

Homeopathy in Brazil: inquiry into its academic production

Walcyamar Estrêla, Rosangela Caetano

State University of Rio de Janeiro, IMS, Brazil

ABSTRACT

Background: according to the WHO, there is an increasing demand for traditional medicines (TM) that must be answered by governmental health authorities. Although homeopathy is the modality of TM best institutionalized in Brazil, it still faces some obstacles among which the controversial results of meta-analyses of homeopathic clinical trials. **Aims:** to map out the state of clinical research in homeopathy in the Brazilian university milieu as reflected in doctoral and master dissertations. **Methods:** specialized databases were searched seeking for doctoral and master dissertations related to homeopathy produced in Brazil between 1985 and 2006. Dissertations were analyzed according to institution; year; research area; type of production; regional distribution and research subject. Dissertations dealing with evaluation of the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment were further evaluated as to their aims, methods and results. **Results:** in the 20 years between 1985 and 2006, 161 dissertations were defended related to homeopathy. Most academic productions dated from the 2000s, particularly 2005-6; 77% were related to master degrees; there was a dramatic concentration (92%) in the Southern and South-Eastern regions of Brazil; they covered 10 different areas, the maximum being physical-biological research (20.4%) and the minimum, clinical research (3.7%); from 6 dissertations dealing with the evaluation of the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment, 3 employed qualitative methods; 1 employed quantitative methods but was in the stage of project; 1 was a standard randomized controlled trial (RCT) which evinced positive results of homeopathic treatment in gastroesophageal reflux not related to hiatal hernia; the sixth study was a meta-analysis of the methodological quality of 132 RCTs of homeopathy in infectious disease. **Conclusions:** The number of projects related to the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment is insignificant and their methods are chiefly qualitative. This suggests that researchers might believe that standard quantitative studies are improper or insufficient to assess the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment or to grasp its dimension of integrality.

Keywords: Homeopathy; Institutionalization; Brazil; Academic dissertations.

Introduction

Since the Declaration of Alma Ata in 1978, several recommendations encourage countries to invest in Traditional Medicines (TMs). TM is the term employed by the World Health Organization (WHO) [1] to define a set of health-care practices that differ from orthodox medicine TMs are known by several different names in different countries, including alternative medicine, complementary practices, non conventional therapeutics, and the like according to the degree and pattern of the process of institutionalization in each country. Furthermore, TMs comprise a wide range of both therapeutic practices (as e.g., phytotherapy, shamanic medicine, manual therapies, spiritual therapies) and actual medical systems, including Chinese Traditional Medicine, Ayurvedic Medicine and Homeopathy.

In 2002, the WHO instituted a commission to study and promote TMs. This resulted in a document to guide the corresponding policies entitled *WHO traditional medicine strategy* [1]. Such strategies are concentrated along three axes: 1) safety, efficacy and quality; 2) availability; 3) rational use. Still that same year, another publication by the WHO entitled *Traditional Medicine: growing needs and potential* [2] presents the results of a study of the situation of TMs in some member-countries. According to it, the use of TMs is increasing in all countries, reaching a maximum of 90% in Ethiopia, whilst the average is 60-70%. Moreover, already in 2000, 25 countries had established national policies for this area.

It is natural to infer that if MTs are widely used worldwide, the availability and quality of facilities and products ought to be a serious source of concern for national and international public health authorities. And, indeed, the number of countries establishing national policies for TMs is increasing [2].

Homeopathy is a TM introduced in Brazil in the 1840s and the one that exhibits the highest degree of institutionalization in the country. The national medical homeopathic association (AMHB) was founded in 1979 and the following year, homeopathy was recognized as an official medical specialty by the Federal Medical Council. In 1990 it was founded the national association of homeopathic pharmacists (ABFH) and 2 years later, homeopathy was acknowledged as a pharmaceutical specialty by the Federal Pharmacy Council. In 1993, the national association of homeopathic veterinary medicine (AMVHB) was founded and in 2000, homeopathy was acknowledged as an official specialty by the Federal Council of Veterinary Medicine.

