

Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Nurses

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Keywords— *Mental health, Nurses, COVID-19 pandemic.*

Abstract— *The healthMental health is a state of psychological, emotional and social well-being that enables people to cope with life's challenges, realize their potential and contribute to society. The new coronavirus pandemic is triggering mental illness in health professionals, especially those in the nursing team. Faced with the pandemic scenario, nursing professionals can acquire harmful results for mental health, triggering reflexes of their hard work routines. The problematization has to do with the health sector presenting challenging situations for health professionals, as workers often have to deal with different adversities in their daily professional lives. Among the difficulties experienced were those related to the nurses' mental health. Given the above, the problem of this research is: How does mental health affect the health of nurses in times of a pandemic? This article aims to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of nursing teams and what are the strategies to face this challenge. The methodology used in this article is a research with a quantitative approach, with a descriptive character through a bibliographic review.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a state of psychological, emotional and social well-being that enables people to cope with life's challenges, realize their potential and contribute to society. Mental health is critical to quality of life, productivity and overall well-being.

However, many people around the world suffer from mental health issues, including anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, autism spectrum disorders, personality disorders and psychotic disorders. These problems can be caused by a variety of factors, including genetics, trauma, stress, substance abuse and social, economic and cultural problems. A pandemic of the new

coronavirus is triggering mental illness in health professionals, especially those of the nursing team. In this scenario, stress, anxiety, depression and Burnout Syndrome stand out, caused by insecurity and fear of contamination and spread to the work team, colleagues and family (DAL'BOSCO et al., 2020). Faced with the pandemic scenario, nursing professionals can acquire harmful results for mental health, triggering reflexes of their hard work routines. Health professionals, especially nurses, are already affected, even in other countries whose pandemic has already passed through the peak of contamination and maintained stability (PEREIRA et al., 2020, p.21). Per Therefore, this article is justified in showing that nursing lives, today, in ambivalence of right or wrong in its

assistance with the emergence of the new coronavirus. This discussion emphasizes the importance of empowering nursing not as war heroes as seen in social media, but as professionals who undergo long hours and differentiated working conditions, due to low contractual levels and regional diversity, which expose these professionals to vulnerability to the risk of physical and mental illness, leading to removal from their employment relationships (BARBOSA et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of nurses around the world. These professionals have been at the forefront of fighting the disease, dealing with an intense workload, long working hours, lack of adequate resources and exposure to the risk of infection. These factors combined have led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues among nurses.

The problematization has to do with the health sector presenting challenging situations for health professionals, as workers often have to deal with different adversities in their daily professional lives. Among the difficulties experienced were those related to the nurses' mental health. Given the above, the problem of the present research is: How does mental health affect the health of nurses in times of the pandemic?

This article aims to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on

mental health of nursing teams and what are the coping strategies to face this challenge. The methodology used in this article is a research with a quantitative approach, with a descriptive character through a bibliographic review.

II. THEORETICAL REFERENCE

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), around 700 million people worldwide suffer from mental health problems.

In this sense, occupations that require closer contact with people obtain a strong emotional and affective charge, as is usual in Maintenance work. This professional class, from their academic training, when facing situations that require the maintenance of important decision-making, generates uncertainties and anxieties that can trigger or aggravate stress and the skills are required as professionals after graduation cognitive decline, preparation and proactive attitude lead to overload, can turn into depression (MOREIRA; FUREGATO, 2013, p.23).

In Brazil, based on society's need for better living and working conditions in the area of health, there was a movement that culminated in the Constituent Assembly.

The country begins to rebuild itself as a rule of law based on the logic of the welfare state, whose function is to intervene and regulate based on political and economic institutions beneficial to the community. All these movements contributed to the emergence of the Brazilian Unified Health System (NOGUEIRA, 2001, p.45).

For Desviat (1999) in the area of Mental Health, the Psychiatric Reform movement supported and further strengthened the issues of changing paradigms in health care.

It was from the denunciations “[...] of living conditions in asylums and the lack of adequate responses to mental health care [...]” that the conditions of Brazilian mental health at that historical moment, became an issue of politics (DESVIAT, 1999, p.142).

