

The mental health of nursing professionals against the COVID-19 pandemic: Literature review

RESUMO | Objetivo: analisar a saúde mental dos profissionais de enfermagem frente à pandemia do COVID-19. Método: trata-se de uma revisão integrativa, realizada em 2021, através da questão norteadora: “Qual o impacto da pandemia da Covid-19 na saúde mental dos profissionais de enfermagem?”. Para a coleta de dados, foram utilizadas bases de dados como LILACS, MEDLINE, SCIELO e BDNF, com auxílio dos Descritores em Ciências da Saúde (DeCS), obedecendo alguns critérios de inclusão para a seleção dos estudos, sendo as buscas realizadas entre os meses de maio a agosto de 2021, com intervalo de revisão de 2019 a 2021. Resultado: elaborou-se uma matriz de síntese dos artigos selecionados, para análise dos dados. Conclusão: destaca-se que esses profissionais estão mais susceptíveis a desenvolverem transtornos mentais, visto que a todo tempo lidam com situações causadoras de um alto nível de estresse e ansiedade, além da necessidade de tomada de decisão de maneira rápida.

Descritores: Profissionais da saúde; Pandemia; Saúde mental.

ABSTRACT | Objective: to analyze the mental health of nursing professionals in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Method: this is an integrative review, carried out in 2021, through the guiding question: “What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of nursing professionals?”. For data collection, databases such as LILACS, MEDLINE, SCIELO and BDNF were used, with the help of the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS), following some inclusion criteria for the selection of studies, and the searches were carried out between the months from May to August 2021, with a review interval from 2019 to 2021. Result: a synthesis matrix of selected articles was prepared for data analysis. Conclusion: it is noteworthy that these professionals are more susceptible to developing mental disorders, as they constantly deal with situations that cause a high level of stress and anxiety, in addition to the need for quick decision-making.

Keywords: Health professionals; Pandemic; Mental health.

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Palabras claves: Profissionais da saúde; pandemia; Salud mental.

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, in the city of Wuhan, China, several cases of hospitalizations for respiratory diseases were identified, thus, it was identified that the causative agent of the disease called COVID-19, was the new coronavirus. It is a virus that is part of a large family of common viruses that infect humans, the main one being Sars-Cov-2. Due to its high pathogenicity and transmission capacity, in March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic status.¹

Faced with this international urgency, collective efforts and State action were necessary to protect the life and health of individuals, so the effects of the pandemic also affected health professionals, mainly the nursing team, since they have direct contact with the infected patient.²

According to Agência Brasil, since the beginning of the pandemic, until August 2020, in the country 226 health professionals died and another 257 thousand were infected by COVID-19, of the contingent, the most affected categories so far were technicians, nursing assistants, doctors and nurses.³ In this way, it is clear that millions of health professionals working on the front line, make a daily effort to contain the spread of the disease and to care for infected patients, while putting their own health at risk.⁴

Due to direct exposure to infected patients, it is inevitable that professionals on the front line are more vulnerable physically and emotionally, as there is a potential risk of infection, in addition to the stress of work overload, uncertainties about the disease and treatment, fear of contracting and transmitting the virus and the difficulty of dealing with losses of their patients, in addition to inadequate working conditions.^{5,6}

All this calamity exposes professionals to chronic stress, exhaustion and exhaustion in the face of intense workload, this trend tends to worsen in a context of labor shortages in the event that health professionals have to isolate themselves due to the fact of contracting COVID-19. In addition,

some studies draw attention to the feeling of powerlessness in the face of the gravity and complexity of the cases, in addition to the lack of beds or life support equipment.⁵

It is worth noting that even before the pandemic, situations with a high level of stress were already part of the daily lives of nursing professionals, but the emergence of the new coronavirus contributed to the worsening of the situation in health centers, raising the situation to alarming levels, thus, it is understood that health professionals on the front lines of combating the COVID-19 pandemic also need care.⁷

In view of the above, it is identified that the pandemic has an emergency character, however, in order to face it, it is necessary to supply and structure the demands of care teams to better provide services. In addition, there is a need to carry out an integrative literature review in order to raise scientific productions about the mental health of nursing professionals, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research aims to analyze how the mental health of nursing professionals is facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This is an integrative review of the scientific literature carried out in 2021, based on the following guiding question: "What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of nursing professionals?". Thus, the present study was prepared following the six steps recommended for the elaboration of an integrative review: identification of the theme and selection of the research question; establishment of eligibility criteria; identification of studies in scientific bases; evaluation of selected studies and critical analysis; categorization of studies; evaluation and interpretation of results and presentation of data in the framework of the integrative review.⁸

Data collection took place from May to August 2021 through an electronic search in the following databases: Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis

and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) and Nursing Database (BDENF), searching with Boolean "AND" and descriptors and crossings: "nursing professionals (profissionais de enfermagem)" AND "coronavirus infections (infecções por coronavírus)" AND "mental health (saúde mental)".

