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**THE METHODOLOGICAL
TRENDS IN THE
PRODUCTION OF
KNOWLEDGE IN
SOCIAL WORK: THE
STATE OF THE ART OF
DISSERTATIONS ON
SOCIAL POLICY**

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Abstract: Knowledge and research that are built on assumptions established historically by science, adopt theoretical and methodological procedures. Based on this understanding, this article aims to analyze the results of research on methodological trends that affect the production of knowledge of Social Work materialized in master's dissertations defended in the Graduate Program in Social Work at the "Universidade Federal da Paraíba" - PPGSS/UFPB in the area of Social Policy between the years 2010 to 2019. The research universe is limited to one hundred and nineteen (119) PPGSS/UFPB Master's Dissertations, linked to the area and temporality mentioned. In methodological terms, it is typified as a bibliographical and documental research in the perspective of the historical-dialectical materialist method with the use of the state of the art methodology. In operationalizing the state of the art, the following investigative themes were used: Type of Research, Methods Used, Approach.

Keywords: Social service; Scientific methodology; Knowledge Production.

INTRODUCTION

The history of humanity denotes that the production of knowledge derives from the creative act of human work. The evolution of man made it possible to add complexity to the formulation, organization and dissemination of knowledge. Therefore, the production of knowledge is characterized as a human process, being, therefore, a historical act of human creation and promotion of sociocultural and scientific knowledge.

The academy - represented by Universities, Centers and Research Institutes and others -, above all, from the Modern Era onwards, has been consolidated as the main producer *locus* of scientific knowledge, constituting the repository of this knowledge materialized

in Theses, Dissertations, Patents, Scientific Articles, Books, Maps, among other documents, so that you cannot run the risk of losing it over time.

Scientific knowledge is produced and constructed based on "[...] assumptions historically established by the scientific community, based on the analysis of phenomena in a systematic way and following the established methodology" (CÓRDULA, 2015, p. 665), by therefore, scientific research is recognized for this purpose through theoretical and methodological procedures adopted.

In Brazil, in addition to the public context of Universities and Institutes, the development and promotion of scientific and technological research take place in public agencies such as Capes, CNPq, FINEP¹, that establish the major areas of knowledge: life sciences, exact and natural sciences and humanities (human sciences, social sciences and applied social sciences).

In the Knowledge Tree of Applied Social Sciences, the Area of Knowledge in Social Work (6.10.00.00-0) is inserted, which is divided into two subareas: Fundamentals of Social Work (6.10.01.00-7): Theoretical-methodological foundations, Professional Training, Professional Practice, Professional Ethics, History of Social Work, Knowledge Production, Social Issues, Work; and Applied Social Service (6.10.02.00-3): Social Policies, Social Protection, Social Management, Public Management, Evaluation.

Inserting the production of Social Work knowledge into one of these subareas is a complex activity, bearing in mind the societal dynamics in which this knowledge is generated, especially in view of the current late-bourgeois societal transformations derived from the crisis of capitalism, the new expressions of the "social issue" and new

1 Coordination Foundation for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes), National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and Studies and Projects Financier (Finep).

strategies to face such expressions with the creation of new Policies or Social Programs, in addition to “[...] new communication systems, such as the internet and new technologies that resulted in the reconfiguration of life itself Social”. (OLIVEIRA; RAMOS; BARROS; NÓBREGA, 2013, pg. 61)

This article aims to analyze the results of research on methodological trends that affect the production of knowledge in Social Work, materialized in Master’s dissertations defended in the Graduate Program in Social Work at the “Universidade Federal da Paraíba” - PPGSS/UFPB in the area of Social Policy between the years 2010 to 2019. The research universe is limited to one hundred and nineteen (119) PPGSS/UFPB Master’s Dissertations, linked to the mentioned area and temporality.

The Graduate Program in Social Work at the “Universidade Federal da Paraíba”, created in 1978, underwent reforms in terms of its curricular structure, area of concentration, lines of research, disciplines with their respective syllabi, etc. The penultimate curriculum reform, carried out in 2014, validated the continuity of the two areas of concentration of the PPGSS: Social Policy and Theoretical-Practical Foundation of Social Work. In 2016, due to the curricular restructuring of the PPGSS, approved through Resolution N° 01/2016 of CONSEPE/UFPB, it established the unification of the two areas of concentration, becoming Social Work and Social Policy; and from the 5 (five) existing research lines, now have two: Social Service, Work and Social Policy; and State, Social Rights and Social Protection

Regarding the research method, the historical-dialectic materialist was adopted, hegemonic contribution of the production of knowledge of Social Work. It is typified as a bibliographical and documentary research through the use of state-of-the-art methodology. According to Romanowski

and Ens (2006), Ferreira (2002), Haddad (2000) and other authors, this type of methodology makes it possible to verify trends, recurrences and gaps present in different areas of knowledge, at different times and contexts in which they process. In operationalizing the state of the art, themes related to the scientific investigation of the analyzed dissertations were identified, such as: Type of Research, Methods Used, Methodological Approach.