In Brazil, the document that legalizes the right to mental health is Law n°. 10,216, of April 6, 2001, the result of a long process of discussion between groups across the country. Initially, the psychiatric reform converged with the Brazilian health movement, characterized by the entry of psi specialists into the space of state health policies and strategies with the aim of integrating health care (AMARANTE, 2013).

According to the WHO, mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual is able to use his or her own abilities, recover from routine stress, be productive and contribute to the community”.

Being productive, in this perspective, concerns not only being functional at work or occupation, but also being able to play the various roles one has in life: that of father/mother, spouse, child, boyfriend/girlfriend (a), friend, among others (RESENDE JÚNIOR, 2021).

However, many people around the world suffer from mental health issues, including anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, autism spectrum disorders, personality disorders and psychotic disorders. These problems can be caused by a variety of factors, including genetics, trauma, stress, substance abuse, and social, psychological, and cultural issues.

A pandemic like this directly affects those on the front line and, like COVID-19, represents a high risk of death, generates greater psychological pressure on professionals who work in the pandemic, such as nurses who deal directly with the patient, (SANTOS et al., 2021).

Nursing is the largest occupational category in the region and deals with the patient throughout the workday, making them more susceptible to the effects of mental health during the pandemic. Protection is fundamental in this competition due to the Covid-19 pandemic we are in the health departments and even in our own homes,

it is necessary to take measures based on standard infection control protocols contact, step, use of medical equipment personal protection, n95 mask, aprons, glasses, face shields, gloves, the mental health of employees must also be protected due to the stress imposed on them (TEIXEIRA et al., 2020, p.3465).

Health professionals can become more vulnerable to virus infection than other people, even with the use of personal protective equipment, this is due to the higher viral load to which they are exposed during their professional practice, (SILVA et al., 2021)

According to Almeida et al., (2009), health professionals are mainly exposed to biological risks derived from the work environment.

Likewise, when they use personal protective equipment, they enter into risk situations, as the hospital is an environment that brings together patients with various infectious and contagious diseases and takes into account some procedures that present a risk of accidents and illnesses for the personnel in the area (ALMEIDA et al., 2009, p.595).

Health workers faced the pandemic in a new routine, uncertainty in the work process and health system problems such as lack of support infrastructure, shortage of productive inputs, lack of personnel, lack of personal protective equipment, long working hours, overload, low wages and lack of education that contribute to employee illness.

Even with the use of personal protective equipment, there is vulnerability to a risk situation, for this professional, when carrying out any hospital activity, he is exposed mainly to biological risk when providing assistance to patients, therefore, nursing is one of the main categories of subjects exposed by biological material (ALMEIDA; BENATTI, 2007, p.45).

According to Barbosa et al. (2020) Another factor that had a great psychological impact during the pandemic was that nurses had to distance themselves from the people they loved most, such as family and friends, due to uncertainties and lack of information about how people could catch the virus.

Health professionals are working on the front lines to provide direct assistance, spending most of their time alongside patients with Covid-19. In this sense, it was not possible for these professionals to have contact with people from their family ties, the fear was of infecting family members with an unknown disease, with little information on how to transmit and treat it. And to make matters worse, it is the alarmist way in which the media deals with the form of transmission that has generated fear and suffering, leading professionals to emotional exhaustion (BARBOSA et al.,

2020, p.31)

According to Oliveira (2020), mental stress was influenced by the lack of specialists, which directly affected the dimension of nursing work, since the long working hours and the lack of knowledge and training to care for COVID patients were taken into account. 19.

The new coronavirus pandemic triggering mental illness in health professionals, especially in the nursing team. In this scenario, stress, anxiety, depression and Burnout Syndrome stand out, caused by insecurity and fear of contamination and its spread to the work team, colleagues and family members.

Faced with the current pandemic scenario, nursing professionals can acquire harmful results for mental health, reflections of the triggering factors of their hard work routines. Health professionals, especially nurses, are already affected, even in other countries whose pandemic has already passed through the peak of contamination and maintained stability (DAL'BOSCO et. al., 2020; PEREIRA et al., 2020, p. 21).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the mental health of nurses. Nurses are working under extremely stressful conditions and facing a large number of patients and/or deceased. They are also facing the risk of getting the virus and passing it on to their loved ones.

These factors have led to an increase in cases of stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia and emotional anxiety among nurses. In addition, nurses are being exposed to high levels of work-related trauma, which can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms.

