on nursing in Turkey, nearly half of the theses were experimental or semi-experimental, and only 2.1% were qualitative studies. In this study, only 9.3% of doctoral theses were quantitative and descriptive, while 75.3% were experimental studies; these included psychoeducation and counseling skills. Master's theses were mostly quantitative and relational studies aiming to identify the current situation. The number of experimental doctoral theses gradually increased. Differences in the study results can be attributed to the examination only of theses on mental health and disease nursing and the differences in the number of theses included in the study. In the study by Tel and Sabancıoğulları^[8] (2014) investigating doctoral theses on psychiatric nursing in Turkey, 55.5% of the theses were semi-experimental and 35.4% were descriptive studies. Because doctoral theses are mostly experimental studies in psychiatric nursing, they show that evidence-based information and nursing practices have become widespread.

Examination of the traits of the theses regarding data collection tools: a sociodemographic data form (questionnaire) was used for all the theses. Furthermore, the data of 88.6% (n=253) of the master's theses and 76.2% (n=74) of the doctoral theses were obtained using a standardized measurement tool whose validity and reliability were measured. In a similar vein, in the study by Ünsal and Ergül^[11] (2010), questionnaires and scales were mostly used as data collection methods. Also, in the study by Tel and Sabancıoğulları^[8] (2014), scales were used as data collection tools in nearly all the doctoral theses. In comparison to the doctoral theses on psychiatry, there is a higher use of standardized measurement tools in master's theses. This can be attributed to the higher number of master's theses than doctoral theses, as the same research design is used more frequently in master's theses. While master's theses were mostly conducted using descriptive and correlational methods with standardized measurement tools, doctoral theses mostly

used methodological or qualitative designs. In Turkey, the use of standardized measurement tools whose validity and reliability were measured in postgraduate theses is important, as systematic and practical information can be acquired.^[8]

Examination of the sample group's traits and special features in the postgraduate theses studied: 14.6% of the master's theses and 17.5% of the doctoral theses were conducted with adults, children, or adolescents with mental health disorders. A study by Motamed-Jahromi and Dehghani^[5] (2014) indicated that 42% of master's theses on nursing and midwifery included patient groups. In contrast to that study, the number of studies including patient groups is lower in Turkey. A study investigating nursing research studies in Turkey found that the sample groups mostly consist of nursing students, healthy individuals, patients, and nurses.^[11] In the study by Tel and Sabancıoğulları^[8] (2014), 23% of doctoral theses on psychiatric nursing consisted of nurses, 16% consisted of clinical patients, 13.8% consisted of students, 12.6% consisted of nursing students, 12.6% consisted of psychiatric patients, and 11.5% consisted of psychiatric patients' families. This can be attributed to the fact that the candidates who want to become specialists (nurses) encounter several bureaucratic barriers while conducting their studies with individuals with mental health disorders. For the studies to be carried out with patients, obtaining permission from ethics committees or institutions, including a physician, or asking for a physician's counseling on the thesis can be presupposed. In the event that this is not approved, the study is not allowed by the ethics committee or the institution. Besides that, certain conditions like obtaining the consent of the patients and their relatives, while patients' relatives often do not want to take part in studies, can be a cause that limits the number of studies in this field. Furthermore, academic nurses in Turkey cannot work in any clinic. The fact that postgraduate students and their advisors do not work in the clinic causes patients to be perceived as the "physician's patients" rather than the "institution's patients." Besides, physicians' concern that nurses may hurt patients by intervention studies leads the nurses to conduct more descriptive studies. Due to these restrictive factors, candidates tend to continue their studies along the lines of protective mental health services for at-risk groups or those with no mental health problems. Also, candidates prefer areas, such as community mental health nursing, where they can easily obtain permissions from ethics committees and institutions for collecting data. This is because candidates have a limited time for their postgraduate education and theses and feel under pressure.

Most of the master's and doctoral theses examined in this study were conducted in community mental health and consultation-liaison psychiatric nursing subspecialties. As stated in the regulations, these studies had a protective role in nurses' mental health services. These studies were described as "protecting, developing, and maintaining mental health of individuals, families and the community (community mental health centers regulations)"^[12] and "providing patients and their families with training to cope with problems and de-

velop their mental health (Nursing Regulations - Consultation Liaison Nursing).^[2] However, today, the services provided by nurses in community mental health centers are more focused on treatment for the individuals with chronic mental disorders by monitoring their medication, treatment, and rehabilitation. These theses, conducted for protecting and improving mental health, can be important guides for developing protective services and increasing service quality intended for nurses in community mental health units which are focused only on monitoring and evaluating chronic mental diseases.

Examination of the sample sizes of the theses: the numbers did not show normal distributions. The master's and doctoral theses had different sample sizes. In the experimental master's theses, the sample average in the experimental group was higher than in the control group. The difference in the sizes of experimental and control group samples might be related to the fact that not all the master's theses had control groups; there were some studies conducted with only a single group.

Publishing postgraduate theses as articles is important to give wide publicity to the intervention used in the theses and to reach a wider readership. We found that 28.1% of the master's theses and 44.3% of the doctoral theses had been published in a journal. The doctoral theses were published in journals scanned by international indexes, whereas master's theses were published in journals scanned by national indexes. Printing experimental studies in national journals is important for clinical nurses especially so that they can access these articles and benefit by using the interventions applied in the studies. Therefore, it is vital to publish postgraduate scientific studies in international indexed journals that are published in Turkey in both Turkish and English. Therefore, most postgraduate theses in Turkey are published in the Journal of Psychiatric Nursing (PHD). PHD is an important publication which publishes articles in both Turkish and English and is the first nursing journal.

Limitations of the Study

The study results are limited to theses kept in the Council of Higher Education National Theses database, which were accessed using three specific keywords. Furthermore, the researcher believes that some theses could not be accessed due to the fact that their titles might have been changed based on the recommendations of the reviewers of the related journals, which is another limitation of the study.

Conclusion

The study results showed that postgraduate studies in Turkey were descriptive and focused on determining the current situation and protecting and improving mental health of individuals with no mental health problems. Considering that mental health services in Turkey are mostly provided as treatment-centered, further studies where there is more contact with patients with mental health disorders should be conducted.

There is a need for child and adolescent psychiatric nursing studies, due to the recent limits on studies of clinical psychiatric nursing, child and adolescent mental health problems, and boarding psychiatry services. Additionally, conducting studies on alcohol/substance abuse has become a vital issue due to such reasons as the increase in addiction statistics and a decline in the average age of addicted persons in Turkey. Furthermore, the increase in the elderly population in recent years and the parallel increase in the frequency of organic or mental disorders has caused geropsychiatric nursing to become popular in Turkey. Opening of high-security institutions providing care to patients with criminal histories due to disabilities in their mental competence stemming from mental disorders and the scarcity of scientific studies to be pioneers for health care providers who will work in these brand new units makes forensic psychiatric nursing a rarely addressed field for studies conducted in Turkey. Due to such reasons, conducting practice-based theses on subspecialties will increase a researcher's appearance. We recommend increasing the number of highly evidence-based experimental studies in which cause-and-effect relationships can be established, and the long-term follow-up studies appropriate for the period of postgraduate education, using standardized measurement tools, disseminating these tools in the field, publishing them, and letting them become accessible to more people. Thus, individuals can be provided with more evidence-based, qualified care services, and they can be empowered.

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