Moreover, homeopathy is represented since the 1980s in the national public health system (SUS); in 2006, it was launched the National Policy for Integrative and Complementary Practices (PNPIC) [3]. Actually, the PNPIC was the last step of a process initiated in 1985, when a first attempt was made to establish a national policy for homeopathy involving public agencies, such as the National Institute for Medical Assistance and Social Welfare (INAMPS), the forerunner of present-day SUS, university centers such as the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ) and the Institute of Social Medicine of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (IMS/UERJ) and the Hahnemannian Institute of Brazil (IHB). Despite the notoriety of this project, its actual application met countless hindrances. For instance, FIOCRUZ was charged of the production of homeopathic medicines but its role never left the paper; UERJ was the responsible for research, but only launched some tepid attempts that did not lasted too long; and INAMPS accomplished only the initial phase of the project, namely, a pilot establishment of some facilities within its network, whilst its actual role was to establish universal homeopathic assistance through its network of outpatient clinics [4].

In 1986, it was held the 7th National Health Conference, where homeopathy, among other alternative practices as they were called then, was recommended to be included in the public network of medical care [5]. The Brazilian new Federal Constitution of 1988 enacted a new national health-care system grounded on the principles of universalization, equity and integrality. This led to the institutionalization of the Single Health System (SUS) as State policy to fulfill the constitutional mandate defining health as a right of citizens and a duty of the State.

In 2003, official data report that homeopathy was present in the public health-care system in 20 out of 26 federal units, including 16 State capitals and 158 counties, comprising 457 homeopathic physicians [3]. By 2006, more than 500.000 homeopathic and acupuncture consultations had been carried out at SUS facilities [6].

Despite homeopathy was included as an integral part of the right to health defined by the Federal Constitution and it was contemplated in the instruments for government management, it entered belatedly the agenda of health-care policy. Furthermore, its presence in the national health system developed quite tepidly along the last 2 decades. Only local initiatives met some success, whilst there is still no federal injunction to implement it.

In the view of this historical process of construction of the homeopathic agenda in the public health setting, it is fitting to ask whether the bibliographical production reflects the diversity and complexity of this process. More particularly, how does homeopathy express itself in the academic production of Brazil? And still more specifically, how much of such production focuses the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment?

The answer to these questions is a stage in the doctoral project the authors are carrying out, seeking to identify the presence of scientific production focusing on the evaluation of research methods and results of homeopathic interventions as represented in scientific and academic literature. The overall aim is to develop instruments more congenial with the rationality underlying homeopathic practice, whereas the goal of this article is to evaluate the academic production. Thus, the aims of this phase of the research project, whose results are presented here were to scan academic literature related to homeopathy, restricted to doctoral and master dissertations in Brazil in order to: 1) map out the academic production in homeopathy during the last 20 years; 2) identify thematic loci and possible areas of concentration within them; 3) draw the outlines of research focusing on the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment.

Materials and methods

Research was carried out in database for doctoral and master dissertations related to the theory and practice of homeopathy without any previous restriction of the approach they used.

In this regard, research was hindered by the lack of a single database including all dissertations written in the country. On the contrary, there are many coexisting database, surely limited as to their completion and that must be searched in an individual basis. This includes the use of different systems of search criteria and systems. Research was carried out in March 2007; since then, it must be mentioned the establishment of a section specifically devoted to dissertations in the homeopathic library of the Virtual Health Library [7].

Our research began at the dissertations database of the national agency for postgraduate programs (CAPES) [8]. The target was doctoral and master dissertations whose subject was represented by search-terms such as “homeopathy”; “homeopathic” (masculine and feminine, singular and plural). The starting point was 1985, and the end point, 2006, since that was the available production at that time. Results gave rise to a definite list entitled “CAPES”.

The next stage comprised research in other databases; the reason being that only dissertations funded by national agencies are mandatorily included in CAPES database. These additional sources were: Portal of Theses and Dissertations on Public Health, Virtual Health Library [7]; Latin-American and Caribbean Literature in the Health Sciences database (LILACS) [9]; Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations of the Brazilian Institute of Science and Technology (BDTD/IBICT) [10].