Prevention is a way to avoid occupational health problems that trigger exposure, but workers must be aware of the risks they are exposed to (SOUZA et al., 2017).

The intervention implies an objective and concrete action in a given reality, in this case to respond to the emotional suffering of nursing professionals in the COVID-19 pandemic. Faced with the emergency situation, the methodology defined for the intervention respected the qualification of the selected team: nurses specialists, professors or doctors, who had affinity with the subject and technical condition to organize and intervene in the execution of actions (COFEN, 2017).

Regarding preventive measures to avoid occupational diseases during the pandemic, the measures were as follows:

regular psychological support to deal with mental distress, psychiatric follow-up, opportunity to talk with friends or family, conference and dialogue with a professional psychiatric nurse strategies adopted to deal with anxiety,

such as breathing and relaxation techniques all these measures helped to reduce the consequences of the pandemic for mental health professionals (AVILA et al.; 2021, p.89).

Mental health is an interdisciplinary field that encompasses a variety of treatment approaches, including cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, interpersonal therapy, and psychodynamic psychotherapy, as well as medication and alternative treatments such as acupuncture and meditation. Successful treatment of mental health issues requires an integrated, holistic approach that involves teamwork of mental health professionals, patients and their families.

To prevent mental illness among nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to adopt measures that promote mental health and well-being. Some of the measures that can be accepted include:

- Providing adequate PPE and training in its correct use: Providing adequate PPE to protect against the virus and training in its correct use can help reduce nurses' anxiety and stress.
- Provides emotional and psychological support: It is important to provide nurses with access to counseling and therapy, as well as mental health support programs in the workplace. This can include individual or group counseling sessions, as well as stress management interventions such as training exercises and meditation.

It is important that steps are taken to prevent and treat mental health problems among nurses, including providing psychological support and emotional support, access to therapy and counseling, and the adoption of more flexible working hours. In addition, it is critical that effective PPE and protective measures are provided to reduce the risk of infection.

It is important to provide nurses with resources and support to help them deal with these challenges. This can include access to therapy and counseling, as well as mental health support programs in the workplace. It is also important to provide effective PPE and protective measures to reduce the risk of infection.

Nurses also need time to rest and recover. It is critical to ensure that nurses have flexible working hours and enough time to recover physically and emotionally after periods of work. In addition, providing opportunities for leisure and relaxation activities can be useful to reduce stress and improve the mental health of nurses during the pandemic.

III. METHODOLOGY

This is a research with a quantitative approach,

with a descriptive character through a bibliographic review, carried out in the following steps: Identification of the theme and guiding research questions; establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; literature search; data collect; selection of articles, critical analysis of articles; discussion of results and conclusion.

Obibliographic survey was carried out from August to October 2022, with the inclusion criteria being original studies, fully indexed in the last 5 years, available online, in Portuguese. Gray literature, editorials, letters to the reader, articles that did not address the subject of the study and incomplete indexed articles were excluded.

A search of the articles occurred in the databases of the Virtual Health Library (BVS), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and Google Scholar. The descriptors obtained by the DECS (Health Sciences Descriptors) vocabulary tool were used: Mental health, nursing, COVID-19 pandemic. After dynamic reading and analysis criticizes the articles went through a selection process. From data collection, 39 articles were selected, of which 8 were found in Google Scholar, 10 in LILACS, 10 in SciELO and 11 VHL. Afterwards, the following filters were applied: year of publication, complete texts that best met the theme of the work, available online, published in the national literature.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study revealed through interviews with 10 nursing professionals in the municipality of Nanuque in the state of Minas Gerais that there were several difficulties that nurses face in their workplaces, taking care of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example : increased workload due to having to replace professional training, difficulties with dressing/undressing breaks and long shifts.

The characterization of the study participants showed a predominance of female nurses interviewed 70% are female and 30% male, 75% are married and 25% are single, 85% have children. In general, women are more affected in terms of their mental health, due to the great demand they have for being professionals and mothers.

According to epidemiological data from the Ministry of Health (MS), there are cases of COVID-19 in Brazil that have grown rapidly. Until January 2020, only 2,798 cases were registered in June.

