

PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

IMPACTO PSICOSSOCIAL CAUSADO PELA PANDEMIA DA COVID-19 NOS PROFISSIONAIS DE SAÚDE

IMPACTO PSICOSOCIAL CAUSADO POR LA PANDEMIA COVID-19 EN LOS PROFESIONALES DE LA SALUD

Vivian Ranyelle Soares de Almeida¹
Diana Cardeal do Nascimento²
Jenny Caroline Vieira Moura³
Juliana Macêdo dos Santos Silva⁴
Denise Rios de Oliveira⁵
Maria Yaná Guimarães Silva Freitas⁶
Carmen Liêta Ressurreição dos Santos⁷

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Objective: to describe the psychosocial impact caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus on health professionals. **Method:** this is a narrative review carried out on the Virtual Health Library platform using the following descriptors "Health Professionals" AND "COVID-19", from May to June 2020. **Results:** a chart was developed showing the characteristics of the six selected scientific articles, according to title, authors, year of publication, journal, type of study and psychosocial impact. **Conclusion:** in the midst of the pandemic, professionals may feel helpless, overloaded with activities and severely affected physically and psychologically, becoming more vulnerable. There is need to adopt protective measures and a psychosocial action plan to provide better working conditions, medical care, psychological and therapeutic care, promoting qualifications and the use of integrative and complementary health practices.

Descriptors: Coronavirus Infections. Pandemic. Health Personnel. Psychosocial Impact.

Objetivo: descrever o impacto psicossocial causado pela pandemia do novo coronavírus nos profissionais de saúde. *Método:* trata-se de revisão narrativa realizada na plataforma da Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde usando os seguintes descritores "Profissionais da saúde" AND "COVID-19", no período de maio a junho de 2020. *Resultados:* foi desenvolvido um quadro apresentando as características dos seis artigos científicos selecionados, conforme título, autores, ano de publicação, periódico, tipo de estudo e impacto psicossocial. *Conclusão:* em meio à pandemia os profissionais podem se sentir desamparados, sobrecarregados de atividades e gravemente afetados fisicamente e psicologicamente, tornando-se mais vulneráveis. Faz-se necessário a adoção de medidas protetivas e um plano de

¹ Nursing Student. Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. ranyalmeida98@hotmail.com. <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0482-8433>.

² Nursing Student. Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9781-0154>.

³ Nursing Student. Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4441-3953>.

⁴ Nursing Student. Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1965-0460>.

⁵ Nursing Student. Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0470-4577>.

⁶ Nurse and Obstetrician. PhD in Public Health. Adjunct Professor at the Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9091-1566>.

⁷ Nurse and Obstetrician. MSc in Collective Health. Auxiliary Professor at the Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana. Feira de Santana, Bahia, Brazil. <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8423-6675>.

ações psicossociais para propiciar melhores condições de trabalho, assistência médica, atendimento psicológico e terapêutico, promovendo qualificações e uso de práticas integrativas e complementares em saúde.

Descritores: Infecções por Coronavírus. Pandemia. Pessoal de Saúde. Impacto Psicossocial.

Objetivo: describir el impacto psicosocial causado por la pandemia del nuevo coronavirus en los profesionales de la salud. Método: se trata de una revisión narrativa realizada en la plataforma de la Biblioteca Virtual de Salud utilizando los siguientes descriptores "Profesionales de la Salud" AND "COVID-19", de mayo a junio de 2020. Resultados: se desarrolló un cuadro que muestra las características de los seis artículos científicos seleccionados, según el título, los autores, el año de publicación, la revista, el tipo de estudio y el impacto psicosocial. Conclusión: en medio de la pandemia, los profesionales pueden sentirse desolados, sobrecargados de actividades y gravemente afectados física y psicológicamente, volviéndose más vulnerables. Es necesario adoptar medidas de protección y un plan de acción psicosocial para proporcionar mejores condiciones de trabajo, atención médica, atención psicológica y terapéutica, promoción de cualificaciones y el uso de prácticas sanitarias integrativas y complementarias.

Descriptor: Infecciones por Coronavirus. Pandemia. Personal de Salud. Impacto Psicossocial.

Introduction

The pandemic caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2 (new coronavirus) has brought numerous challenges for the world population, causing a situation of alertness and concerns about the uncertainties of the near future, especially for health professionals who are on the front line against this disease.