The second set of data was cross-checked against the ones in “CAPES” list and the dissertations not included in the latter were arranged in a list titled “non CAPES”.

Finally, it was also included dissertations found through non systematic individual search of references found in electronic lists, as e.g., the one made by AMHB, and websites of some of the major Brazilian universities (University of São Paulo, Federal University of Bahía, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Federal University of Santa Catarina, State University of Rio de Janeiro, State University of São Paulo, State University of Campinas, etc.).

All such located dissertations were included in a database through software Excel® and analyzed on the grounds of their abstracts according to the following variables: 1) year; 2) institution; 3) federal unit (UF); 4) region of institution; 5) research area; 6) main focus of research. Data regarding sources of funding and links to official research groups unfortunately were not available.

Additionally, in order to analyze academic productions focused on the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment, the full text of the corresponding dissertations, located by their abstracts were studied. Criteria to select such dissertations were: 1) studies on human therapeutics evaluating the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment or features related to doctor-patient relationship; 2) studies on the impact on the quality of life of patients treated with homeopathy.

In order to systematize the analysis of this set of academic production, data were recorded in a table which further included more detailed information on the aims of the research project, the methods applied and the main results obtained.

Results and discussion

Literature search located 201 dissertations, which were arranged in a database before their results were analyzed. Forty dissertations had no relation with homeopathy whatsoever and were excluded. These results are described in Table 1.

Table 1 –Data collection

Database	Initial results	Dissertations	Dissertations not present in the former consulted databases
CAPES	188	148	148
FIOCRUZ	5	4	1
BIREME	14	14	6
LILACS	2	2	1
IBICT	5	5	5
THESIS	14	14	0

The remaining 161 titles elaborated between 1985 and 2006 included 125 master dissertations and 36 doctoral theses, representing, respectively 77% and 23% of the full academic production. Prevalence of master over doctoral dissertation was also found by Barata [11], who studied the distribution of academic production in collective health (67% master dissertations) and by Kornis et al. [12] regarding oral health (85%). This might be due to the fact that, in Brazil, the number of master postgraduate programs is much larger than the corresponding to doctoral programs.

According to the Directory of Research Groups of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (DGI/CNPq), among all areas of knowledge, health contributed to 20% of master and 16% doctoral dissertations. For the period between 2003 and 2006 the relative proportion of master and doctoral dissertations was 74% and 26% respectively. Therefore, the situation of dissertations related with homeopathy agrees with the overall national trend.

Academic studies related with homeopathy belong to different areas of knowledge, as it can be seen in Table 2. Areas were selected as a function of the main content of dissertations and/or their approach and do not necessarily agree with the official classification followed by either CAPES or CNPq. Thus, for instance, in “pharmacy”, only research projects strictly related to medicines as such were considered, as, e.g. a study on the uniformity of the impregnation of globules.

On the other hand, studies focusing on pharmaceutical assistance in public health facilities, as, e.g. the one entitled “The homeopathic remedy in health-care facilities”, devoted to the distribution of homeopathic medicines in the public health-care network, were listed under heading “collective health”. Under heading “physical-biological research” were listed dissertations on fundamental research, research carried out in laboratories, including the use of experimental models with animals. On the other hand, when the focus was on education and training of specialists, dissertations were listed under heading “education”. Studies devoted to specific periods in the history of homeopathy in Brazil or characters significant for the development of homeopathy were listed under heading “history”. The specific applications of homeopathy in agriculture, be it in culture, soil improvement or plague-control, and in the treatment of disease and the improvement of animal production were respectively listed under headings “agronomy” and “veterinary”. Clinical research in dentistry and medicine, in turn, were listed under the corresponding headings. Studies converging on sociology and philosophy were listed under heading “social sciences”. Finally, the functioning of experiences or homeopathic facilities, as well as the studies focusing on health policy with an interface with homeopathy were listed under heading “collective health”.