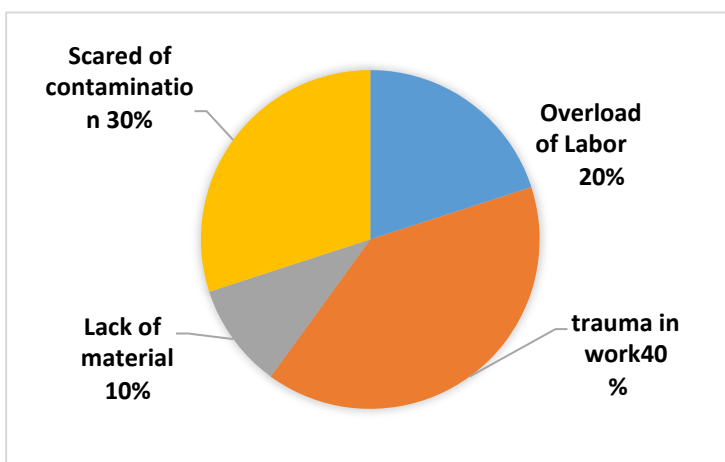
In 2020, the number of cases increased to 850.51 cases and 1,828 deaths were recorded. End of 2020, Brazil There were 7,65,806 cases of COVID-19 and more than 190,000 deaths. February 2021 registered 10,517,232 cases, of which 25,221

died, and in July 2021 there were already a total of more than 20 million and more than 500,000 deaths from COVID-19 (BRASIL, 2021, p.23).

The increase in cases of this virus overwhelmed the Brazilian health system, hospitals were at 100% capacity and health professionals worked for about 8 hours straight to cure the disease and many difficulties were encountered (LAI et al., 2020).

The factors that triggered nurses' mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic are complex and multifaceted. It is important to address these factors to help prevent and treat mental health problems among nurses and what we will see in graph 1.

Graphic 1-Situations that cause stress in nurses.

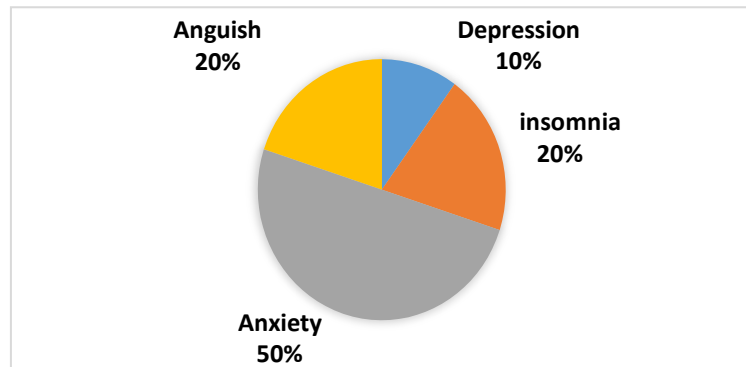


Source: Elaborated by the author.

According to the graph, the situation that caused the most stress to nurses with 40% trauma at work due to the pandemic, with 30% fear of contamination, 20% work overload, 10% due to lack of material. COFEN manifests itself in the lack of protective equipment (PPE) and highlights that the worker's health is at risk and the lack of specialists due to absenteeism due to contamination can contribute to the collapse of the unified health system (COFEN, 2020).

According to Dantas (2021), the mental health of professionals is shaken during the pandemic, due to despair, hopelessness, exacerbated fear of repeating the phenomena, fear of dying and of family members, fear of being infected by other people, given the isolation measures which can facilitate the appearance of post-traumatic stress, depressive and anxious symptoms and suicidal behavior, as we will see in Graph 2.

Graph 2-Aspects that favor the appearance of mental suffering in nurses working on the front line.



Source: Elaborated by the author.

As we saw in Graph 2, exposure to the Covid-19 virus had a direct influence on the mental health of health professionals. Many nurses who took care of patients with Covid-19 exhaustively, showed that a large number of professionals reported symptoms related to depression (10%), anxiety (50%), insomnia (20%) and anguish (20%), with the more expressive symptoms were in female nurses, who were directly involved in the diagnosis and care of patients with COVID-19.

The World Health Organization (WHO) points out that caregivers stressed by this situation have high levels of anxiety, increased risk of diseases, which, in addition to anxiety, depression and related stress, leads to serious mental health problems and increases cases of burnout syndrome (WHO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also put a huge emotional strain on nurses, who are facing an unprecedented amount of patient deaths and suffering. This can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression and emotional burnout.