The virus is responsible for COVID-19, a severe respiratory disease first identified in Wuhan city, China, which has spread throughout the world, generating a major public health problem due to its rapid spread⁽¹⁾. The number of cases becomes increasingly aggravating in Brazil, which is the 2nd country with the highest number of cases worldwide, with 1,841,809 confirmations and 71,540 deaths reported by July 11, 2020⁽²⁾.

Although it may present mild clinical manifestations, COVID-19 may develop severe symptoms, such as pneumonia and acute respiratory failure, which may lead to death⁽³⁾. Besides having a high transmissibility, the virus can generate a high lethality rate for specific groups, which have certain defining characteristics, such as age, the presence of comorbidities and immunodeficiency⁽⁴⁾. Seeking to reduce the number of cases and control the epidemic curve, it became necessary to adopt preventive measures against the disease and deliberate adaptive measures by management such as: rigor in hygienic habits, use of mask,

social distancing, contact restriction, quarantine, lockdown and social isolation⁽⁵⁾.

Based on the assumption of control, in addition to the specific conditions caused by the pathology, it is important to show that recent studies have indicated that this pandemic has caused numerous reflexes and significant consequences in the psychological conditions of the population worldwide, and it is natural that, in a situation of real and imminent threat, individuals feel fear⁽⁶⁾. However, the same authors report that, depending on the degree of intensity, this fear can generate anxiety and malaise, increasing the existing challenges for coping with the disease.

In this context, it is estimated that half of the population may present some psychological manifestation, depending on factors that influence daily life, such as the severity of the pandemic, the individual condition of vulnerability and identification with the suffering of other people, especially health professionals and the nursing team, who are on the front line against COVID-19, also becoming more vulnerable to infection⁽⁷⁾. In Brazil, up to June 16, 2020, there were 196 recorded deaths of nurses, representing 2.44% of the lethality rate for this category⁽⁸⁾.

Therefore, these professionals need to deal with direct coping, the disease environment, the

feeling of mourning before losses and fear of the risk of acquiring/transmitting the disease, besides having redoubled care with protective measures⁽⁷⁾. These situations can provide a state of stress caused by psychosocial impacts, which can be defined as the relationships between the environment and working conditions, added to the individual and family characteristics of workers, which may negatively interfere in the individual/environment relationship⁽⁹⁻¹¹⁾.

The factors described are considered risks, which may reveal personality traits, cause emotional disorders, behavioral problems, neural-hormonal changes and exacerbate greater risks in the onset of mental and physical diseases⁽¹⁰⁻¹²⁾. Thus, the term psychosocial has been used to refer to a variety of psychological and social factors related to health and disease in workers⁽¹¹⁾.

In this perspective, the chosen theme resulted from the need to address professional health in times of pandemic, in view of the numerous reports in the media, from specialists and the professionals themselves, about the difficult working conditions that reflect on psychosocial health. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of productions and studies addressing the theme, and there is a knowledge gap due to the fact that this disease is still being studied and its long-term impacts, measured, requiring more knowledge of the short-term impacts.

We believe that this study is relevant because it presents an overview of the scientific evidence recently produced on the theme, so its results can contribute to support decision-making, the search for improved working conditions, the valorization of the health team, especially nursing professionals, besides evidencing the need for further studies with different approaches.

Thus, the question is: What is the psychosocial impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on health professionals found in the literature? The aim of this study is to describe the psychosocial impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in health professionals.

Method

This is a narrative literature review, which seeks to demonstrate studies on a particular and little studied theme, encouraging greater reach and updating of knowledge; it is judged as one of the most beneficial models to start a study seeking affinities and divergences among the articles found⁽¹³⁻¹⁴⁾. Thus, the chosen study allows discussing the psychosocial impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on health professionals, through publications that can emphasize the theme previously selected from the database.

The search took place in May and June 2020, on the Virtual Health Library (VHL) platform. Initially, the descriptors "Psychosocial impact" AND "Health professionals" AND "COVID-19" were searched; subsequently, "Psychosocial impact" AND "COVID-19" was used, however, there was a scarcity of articles, in insufficient numbers for the continuity of the study. Therefore, the following descriptors "Health Professionals" AND "COVID-19" were chosen, and 430 scientific publications were initially evidenced.