Table 2 – Data distribution

Thematic area	Master		Doctorate		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Physical-biological	26	20.8	7	19.4	33	20.4
Social sciences	24	19.2	8	22.2	32	19.8
Collective health	19	15.2	4	11.1	23	14.2
Agronomy	17	13.6	7	19.4	24	14.9
Veterinary	12	9.6	3	8.3	15	9.3
Medicine	9	7.2	2	5.6	11	8.8
Education	7	5.6	1	2.8	8	4.9
Pharmacy	5	4.0	0	0.0	5	3.1
History	3	2.4	2	5.6	5	3.1
Dentistry	3	2.4	2	5.6	5	3.1
Total	125	100.0	36	100.0	161	100.0

Analysis of data in Table 2 show that 70% of academic productions belong to one of 4 areas: physical-biological research, social sciences, collective health and agronomy. Distribution of master and doctoral dissertations varies within all 4 areas: doctoral dissertations prevail in the social sciences while lab research dominates among master productions. Physical-biological research represents one fifth of all academic productions, applying for both doctoral and master dissertations. No doctoral dissertations were found for the pharmacy area. It must be noticed that clinical research in the medical area has inexpressive production as of now, representing merely 7.2% and 5.6% of master and doctoral dissertations. Moreover, from the corresponding 11 productions located, only 6 (3.7% of the total production) are strictly related to the evaluation of the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment in human beings.

Kornis et al. [12] also found a strong concentration of academic productions in oral health in 4 thematic areas named by them “health and society”, “models of assistance and management”, “policy” and “education and health”. Their “health and society” (33%) corresponds to our “social sciences” (19.8%). Dissertations we listed under heading “collective health” (14.2%) have similar subjects to their “models of assistance and management” (15%) and “policy” (15%). Therefore, there is some correlation between our and their results, despite production belongs to different fields of knowledge. Again, in both series 4 areas comprised 70% of production suggesting a trend of concentration.

As mentioned above, the number of dissertations on the efficacy/effective of homeopathic treatment in human beings is very low and unsatisfactory: from 161 dissertations, only 6 (3.7%) strictly dealt with this subject. Moreover, the methods prevailing in them tended to be qualitative assessments – influence on the quality of life; feeling of general well-being; improvement of symptoms; changes in so-called “vital attitude” manifested through the somatic responses of the organism to the external environment; increase in autonomy; and feeling of being taken care of. Only 2 studies followed the methods recommended by Evidence Based Medicine to assess therapeutic efficacy, namely randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with quantitative results. One further study was a review of clinical studies focusing on their methodological quality; in this way, it analyzed 132 trials of infectious diseases treated with homeopathy.

Arrangement of data by year of production yielded the results shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – time distribution

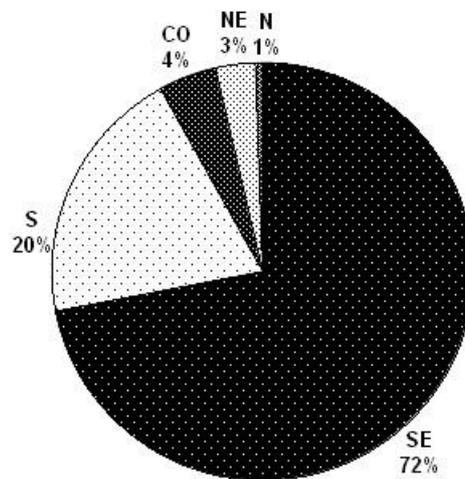
Year	Master		Doctorate		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
1986-91	6	4.8	0	0.0	6	3.8
1992	0	0.0	1	2.8	1	0.6
1993	2	1.6	0	0.0	2	1.2
1994	4	3.2	1	2.8	5	3.1
1995	3	2.4	0	0.0	3	1.9
1996	2	1.6	0	0.0	2	1.2
1997	5	4.0	1	2.8	6	3.8
1998	2	1.6	2	5.5	4	2.5
1999	7	5.6	3	8.3	10	6.2
2000	5	4.0	3	8.3	8	5.0
2001	5	4.0	3	8.3	8	5.0
2002	13	10.4	3	8.3	16	9.9
2003	21	16.8	4	11.1	25	15.5
2004	13	10.4	3	8.3	16	9.9
2005	20	16.0	4	11.1	24	14.9
2006	17	13.6	8	22.2	25	15.5
Total	125	100.0	36	100.0	161	100.0