Additionally, nurses are working in a stressful and unpredictable environment where rules and protocols can change quickly. This can lead to feelings of distress and insecurity, which can further increase mental anguish.

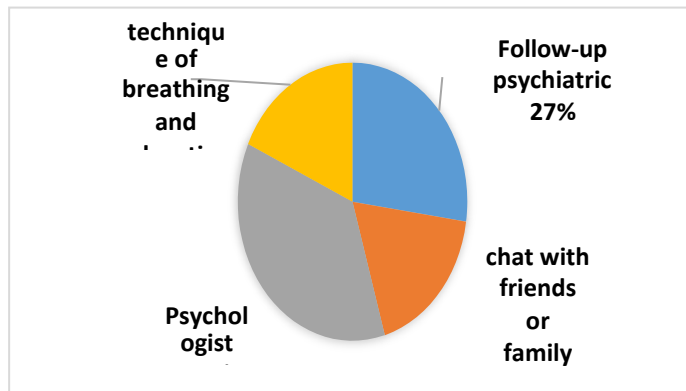
The results of this study showed that nurses presented anxiety during a pandemic characterized by a feeling of loss of control and fear of their lives due to spending most of their time with their

patients, which puts them at the forefront of the fight against the disease (BARBOSA et al., 2020).

In this sense, as a way of preventing psychic problems, Dal' Bosco et al. (2020), suggested that the professional seek information about the risk and protection factors in relation to the pandemic, and what it would entail in their routines, thus seeking coping strategies, such as

specialized psychological support, consultation with the psychiatric doctor and carrying out complementary integrative practices such as Yoga and Reiki. Regardless of the pandemic, it is important that institutions, especially area managers who are closest to nurses, be able to adopt methods to detect changes in the behavior of professionals and signs of mental exhaustion, as shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3-Measures adopted to support the mental health of nurses.



Source: Elaborated by the author.

Graph 3 described the measures adopted by nursing professionals to deal better with mental health as follows: 37% used regular psychological support to know how to deal with mental suffering, 27% of nursing professionals received psychiatric follow-up, another 18% created the habit talking to friends or family, lecture and the other nurses 18% adopted strategies for coping with anxiety, such as breathing and relaxation techniques. All these measures helped to reduce the impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of professionals. Second souza et al., (2021), emphasized the importance of nurses not isolating themselves, they should talk to friends and colleagues, share experiences, even virtually, they should consider the difficulties experienced and do calm activities such as breathing exercises and meditation.

In the same way, Pereira et al. (2020), emphasized the need to promote well-being maintenance activities that contemplate the individual, also highlighting the importance of increasing the professional contacts of the psychologist, social workers to create a collaborative relationship to reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

It is essential that measures to support the mental health of nurses are implemented. This includes access to counseling and psychotherapy services, stress management programs, adequate workplace resources, regular breaks, peer support, and recognition of your hard work and benefits during the pandemic. Self-care is also crucial, with the promotion of activities that help reduce stress, such as

physical exercise, adequate rest and time for relaxation and leisure.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In view of the data analysis, it was evident that during the pandemic, the work carried out by nursing professionals was intensified due to the emergence of a disease, which comes from a family of viruses, unknown to most people, but known to scientists. However, the way in which it manifested itself was different, causing an unknown reaction in the human body, with symptoms that were confused with other diseases. What left people most scared was the way of contagion with the virus, since in different parts of the world the contamination was very fast, leading to a collapse of the health system in several countries.

A mental exhaustion is one of the main concerns of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the increased demand for healthcare, nurses are working long hours and are often overworked. This can lead to mental, emotional and physical fatigue, which can affect your ability to provide quality patient care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also put a huge emotional strain on nurses, who are facing an unprecedented amount of patient deaths and suffering. This can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression and emotional burnout.

Furthermore, nurses are working in a stressful and unpredictable environment where rules and protocols can change quickly. This can lead to feelings of distress and insecurity, which can further increase mental anguish.

To deal with these issues, it is important that nurses receive emotional and psychological support, as well as time to rest and recover. This can include access to counseling and therapy, workplace mental health support programs, and more flexible working hours.

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