From the universe of 119 dissertations defended at the PPGSS/UFPB between 2010 and 2019, data referring to the methodological procedures of 104 dissertations were fully analyzed, since the other 15 works were not available for download.

THE METHODOLOGICAL TRENDS IN SOCIAL SERVICE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION: A LOOK AT THE LIGHT OF MASTER’S DISSERTATIONS DEFENDED AT PPGSS/UFPB IN THE AREA OF SOCIAL POLICY

The process of knowledge production in Social Work gains density with the creation of the first *stricto sensu* Graduate Programs in the area, during the 1970s. This process advances in the 1980s, mainly with the creation of the first Doctorate courses. Furthermore, in that same period, the scientific recognition of Social Work by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the Coordination Foundation for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) as an area of knowledge of Applied Social Sciences stands out.

Social Work makes up area 32 of Capes, currently with 36 Postgraduate Programs, 35 in Social Work and 01 in Home Economics. The expansion of Graduate Programs in Social Work expresses the expansion of the critical professional and academic renewal process that has taken place in Brazilian Social Work

in recent decades. (CAPES, 2019)

The Graduate Program in Social Work at the “Universidade Federal da Paraíba” was implemented in 1978, with the creation of the Master’s Degree in Social Work by Resolution Number: 202/77 of the University Council-CONSUNI. It is the first Postgraduate Program with a Master’s degree in the area of Social Work in the Northeast and the fifth in the country, after PUC/SP and PUC/RIO (1972), UFRJ (1976) and PUC-Porto Alegre (1977). The creation of the MSS/UFPB meant the possibility of training the repressed demand for professionals in Social Work and other areas of knowledge in the North and Northeast regions of Brazil.

Almeida (2018, p. 2) elucidates that the MSS/UFPB, even though it was founded in the period of greatest repression of the Military Regime, was structured with a politically advanced proposal and in defense of democracy, seeking to move away from the conservative tendencies, present in the other Post Programs. “Attention is called to this finding because the other Masters programs created in the same decade had ideological approaches to conservative modernization, a mark that influenced Brazilian Social Work in the period between 1965-1975”. However, by moving away from conservatism, the MSS/UFPB in the 1980s demonstrates an eclectic tendency,

[...] by proceeding with the interlocution between structuralism with a strong influence of Foucault and Goffman; Althusser’s revisionist Marxism; institutionalists Lourau, Lapassade and Guilhon Albuquerque; biased approaches to the Marxian legacy; the dialogues with Paulo Freire and the gramscian readings. The content and bibliographical references of the disciplines and the first Dissertations contemplated this strong eclecticism of the time. (Id., Ibid., p. 2)

The creation of the MSS/UFPB was also

limited to the expansionist process of the UFPB, at the time managed by the rector Lynaldo Cavalcanti de Albuquerque (1976-1980), a name known by the national and international scientific community given its relevant role in science and technology policy in the Brazil. During his management, a policy was implemented to expand undergraduate and graduate courses at UFPB, with the admission of renowned researchers and professors to compose its faculty.

In the course of 44 years of existence, the PPGSS/UFPB underwent reforms, previously identified, which redefined the curricular structure, organization of the proposal, regulation, lines of research, curriculum of disciplines and workload. As for the areas of concentration Social Policy and Theoretical-Practical Basis of Social Work, they remained active until 2016, when a new process of curricular revision and restructuring of this Program took place.