In this regard, it can be seen that most of the production is quite recent. Until the 1990s, there was an average of 3-4 dissertations per year. An increase is seen in the current decade, especially from 2002 onwards. This period corresponds to about 67% of the total production, whilst about one third is concentrated in the last 2 years analyzed (2005-2006).

The growth of master studies, taking as baseline the average yearly production until 2001, is about 340% compared to 2006. There are some differences between the master and doctoral dissertations, since the latter grew more slowly and only achieved a significant raise in the last year analyzed, whilst overall they became systematically present only since 1997.

Kornis et al. [12] have found a similar pattern of temporal growth in the field of oral health. They identified a leap in production in 2000 growing until 2003 to then decrease since then. Therefore, there is some correlation between their and our series for the period between 2000 and 2003. By using as ground the data exhibited in the CNPq report [13], we can conclude that the growth of production in general area “health” in the same period was close to 200%. Therefore, despite its absolute smaller proportion by comparison with other fields, the production in homeopathy grew above the average. Furthermore, it is also possible to verify that this raise is proportional to the number of corresponding institutions and research groups, which can help explain this trend.

A further feature analyzed was the geographical distribution of dissertations, whose resulted are exhibited in Figure 1. It was found an intense concentration of these academic productions in the Southern and South-Eastern regions. The South-Eastern region comprises 72% of productions, which added to the Southern region attains 92% of productions. In this regard, there are no differences between doctoral and master dissertations.



N: North; NE: Northeast; CO: Center-West; S: South; SE: Southeast

Figure 1 - geographical distribution of dissertations.

The UF with most productions is São Paulo (37%) followed by Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais (both 17.4%), Paraná (10.6%), Santa Catarina (5.6%) and Rio Grande do Sul (3.7%).

As a fact, all countries with a tradition in science and technology exhibit some degree of geographical concentration. However, Guimarães [14] judges that in the case of Brazil, this pattern is “excessive”. According to him, about 82% of doctorates concluded in 2000 in Brazilian universities occurred within the triangle São Paulo – Rio de Janeiro – Minas Gerais.

There is a strong regional concentration of institutions, resources and researchers [15] and this is the cause of concentration of the academic production in Brazil. Postgraduate programs are agglutinated in the South-eastern region, comprising 64% of the general national total rising to 66% for the general area “health”. Again, considering academic productions without distinguishing between doctoral and master dissertations, 60% converge in the South-Eastern region [15].

Table 4 describes distribution according to institution and origin of dissertations.

Table 4 – Institutional distribution

Institution	N° dissertations	%
USP (Universidade de São Paulo)	23	14.3
UFV (Universidade Federal de Viçosa)	21	13.0
UFPR (Universidade Federal do Paraná)	17	10.6
UERJ (Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro)	12	7.5
UFSC (Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina)	9	5.6
UNICAMP (Universidade de Campinas)	8	5.0
UFRJ (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro)	8	5.0
UFMG (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais)	7	4.3
UFRS (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul)	6	3.7
PUC-SP (Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo)	6	3.7
UNIFESP (Universidade Federal de São Paulo)	5	3.1
UnB (Universidade Nacional de Brasília)	4	2.5
ENSP (Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública)	4	2.5
UFBA (Universidade Federal da Bahia)	3	1.9
Remainder of universities	28	17.3
Total	161	100

It can be seen that University of São Paulo (USP) leads the pack, with 14.3% of dissertations, half of them located in the faculties of medicine and public health. It is closely followed by Federal University of Viçosa (13.0%), which although is not a major center, it has a strong tradition of research in homeopathy and agronomy, a quite recent focus of interest, devoted to the treatment of ill cultures or the improvement of production dismissing the use of chemicals or concentrating on organic animal products.