The studies included in this integrative review complied with the following inclusion criteria: publication having as its theme the mental health of nursing professionals in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, complete publications with available abstracts, published in Portuguese, between the years 2019 to 2021. Editorials, letters to the editor, as well as studies that did not address the theme for the purpose of the review were excluded.

The searches were carried out by two researchers, occurring independently. 30 articles were found. The selection process initially took place through the reading of titles and abstracts, by two evaluators, individually. Articles approved by both were included in the study, and those with disagreement were submitted to the third evaluator. After applying the filters and inclusion and exclusion criteria, 11 articles were selected for the preparation of this study and 19 articles were excluded. Soon after, a flowchart was prepared in order to detail the methodology used by the authors, shown in Figure 1.

DISCUSSION

Based on the articles analyzed, it is evident that with the establishment of the pandemic by COVID-19, which generated a great impact on public health, changes in structures and investments in health systems around the world were necessary.⁹ These modifications were aimed at controlling the contagion of the infectious disease and reducing the mortality rate of affected patients, especially hospitalized patients. Thus, there was a reformulation of care parameters, emphasizing emergency actions.¹⁰

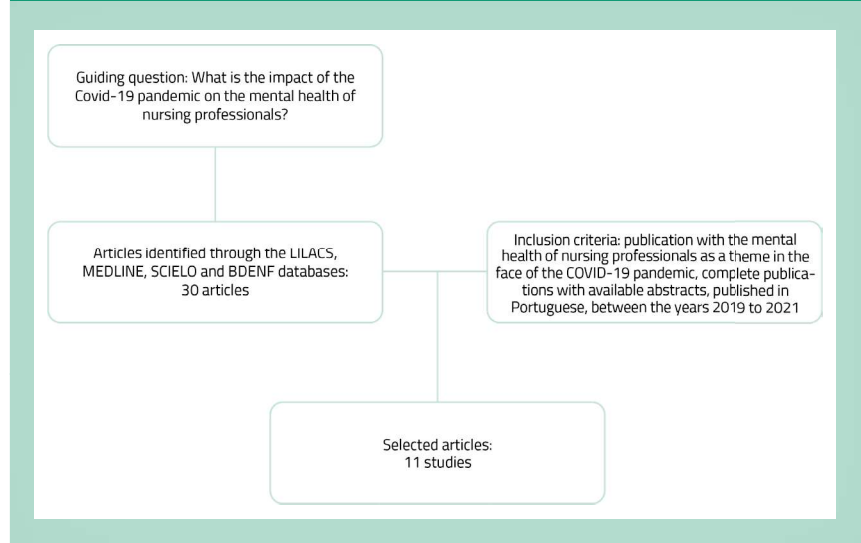
In addition, countries in general were

unprepared to deal with a pandemic scenario, which gave rise to the visibility of a series of weaknesses associated with health systems, highlighting the mental health of nursing professionals. These workers comprise the largest professional category in the health area, and spend most of their time with patients and their families, which makes them more vulnerable to the possible psychological impacts of the pandemic.⁹

During the pandemic, nursing professionals go through several stressful situations such as work overload, fatigue, frustrations regarding the quality of care, aggression, threats, increased risk of being infected, adoption of multi-employment, extension of the weekly working day, excess and variety of activities to be performed, lack of recognition from patients, co-workers and institution.^{9,10}

It is worth mentioning that social iso-

Figure 1 - Flowchart with the methodology used to select the studies, in the LILACS, MEDLINE, SCIELO and BDNF databases, between May and August 2021.



Source: The authors, 2021.