This review process of the PPGSS Regulations, approved through Resolution N° 01/2016 of CONSEPE/UFPB, established the unification of the two areas of concentration, becoming Social Work and Social Policy and with two lines of research: Social Work, Work and Social Policy; and State, Social Rights and Social Protection. In accordance with this Resolution, the objectives of the PPGSS are:

- I – Train staff at the level of Academic Masters in the area of Social Work and Social Policy to work in higher education and in the development of interdisciplinary research;
- II – Foster research activities with didactic and scientific purposes, with a view to producing, deepening and disseminating knowledge;
- III – Promote academic and scientific exchange and cooperation with national and international teaching and research institutions. (UFPB/CONSEPE, PPGSS Resolution, 2016, p. 2)

This Program has the proposal to meet the demands of teacher training in higher education institutions in the North/Northeast and technical qualification for the social management of professionals, whose investigative direction points to the different social processes that configure the antagonistic relationship capital - work and the expressions of the “social issue” that affect the implementation of Social Policies and the professional performance of Social Work.

As previously mentioned, the investigative focus of this article are the master’s dissertations defended at the PPGSS/UFPB from 2010 to 2019, totaling 171 works. This research period was distributed: from 2010 to 2015, which involves the two areas of concentration - Theoretical-Practical Foundation of Social Work and Social Policy; and from 2016 to 2019 with the unification of these two areas of concentration as a result of the curricular review that took place in 2016 and with the creation of two lines of research: Social Work, Work and Social Policy; State, Social Rights and Social Protection. Thus, the collection and analysis of data from this research was carried out around the universe of 119 dissertations defended in the area of concentration Social Policy (2010-2015) and in the Line of Research State, Social Rights and Social Protection (2016-2019), linked to the area of Social Policy.

Areas of Binding	2010 a 2015		2016 a 2019		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
Fund. of Social Service	21	15%	31	28%	52	30%
Social Policy	78	85%	41	72%	119	70%
Total	99	100%	72	100%	171	100%

Table 1 - Dissertations defended at the PPGSS/UFPB between 2010 and 2019. João Pessoa/PB, 2022.

Source: PPGSS/Dissertation Catalog, 2020. Own elaboration.

In the universe of 171 defended dissertations, 119 (70%) are linked to the area of Social Policy in relation to the area of Fundamentals of Social Work with 52 (30%) defended dissertations. Previously elucidated, of this total of 119 dissertations on Social Policy, 104 were fully analyzed, since the remaining 15 works were not available for download. Thus, the data referring to the themes collected and analyzed in the dissertations are identified as: Type of Research, Method Used, Methodological Approach and Place of Conducting the research.

The production of scientific knowledge is not based on guesswork, magic or any other way. There is and requires a set of coherent theoretical-methodological procedures that must be followed so that scientific research is recognized within and beyond the academic community.

Research must have a scientific theoretical-methodological framework, which is the path taken to apprehend a given reality or object of study. According to Lima and Miotto (2007, p. 39), the process of apprehending and understanding social relations “[...] includes the theoretical concepts and the set of techniques defined by the researcher to achieve answers to the proposed object of study [...]”; and it is the methodology that highlights the theoretical conceptions and the paths taken to approach the reality that the researcher intends to know according to the research object.

Search Types	Quantity	%
Documentary	28	18%
Exploratory	27	17%
Bibliography	22	14%
Field	21	13%
Descriptive	15	09%
Qualitative	09	06%
empirical	07	04%
Applied Social	04	03%
Theoretical	02	01%
Explanatory	02	01%
Others	07	05%
It does not describe it	16	10%
Total	160	100%

Table 2 - Types of Research in Dissertations on Social Policy by the PPGSS/UFPB between 2010 and 2019. João Pessoa/PB, 2022.

Source: PPGSS/UFPB. Repositório – 2010 a 2019. Elaboração Própria.

These results indicate that dissertations identified with two or more types of research, therefore, within the universe of 104 works available for download, a total of 144 types of research are observed, while 16 dissertations do not present the type of research. According to table 2, the types of research with significant incidences are: Documental with 28 (18%), Exploratory 27 (17%), Bibliographic 22 (14%) and Field 21 (13%).

The prevalent incidence of documentary research with 18% (28) can be explained by the fact that these are studies that have as their object the management of social policies and their impacts. These surveys analyze laws, decrees, resolutions, letters, minutes, user follow-up documents, management reports, registration forms, social reports and opinions, etc.

Documentary research, according to Oliveira (2007, p. 69) “[...] is characterized by the search for information in documents that have not received any scientific treatment, such as reports, newspaper reports, magazines, letters, films, recordings, photographs, among

other publicity materials”.

It is noteworthy that the use of this type of research in the area of knowledge of Social Work is incidental because several types of documents are part of professional daily life, and the systematization of data, reading and interpretation of these provide subsidy for the professional and intellectual work of the category, in addition to being relevant data for apprehending reality. It also demonstrates the qualitative leap in research and the production of knowledge in the area and its researchers, since documentary research requires the researcher to have methodological, scientific and theoretical capacity to proceed with all the steps that this type of research demands.