A further pole of concentration of academic production is the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), which exhibits a significant number of researches chiefly in the physical-biological area of homeopathy through the *canova* method. The latter, although it uses homeopathic preparations to increase macrophagic activity in conditions of immunosuppression such as HIV/AIDS syndrome and *neoplasia*, it does not apply them according to the principles of classic homeopathy, namely individualization of treatment and similarity [16].

It must also be highlighted the contribution of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), with 7.5% of the total production. Virtually all these dissertations are originated at the IMS/UERJ, which has a long tradition of research in this area through some particular research projects, including Project Medical Rationalities and the Laboratory of Research on Practices of Integrality in Health (LAPPIS). The only exception is a dissertation belonging with the area of physical-biological research.

The institutions mentioned above together with further 6 (Federal University of Santa Catarina, State University of Campinas, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Federal University of Minas Gerais, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo) comprise 72.7% of the productions analyzed here. The predominance of USP is also highlighted in the studies by Guimarães, Kornis et al. and CNPq already mentioned [12,13,14].

Regarding the specific issue that motivated this study, namely, how research on the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment is reflected by the Brazilian scientific production, as it was mentioned, only 6 out of 161 dissertations dealt with this subject, as stated in their abstracts, being 5 of them (83.3%) master dissertations. Therefore, the number of clinical studies on the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment is very low regarding the overall academic production related with homeopathy, which is particularly worrisome when it is remembered the need of studies evaluating the clinical results of homeopathy.

Further analysis of these 6 dissertations showed that 3 employed qualitative methods; 2 were RCTs (one complete and one is stage of project); and the last was a review of the methodological quality of homeopathic clinical trials in infectious and parasitic diseases.

From the 3 qualitative studies, one [17] focused on the role of the doctor-patient relationship in homeopathy. According to the author, this setting favors the development of new meanings for the understanding of the process of becoming-ill and, thus, for a wider comprehension of the notion of health-care as well as for the ongoing process of healing and recuperation of health. These aspects were rated important by the author in the quest to explain the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathy as a therapeutic practice.

Another one [18] sought to understand the influence of homeopathic treatment on the quality of life of cancer patients. The author discusses the aspect of quality of life from the homeopathic philosophical perspective, which approaches individuals in a holistic manner in their totality and singularity as well as in their relation with the external environment. The resulting conception about the quality of life includes notions such as “feeling of general well-being”, “improvement of mental, general and local symptoms”, but mainly the potential changes in the so-called “vital attitude”, which are manifested somatically in the responses of the organism to the external environment, and psychologically, through the strategies to deal with events, which as a whole represent individual susceptibility.

The last one [16], carried out by one of the authors of this article, sought to establish a correlation between the results of homeopathic treatment and the notion of integrality through interviews with patients and their doctors. The author concluded that the positive results of homeopathic treatment from the perspective of both, patients and doctors, lead to include into analysis notions such as integrality, autonomy and feeling of being taken care of. It was further suggested that such categories ought to be included in evaluations of the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment in order to make visible its dimension of integrality.

Regarding 2 clinical trials, one was in the stage of project [19] and consequently presented no results. This was a master dissertation in the program of Evidence Based Medicine of the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), which sought to draw a methodological design for clinical trials in homeopathy.

The one RCT which was complete [20] showed the efficacy of homeopathic treatment in cases of gastroesophageal reflux. It correlated the clinical and endoscopic results with homeopathic treatment by

comparison to placebo and concluded that homeopathic treatment 1) was more efficient than placebo in the following outcomes: a) improvement of well-being; b) remission of heartburn; c) improvement of heartburn; d) remission of esophageal erosions; e) remission of regurgitation [in d) and e), cases without concomitant hernia]; 2) was not more efficient than placebo for the remission of regurgitation in patients with hernia; 3) was hindered by the presence of hiatal hernia 2 to 4 cm of extension; 4) the higher the degree of erosive esophagitis, the lower the ratio of remission of regurgitation; 5) the patient's "faith" in homeopathy did not seem to interfere with the clinical results.