Table 1 - Synthesis matrix of selected articles

Title	Author(s)	Objective	Results
Empathic listening: a welcoming strategy for nursing professionals in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. (Escuta empática: estratégia de acolhimento aos profissionais de enfermagem no enfrentamento da pandemia por coronavírus.)	TOBASE L, et al.	Reflect on the use of empathic listening as a welcoming strategy for nursing professionals in facing the challenges during the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus.	There is an increase in manifestations of fear, insecurity due to uncertainty, sadness, anxiety, depression, among others. Thus, non-violent communication can be an effective resource in welcoming the professional, as well as empathic listening.
Nursing work in the covid-19 pandemic and repercussions for the mental health of workers. (Trabalho de enfermagem na pandemia da covid-19 e repercussões para a saúde mental dos trabalhadores.)	SOUZA NVDO, et al.	Reflect on the work context of nursing professionals in the Covid-19 pandemic and the repercussions for the mental health of these professionals.	The psychic suffering of the nursing team was evidenced due to inadequate working conditions that generate a work overload, leading to an increase in professionals with burnout, depression, pathological anxiety, panic syndrome, among other diseases.
Auriculotherapy in nursing professionals in the coronavirus pandemic: a multiple case study. (Auriculoterapia em profissionais de enfermagem na pandemia do coronavírus: estudo de casos múltiplos.)	OLIVEIRA CMC, et al.	To evaluate the effect before and after an auriculotherapy session on the levels of anxiety, depression and stress in nursing professionals scheduled to work in care during the coronavirus pandemic.	There was a reduction in the level of stress from a moderate degree at the pre-intervention moment to the normal level after the auriculotherapy session. There was also a significant reduction in depression and anxiety observed in the median values
The 'NEW' of COVID-19: impacts on the mental health of nursing professionals? (O 'NOVO' da COVID-19: impactos na saúde mental de profissionais de enfermagem?)	QUEIROZ AM, et al.	To understand the impacts on the mental health of Nursing professionals in the face of interactions with the 'new' of the Covid-19 pandemic.	Nursing professionals had difficulties in dealing with "new", generating negative feelings, in addition to emotional and physical overload, situations of violence, discrimination, stigma and disrespect for social isolation by the population.
Depression and anxiety in nursing professionals during the covid-19 pandemic. (Depressão e ansiedade em profissionais de enfermagem durante a pandemia da covid-19.)	SANTOS KMR, et al.	To analyze the prevalence of symptoms of depression, anxiety and associated factors in nursing team professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic.	The occurrence of symptoms suggestive of mental disorders was related to female nursing professionals, of mixed color or race, with a monthly income of less than 5 minimum wages who worked in the private sector, had symptoms of Burnout Syndrome and lived with their parents. The occurrences were more pronounced when the services did not have adequate working conditions, especially for dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