The exploratory research is attested with an incidence of 17% (27) in the researched dissertations. According to Gil (2008), exploratory research aims to provide an overview of the object or fact in a more approximate way and “[...] is carried out especially when the chosen theme is little explored and it becomes difficult to formulate hypotheses about it. accurate and operational” (Id., p. 27). The incidence of this type of research can be explained by the *locus* where the research was carried out, as shown later, by concentrating the analysis with the municipalities as reference, that is, the *locus* where services, projects, programs and policies are offered directly the population.

As for the bibliographic research, it presents 14% (22) and the field research with 13% (21). Bibliographical research is carried out through already prepared scientific material, such as books, scientific articles, periodicals, encyclopedias, Oliveira (2007, p. 69) points out that “[...] the most important thing for those who opt for bibliographical research is make sure that the sources to be researched are already recognized in the scientific domain”.

Lima and Mito (2007) point out that bibliographical research has been widely used

in exploratory and descriptive studies, as it enables a wide range of information and the use of data that help define the conceptual framework of the object of study; in addition to being an important methodological procedure in the production of scientific knowledge, as it is capable of generating the formulation of hypotheses and interpretations that may serve as a starting point for further research.

With regard to field research, Gil (2008) characterizes by direct contact through questionnaires and interviews with the group, whose object of study must be understood, so that after this procedure, the conclusions of the collected data can be obtained through quantitative analysis. This type of research normally works with the sampling of the studied population.

The incidence of field research demonstrates that researchers in the area of knowledge of Social Work are going to the locus to get closer to social reality. In this case, to approach the multiple fractions of the social question.

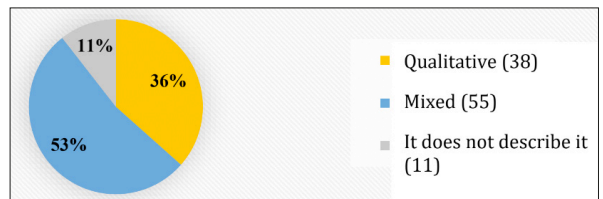
According to Lima (2018, p. 124),

For Marxism, as a methodological contribution to Social Work, Field Research is of fundamental importance, as it allows the subject to be in direct contact with the object. Likewise, bibliographical research is important, which, even if it does not go into the field, manages to extract from the existing theoretical construct the necessary subsidies to contribute to the analysis of the real, even allowing the crossing of ideas for the construction of the new.

Also noteworthy is the indication of research: Descriptive with 09%, Qualitative 06%, Empirical 04%, Social Applied 03%, Theoretical and Explanatory with 1%, and with 4% others that are: Case Study, Ethnographic, Ergology, Evaluative, Social Empirical, Analytical, Life Story, Propositive. The adoption of these types of research are often mistakenly indicated as synonyms or

chosen together with another type of research.

With regard to the methodological approach present in the surveyed dissertations, it was found that 53% (55) are called mixed approach research, that is, they are quantitative and qualitative research; 36% (38) are qualitative research and 11% (11) do not describe the approach in the dissertation.



Graphic 1- Approach to Dissertations in the Social Policy area of the PPGSS/UFPB between 2010 and 2019. João Pessoa/PB, 2022.

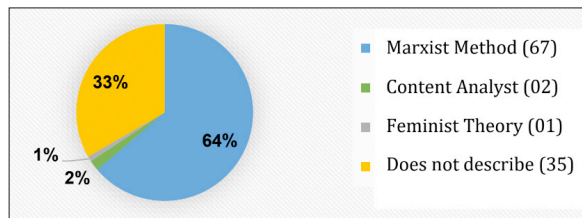
Source: PPGSS/UFPB, Repository – 2010 to 2019. Own elaboration.

The mixed approach with significant prevalence stands out. This type of research according to Creswell (2007, p. 213) “[...] focuses on collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study”. Prates elucidates that this type of approach in research that chooses the Marxist perspective as a method has the ability to express the real, because “The expression of the real is manifested and constituted by quantitative and qualitative elements [...]” (PRATES, 2012, p. 17). This author also points out that,

If, on the one hand, we are concerned with the transformation of the real and, it must be noted, this is a central issue in Marx’s proposal, the visibility of the movement, its integral apprehension and proposals to affect the real need to be viable, contemplate processes and results, arguments based on quantitative and qualitative data. (Id., Ibid., p. 117-118)

Regarding the method, as the first step of the methodological choices of research, it is

understood as the theoretical conception or theoretical narrative that the study will be undertaken, that is, the conception that “[...] will convey the conception of the world and of man responsible for how the researcher will apprehend the conditions of possible interaction between man and reality” (LIMA; MIOTO, 2007, p. 39).