The sixth and final dissertation assessed clinical trials from the perspective of their methodological quality [21] through the analysis of 132 trials of infectious diseases treated with homeopathy. It concluded that only 55.6% could be rated as having good-quality according to the criteria listed in this study. The author concluded that these results indicated the need to carry out more similar studies with trials with better methodological rigor.

Conclusions

One of the advantages of inquiring into academic production is that it might be less subjected to the publication biases exhibited by scientific journals, which massively are devoted to conventional medicine. Moreover, in the latter case, the chances of publication are lower for studies carried out in small populations and/or report non significant or inconclusive data [22].

This approach is facilitated in Brazil, since Portal CAPES hosts the lion's share of academic dissertations and consequently enhances the visibility and accessibility of academic productions related with homeopathy.

Despite the noticeable growth of academic production in recent years, the number of the ones strictly related with homeopathy is virtually insignificant by comparison to the overall national production of doctoral and master dissertations. However, at the same time, it was detected a steadily increasing growth, more significant in the 2000s, which might be related to the expansion in the number of postgraduate programs in Brazil. On the other hand, relation with the PNPIC could not be assessed due to time limits of the present research; this remains a task for the future.

Our study also verified a large diversity of thematic areas of research – 10 different kinds – which shows that homeopathy operates in the direction of multidisciplinary, besides progressively attracting areas alien to health-care. On the other hand, there was significant heterogeneity in the distribution of academic productions according to such areas. Physical-biological researches largely prevail, representing one fifth of the overall total. On the other extreme, the medical area, which includes clinical trials, is virtually insignificant, failing to attain 10% of production.

The hegemony of the South-Southeast (especially the latter) axis overreaches 90% of academic production related with homeopathy. This is consistent with the fact that these regions concentrate the institutions for higher education offering postgraduate programs as a whole, as well as the accredited schools to train homeopaths [3].

Finally, our quest for standard studies aiming to assess the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment was unsuccessful since researchers tend to look for more qualitative answers, expressing the meaning that patients and doctors apprehend regarding disease and its influence on the quality of life. On the one hand, this paucity reflects a lack of research employing the tools of classic epidemiology, corroborating the criticism against homeopathy mentioned above. However, on the other hand it might mean that homeopathic practitioners understand that such tools are not proper or sufficient to assess the efficacy/effectiveness of homeopathic treatment as well as it highlights the dimension of integrality that it might possess.

In this article, it is not discussed the corresponding situation in the medical specialized literature as to establish whether the results obtained here are a global phenomenon or a particularity of academic productions. This is the aim of the present stage of research of the doctoral project mentioned above.

Finally, regarding the concentration of academic productions in the last 2 years studied, it must still be established the later fate of the growth curve, since it might help to define the effects of the PNPIC in the development of homeopathy in Brazil.

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Homeopatia no Brasil: averiguação da sua produção acadêmica