Next, the inclusion criteria were defined: articles in Portuguese, to verify the national production on the theme, published in 2020 and that interfaced with the themes psychosocial impact caused by COVID-19, health professional and working conditions, leaving 30 articles. After reading the titles and abstracts, 24 scientific productions were excluded because they did not address the delimited theme, totaling six articles for full reading.

For systematization and analysis, the researchers created an instrument to gather the publications in a didactic way, with the following information: title, authorship, year of publication, journal, type of study and the psychosocial impact on health professionals caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The studies were read exhaustively, categorized and analyzed based on psychosocial impact.

Results

Based on the selected articles, a chart was developed with the characteristics of these articles,

according to title, authors, year of publication, journal, type of study and psychosocial impact (Chart 1).

Chart 1 – Synthesis of scientific articles selected from the VHL platform on the psychosocial impact on health professionals, according to title, authors, year of publication, journal, type of study and psychosocial impact

N.	Title	Authors, Year, Journal	Type of study	Psychosocial impact
1	Working conditions and the impact on the health of the nursing professionals in the context of Covid-19	Miranda FMA, Santana LL, Pizzolato AC, Saquis LMM (2020) Cogitare Enfermagem UFPR	Reflection	Health professionals present physical, emotional and mental fatigue caused by the overload of the work process, being in a position of greater vulnerability.
2	Mental health interventions for health professionals in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic	Saidel MGB, Lima MHM, Campos CJG, Loyola CMD, Esperidião E, Santos JR (2020) Revista Enfermagem UERJ	Reflection	Health professionals are more vulnerable to emotional issues, stress due to working conditions, fear of contracting/transmitting the virus and uncertainties about the disease, causing exhaustion of the team and physical/mental exhaustion.
3	Stress factors in nursing professionals in combating the COVID-19 pandemic: synthesis of evidence	Barbosa DJ, Gomes MP, Souza FBA, Gomes AMT (2020) Comunicação em Ciências da Saúde	Literature review	The health team presented high levels of anxiety, depression, fear and emotional stress evidenced by work overload, lack of communication and training.
4	Mental health of Brazilian nursing professionals in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: action by the Nursing Federal Council	Humerez DC, Ohl RIB, Silva MCN (2020) Cogitare Enfermagem UFPR	Reflection	Health professionals face uncertainties, anxieties and concerns, causing problems in their mental and physical health, presenting feelings such as anxiety, stress, ambivalence, depression and exhaustion, making them more vulnerable.
5	Prevention related to the occupational exposure of health professionals workers in the COVID-19 scenario	Gallasch CH, Cunha ML, Pereira LAS, Silva-Junior JS (2020) Revista Enfermagem UERJ	Reflection	Health professionals have a high risk of infection, which can result in emotional problems, such as stress, mainly due to work overload.
6	Health professionals' fight against COVID-19	Medeiros EAS (2020) Acta Paulista de Enfermagem	Editorial	Health professionals are more vulnerable, and may present physical and mental exhaustion, risk of infection, fear of transmitting the disease and anxiety.

Source: Created by the authors.

Discussion

COVID-19 stressed the urgency of reflecting on psychic changes in the population and health professionals, in view of the increasing number of cases and the search for psychological care, which demonstrates vulnerability and negative impact on the health team, with the possibility of illness and absence from work. Nevertheless, during the pandemic, the emphasis is commonly given to the discovery of epidemiological and clinical aspects of a new threatening disease, and a lower priority for the psychic problems that may arise from it⁽¹⁵⁾. The onset of the coronavirus pandemic has evidenced numerous weaknesses of the affected countries concerning the psychological aspects of the population and, especially, of health professionals in times of crisis⁽¹⁶⁾.

While thousands of people tend to stay at home aiming to reduce coronavirus transmission, health professionals are in an opposite situation, since they need to act in coping with the pandemic⁽¹⁷⁾. Health teams that work on the front line are more prone to emotional changes, because the lack of communication and lack of training are factors that predispose to risk, raising the possibility of developing COVID-19 and generating greater concerns that can lead to psychological diseases in these professionals^(15,18).

In addition, the extensive workload can cause physical/mental exhaustion and burnout in health professionals⁽¹⁹⁻²⁰⁾. A study conducted with 1,257 health professionals caring for patients infected with coronavirus showed that 50% had depressive symptoms, 45% anxiety, 34% sleep disorders and 72% distress⁽²¹⁾. In another study, health professionals reported: fear due to the high chance of contracting the virus and infecting family members; anxiety caused by the news published by the media; insufficient amount of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); stress caused by the high and increasing number of patients and deaths that occur in health units; depression, due to family leave, death of co-workers and feeling of loneliness; in addition to

emotional exhaustion and/or burnout due to the high workload⁽²²⁾.