Graph 2- Method of Dissertations in the Social Policy area of the PPGSS/UFPB between 2010 and 2019. João Pessoa/PB, 2022.

Source: PPGSS/UFPB, Repository – 2010 to 2019. Own elaboration.

According to the reading of this graph, it is observed that 67% of the dissertations use the Marxist method². The Marxist method comprises what is called the dialectical-historical-materialist method. It was detected that in the descriptions of the dissertations, the Marxist method is called in various ways: Historical-dialectical materialism, critical perspective, historical-dialectical, dialectical, dialectical critic, dialectical method, hermeneutic-dialectical, historical-dialectical, Marxist dialectical method.

Adherence to the Marxist method in Social Work took place in the renewal movement, when from the 1980s onwards the profession's commitment to the working class materialized in documents such as the 1986 Code of Ethics, the curricular review (1982) and other

² Lima and Mioto (2007, p. 39) when describing the chosen method that is the basis for the article “Methodological procedures in the construction of scientific knowledge: bibliographical research”, in *Katálysis* magazine in 2007, assert: “The dialectical method was chosen for leading the researcher to work always considering contradiction and conflict; the ‘becoming’; the historical movement; the totality and unity of opposites; in addition to apprehending, throughout the research course, the philosophical, material/concrete and political dimensions that involve its object of study”. The logic of this justification is often used in dissertations that use the Marxist method.

documents.

It is important to emphasize that the Marxist theoretical option is still configured as hegemonic within the professional category, in the academic field and in the political and organizational field of the profession, despite the growth of postmodern influence and the profession's conservative substrates.

It is clarified that the description itself of the Method in Marx does not mean that the research was based, in fact, on the theoretical-methodological approach described, the occurrence of syncretism in the dissertations with the use of authors of several currents of thought is registered without proper critical and interpretative analysis in conducting the research. The analysis of authors from different currents of thought is unquestionable for scientific research, even for the dialectical method that works considering contradictions, however, the use of these authors must pay attention to the theoretical-methodological rigor and coherent analysis, necessary to avoid fall into theoretical syncretism.

Content Analysis stands out with 2% (2) of incidence and Feminist Theory with 1% (1). Attention is drawn to the fact that 33% (35) of the dissertations do not describe the method adopted in the research. This is a statistically significant number and demonstrates that even with the advancement and theoretical maturation that Brazilian Social Work has been showing since 1990 in the field of research and knowledge production, there is still a significant incidence that reveals the fragile appropriation of the method and a marginalization of scientific methodology, also evidenced by the percentage of 11% (11) of dissertations that do not describe the research approach, and 16 (10%) dissertations

that do not present the type of research.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The production of knowledge of Brazilian Social Work today has a collection recognized by other areas of knowledge on Social Policies, conjuncture analyzes of the political, social context and the world of work of Brazilian society. In the material produced at the PPGSS/UFPB, one can observe the magnitude of this production in quantitative and qualitative terms.

In conclusive terms, it is attested that the data attest to the intellectual maturity of Social Work in the production of knowledge in the particularity of the PPGSS/UFPB, in particular in productions on Social Policies.

In addition, it appears that the Dissertations analyzed follow the national analytical trend of linking to the ABEPSS Professional Ethical-Political Project³ regarding adherence to the Modernity Project from the perspective of dialectical reason. In this sense, regarding the theoretical-methodological trends, the significant incidence of the hegemonic direction of Marxism is proven and the types of research most used in the particularity of the PPGSS/UFPB are Documental with 28 (18%), Exploratory 27 (17%), Bibliographic 22 (14%) and Field 21 (13%); and with regard to the methodological approach, the prevalence of the mixed procedure (quantitative and qualitative) is indicated, which demonstrates the theoretical-methodological maturity of the area of Social Work at UFPB.

However, weaknesses were also identified in the methodological processes of research carried out with a tendency to put the method and scientific methodology in the background, identified by the lack of description of the type of research, approach and method used in the analyzed dissertations.

³ Associação Brasileira de Ensino e Pesquisa em Serviço Social.

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