RESUMO

Introdução: de acordo com a OMS, existe uma crescente demanda pelas medicinas tradicionais (MT) que devem ser atendidas pelas autoridades governamentais de saúde. Apesar da Homeopatia ser a modalidade de MT melhor institucionalizada no Brasil, ela ainda enfrenta obstáculos dentre os quais os resultados controversos das meta-análises dos ensaios clínicos. **Objetivos:** mapear o estado da pesquisa clínica em Homeopatia, no meio universitário brasileiro, a partir das dissertações de mestrado e doutorado. **Métodos:** bancos de dados especializados foram consultados para buscar as dissertações de mestrado e doutorado relacionadas a Homeopatia, produzidas no Brasil entre 1985 e 2006. As dissertações foram classificadas de acordo com a instituição, anos, área de pesquisa, tipo de produção, distribuição regional e assunto da pesquisa. Dissertações que tratavam da avaliação da eficácia/efetividade do tratamento homeopático foram avaliados em termos de objetivos, métodos e resultados. **Resultados:** nos 20 anos, entre 1985 e 2006, 161 dissertações relacionadas com a Homeopatia foram defendidas. A maioria da produção acadêmica era posterior ao ano 2000, particularmente 2005-2006; 77% eram relacionada a programas de mestrado; houve uma forte concentração (92%) nas regiões Sul e Sudeste do Brasil; estas cobriram 10 diferentes áreas, a maioria sendo pesquisas físico-biológica (20,4%) e o restante, pesquisas clínicas (3,7%); das 6 dissertações que lidavam com a avaliação da eficiência/eficácia do tratamento homeopático, 3 empregaram métodos qualitativos, 1 empregou métodos quantitativos porém em apenas 1 fase do projeto, 1 foi um ensaio controlado randomizado padrão, evidenciando resultados positivos do tratamento homeopático do refluxo gastroesofágico não relacionado com hérnia do hiato, e 1 estudo foi uma meta-análise de qualidade metodológica de 132 ensaios clínicos, em doenças infecciosas. **Conclusões:** o número de projetos relacionados a eficácia/efetividade de tratamentos homeopáticos é insignificante e seus métodos são essencialmente qualitativos. Isto sugere que os pesquisadores devem acreditar que estudos com métodos quantitativos são impróprios ou insuficientes para estudar a eficácia/efetividade do tratamento homeopático ou para entender sua dimensão de integralidade.

Palavras-Chave: Homeopatia; Institucionalização; Brasil; dissertações acadêmicas.

Homeopatía en Brasil: investigación sobre su producción académica

RESUMEN

Según la OMS, existe una creciente demanda por las medicinas tradicionales (MT) que deben ser atendidas por las autoridades sanitarias gubernamentales. Aunque la homeopatía sea la modalidad de MT mejor institucionalizada en Brasil, todavía enfrenta a algunos obstáculos, entre los cuales los resultados controvertidos de las meta-análisis de ensayos clínicos homeopáticos. El objetivo de este trabajo fue trazar el estado de la investigación clínica en homeopatía en el ámbito universitario brasileño, como se refleja en tesis doctorales y de maestría. Se realizaron búsquedas en bases de datos especializadas en tesis doctorales y de maestría relacionados con la homeopatía producidas en Brasil entre 1985 y 2006. Las disertaciones fueron analizadas de acuerdo a la institución, el año, área de investigación, el tipo de producción, la distribución regional y sujeto de investigación. Las tesis que se ocupaban de la evaluación de la eficacia / efectividad del tratamiento homeopático fueron evaluadas en cuanto a sus objetivos, métodos y resultados. En los 20 años transcurridos entre 1985 y 2006, 161 tesis fueron defendidas. La mayoría de las producciones académicas datan de la década de 2000, especialmente en 2005-6, el 77% estaban relacionadas con títulos de maestría, había una concentración espectacular (92%) en las regiones Sur y Sudeste de Brasil. Las tesis cubren 10 áreas diferentes, siendo la mayoría respecto a investigaciones físico-biológico (20,4%) y solamente pocos trabajos clínicos (3,7%). De 6 disertaciones relacionadas con la evaluación de la eficacia / efectividad del tratamiento homeopático, 3 usaban métodos cualitativos, una usaba métodos cuantitativos solo en la etapa de proyecto, 1 fue un ensayo controlado aleatorio (ECA), que mostraba resultados positivos del tratamiento homeopático en el reflujo gastroesofágico no relacionado con hernia hiatal, y el sexto estudio fue un meta-análisis de la calidad metodológica de 132 ECA de la homeopatía en las enfermedades infecciosas. El número de proyectos relacionados con la eficacia / efectividad del tratamiento homeopático es insignificante y sus métodos son principalmente cualitativos. Esto sugiere que los investigadores creen que los estudios cuantitativos son inadecuadas o insuficientes para evaluar la eficacia / efectividad del tratamiento homeopático o para comprender su dimensión de integralidad.

Palabras clave: Homeopatía, Institucionalización, Brasil, disertaciones académicas.



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Correspondence author: Walcymar Estrêla, walcymarestrela@yahoo.com.br

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