Nurses' Social Representation of Environmental Sustainability in the Operating Room: a qualitative study

Augusta Gomes[1*], Sónia Novais[2], Maribel Carvalhais[2], António Ferreira[3], Odete Silva[4], Fernanda Príncipe[2]

[1*]ESSNorteCVP Master's Degree student/ ULS Médio Tejo – Unidade de Abrantes; [2]CINTESIS@ RISE; ESSNorteCVP; [3]CIIS; ESSNorteCVP; [4]ESSNorteCVP EcoEscola Council

Introduction

The United Nations (1987) defined sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations, to meet their own needs. This is supported by three fundamental pillars: economic, social and environmental (Beloeil & Albaladejo, 2021).

You can't discuss sustainability without referencing the 5 R's policy - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, Rethink and Research (Beloeil & Albaladejo, 2021). This policy aims to reduce waste production by changing consumption behavior and the way companies deal with waste.

According to Phoon (2022), the health sector is the largest contributor to the world's carbon footprint, after the food industry.

The World Health Organization (WHO), estimates that around 85% of hospital waste and 90% of the waste produced in operating theatres is non-hazardous, equivalent to household waste and potentially recyclable (Beloeil & Albaladejo, 2021).

Therefore, all healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, have a crucial role to play in the sustainable management of waste produced in the operating room, in order to reduce the carbon footprint while safeguarding the quality of care provided (Beloeil & Albaladejo, 2021).

Keywords

Operating room; sustainable development; carbon footprint; waste management

Objetive

The aim of our work is to identify the social representation of nurses working in perioperative settings in relation to the environmental sustainability of the operating room.

Methods

The methodology used was a qualitative approach, using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique, which was complemented by a snowball sampling technique through contacts and social networks (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram).

A free word association test ("TALP") was applied to nurses working in perioperative environments, and the data was processed using the IRAMUTEQ software.
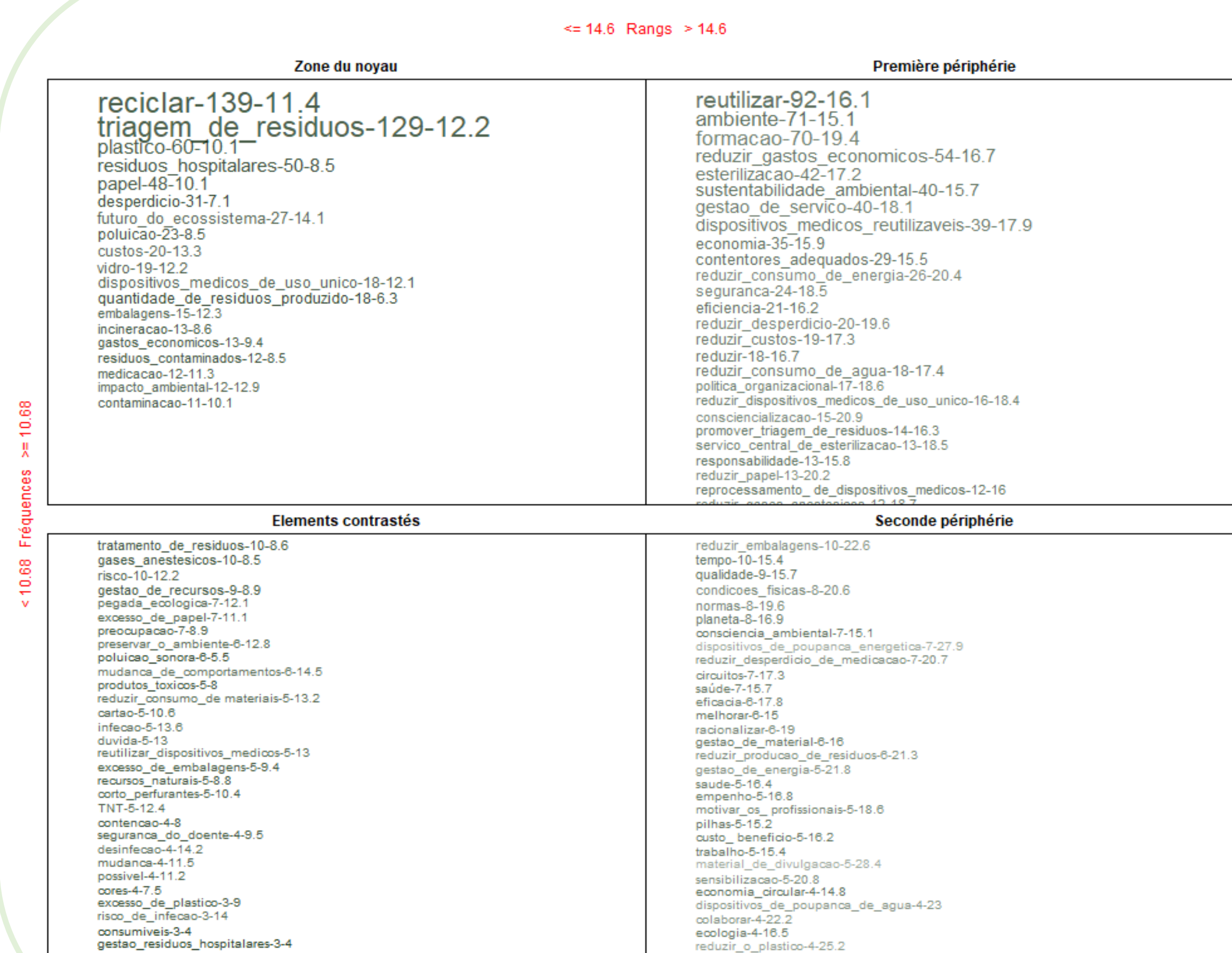
The research was approved by the Ethics Committee.

Results

A total of 94 nurses took part, 70 were female, and 44 were over 45 years old. The majority (48) are graduates and 70 have more than 10 years' service.

A prototypical analysis was carried out, where it was possible to identify the four dimensions of the social representation structure, according to the frequency and order of evocation of the words from the TALP.

The participants' social representation is anchored in the third R of the policy, Recycle, which is in the central core, as well as waste sorting. The first periphery of the social representation includes terms such as Reuse, environment, training and reducing economic costs, which reinforce the central core. The second periphery, which is less related to the central core, is made up of words such as reduce packaging, time, quality, physical conditions and reduce hospital waste, which could be the start of a future social representation or is in the process of being constructed. Regarding the contrasting elements, we can find the words waste treatment, anesthetic gases, risk, resource management and ecological footprint, which were evoked in the first place, but have a low frequency.

Conclusion

Considering the other R's of the sustainability policy, namely reduction, the results were lower, which shows that healthcare professionals are not yet aware of the strategies they can implement in this area.

Bibliography