The use of adequate forms of protection to the pandemic situation causes impacting changes in the acquisitions and basic needs of the daily life of the health professional, due to the scarcity and/or rationing of materials and PPE offered to them⁽¹⁵⁾. However, the indispensability of the PPE and the physical protection as governed by the protocols, both nationally and internationally, guarantee greater safety in the exercise of health care, thus avoiding a higher risk of contamination, but which can cause greater exhaustion⁽²³⁾.

Although health professionals have knowledge and preparation in the proper management of health practices and techniques, exposure to pathogens is inevitable, as they are on the front line of care with high workloads, which contributes to psychic suffering⁽¹⁶⁾. Associated with these factors, there is need to care for and protect their elderly parents and/or young children, due to social distancing strategies, adopted as control measures⁽¹⁸⁾. The anguish of proximity and distance, this dichotomy, generates anxiety and increases the possibility of psychological outcomes.

Thus, the psychological health of health professionals may be threatened and should not be overlooked. Thus, governments need to see workers, not only as service providers, but as human beings, to whom safety and physical/mental integrity must be guaranteed^(17,20).

Keeping the team protected during the pandemic means they will be better qualified to perform their duties. In addition to safety, managers need to promote alternation between sectors; implementation of flexible schedules for workers; reduced workload, to avoid greater exposure among professionals, contamination and absence due to the disease; release of financial incentive and/or increased wages that provide survival and conditions of dignified assistance during the illness; integrated team formation that strengthens the whole group in moments of emotional instability, and at the same time, to ensure that professionals know

where and how to access psychosocial support services⁽²⁴⁾.

Other important behaviors to reduce the level of stress are: sensitive listening about daily anxieties that can be solved with individualized teleservice; self-knowledge for the detection of tasks that may cause satisfaction and release of endorphins, known as the pleasure hormone, which has analgesic, euphoric and additive effects, consequently causing well-being⁽²⁵⁾; stimulus to the ability to analyze problems with positive perception, avoiding denialism and pessimism; and use of Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (PICS), which seek natural forms of disease prevention, health promotion and recovery through effective and safe technologies, such as Reiki, suction cup, phytotherapy, music therapy, use of natural medicines⁽²⁶⁾.

Conclusion

The new coronavirus has brought numerous changes to health professionals, and may have a negative impact on the mental health of these workers. In the midst of the pandemic, professionals tend to feel helpless, overloaded with activities and severely affected psychologically. These aspects are intensified due to drastic changes in work routine, lack of support and means of coping, unfavorable working conditions with high rate of risk exposure, which provide a high situation of vulnerability.

Thus, there is need to adopt protective measures such as: medical care, reduced workload, better remuneration, handoffs and transitions of health professionals in critical and semi-critical sectors, qualifications on current topics and behaviors, permanent education to address doubts and provide greater knowledge, adequate hygiene in work environments, causing greater safety and, consequently, individual and collective protection.

Moreover, a psychosocial action plan is essential, such as psychological and therapeutic care, sensitive listening about the work process and daily anxieties, fostering self-esteem,

self-knowledge for detecting tasks that can cause well-being and the use of integrative and complementary practices.

Collaborations:

1 – conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Vivian Ranyelle Soares de Almeida, Diana Cardeal do Nascimento, Jenny Caroline Vieira Moura, Juliana Macêdo dos Santos Silva, Denise Rios de Oliveira, Maria Yaná Guimarães Silva Freitas and Carmen Liêta Ressurreição dos Santos;

2 – writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Vivian Ranyelle Soares de Almeida, Diana Cardeal do Nascimento, Jenny Caroline Vieira Moura, Juliana Macêdo dos Santos Silva, Denise Rios de Oliveira, Maria Yaná Guimarães Silva Freitas and Carmen Liêta Ressurreição dos Santos;

3 – final approval of the version to be published: Vivian Ranyelle Soares de Almeida, Diana Cardeal do Nascimento, Jenny Caroline Vieira Moura, Juliana Macêdo dos Santos Silva, Denise Rios de Oliveira, Maria Yaná Guimarães Silva Freitas and Carmen Liêta Ressurreição dos Santos.

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