<p>Quarantine life project: a strategy to promote the mental health of nurses in the face of Covid-19 (Projeto vida em quarentena: estratégia para promoção da saúde mental de enfermeiros diante da Covid-19)</p>	<p>OLIVEIRA EN, et al.</p>	<p>To report the experience in the development of the extension project "Vida em Quarantine" with a strategy to promote the mental health of nurses working on the front line of the fight against COVID-19.</p>	<p>It was evidenced that nursing professionals showed emotional instability, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to ways of adapting and overcoming the problems installed with mechanisms to experience the situation, which can lead to serious mental health problems, increasing the likelihood of developing conditions such as burnout syndrome, anxiety and depression.</p>
<p>Nursing mental health in coping with COVID-19 in a regional university hospital. (A saúde mental da enfermagem no enfrentamento do COVID-19 em um hospital universitário regional.)</p>	<p>DAL'BOSCO EB, et al.</p>	<p>To identify the prevalence and factors associated with anxiety and depression in nursing professionals who work in coping with COVID-19 in a university hospital.</p>	<p>A prevalence of anxiety (48.9%) and depression (25%) was observed in professionals who were mostly female, over 40 years old, married or in a stable union, white, with higher education or postgraduate education, with an income of more than R\$3,000.00, with a public service examination, with a 40-hour workweek and working time in the hospital for 1 to 5 years.</p>
<p>Nursing and mental health: a reflection in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. (Enfermagem e saúde mental: uma reflexão em meio à pandemia de coronavírus.)</p>	<p>DUARTE MLC; SILVA DG; BAGATINI MMC.</p>	<p>Reflect on the mental health of nursing professionals in the context of the coronavirus pandemic.</p>	<p>The study demonstrates that nursing professionals are susceptible to the exacerbation of symptoms such as depression, anxiety, insomnia, anguish, stress, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, in view of the exhausting work shifts, the death of patients, risk of self-contamination and their families in social isolation.</p>
<p>Nursing performance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Atuação da enfermagem no cenário da pandemia COVID-19)</p>	<p>REIS LM, et al.</p>	<p>To report the experiences, fears and anxieties of nursing professionals who work on the front line in the care of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients.</p>	<p>From the description of nursing performance in the Covid-19 Pandemic scenario, it is observed that professionals have weaknesses in their mental health, since facing the unknown makes them more vulnerable.</p>
<p>Nursing in times of covid-19 in Brazil: A look at work management (Enfermagem em tempos da covid-19 no Brasil: Um olhar da gestão do trabalho)</p>	<p>MACHADO MH, et al.</p>	<p>To analyze the situation of the Nursing team in the context of the pandemic in Brazil, focusing on the management of the work of these professionals.</p>	<p>There are numerous weaknesses in the conditions of employment, income, work, physical and mental health of nursing professionals. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the picture is of a disease installed throughout the country, but differing significantly between states and regions.</p>
<p>Mental health of nursing professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic: support resources (Saúde mental de profissionais de enfermagem durante a pandemia de COVID-19: recursos de apoio)</p>	<p>RAMOS-TOESCHER AM, et al.</p>	<p>Reflect on the implications of the coronavirus pandemic on the mental health of nursing professionals and key support resources under development.</p>	<p>Nurses are observed to face additional challenges during infectious disease outbreaks, including service overload, shortage of human and material resources, uncertainty of the effectiveness of treatments used and still concerns about the management of their own health, and that of their families and patients, thus needing psychological support, they may present depression, anxiety, insomnia and moderate to severe psychological distress.</p>

Source: Authors, 2021.

litation was a stressor, as these professionals moved away from family and loved ones due to the pandemic. Another factor was the high number of deaths of patients under their care and experiencing the process of death and dying from co-workers contaminated by SARS-CoV-2. In addition, the fragility of protocols for infection control is observed, in addition to the lack of properly trained human resources in the care of critically ill patients. Circumstance that contributes to the anguish of professionals, negatively impacting their health.¹¹

Faced with these situations, nursing professionals may trigger different feelings

capable of generating behavioral, psychological and physical changes such as anguish, fear, uncertainty, insomnia, insecurity, feelings of incapacity, sadness, alcohol and other drug abuse.⁹ In addition to the increased risk for the development of mental illnesses such as burnout syndrome, depression, pathological anxiety, and panic syndrome, due to the current context, which does not allow the development of safe and quality care.^{11,12}

To ensure safe care during the pandemic, the proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is extremely important, as these professionals deal with suspected and

confirmed COVID-19 patients. In addition to the adequate supply of these materials, it is necessary to adopt permanent education on their handling, and the appropriate management of infected patients, in order to reduce the risk of contamination among professionals.^{13,14}

According to a study carried out in a University Hospital, the predominance of some type of mental suffering in female nursing professionals was evidenced, however, there is a prevalence of women working in the nursing area. In addition, the research points out that the multiple work activities in their daily lives, such as

family and home care in addition to the working day, favors the emergence of psychic changes, such as stress and anxiety.¹⁵

Among the nursing professionals with the highest rate of mental illness, stand out nursing technicians in a care position (44.2%), those who work without critical sectors (55.8%), public service (44.2%) and work in the area for about 10 years (27.9%).¹⁵ In addition, another study points out that moderately severe and severe anxiety are predominant in brown-skinned professionals, aged between 31 and 36 years, with a monthly income of 3 to 4 minimum wages, and who work in the public sector.¹⁶

In pandemic settings, the number of people with impaired mental health can be greater than the number of people affected by the disease, and these implications can last longer and be more prevalent than the traumatic event itself. High rates of anxiety and stress symptoms, in addition to mental disorders and post-traumatic stress, are recorded in professionals, especially among the nursing team, which reinforces the need for attention to this aspect.¹⁷

In view of the impacts resulting from the pandemic on the mental health of nursing professionals, the Ministry of Health made an investment of around 2.3 million reais, in the provision of psychological teleconsultation for health professionals, between May and September 2020. In addition, the Federal Council of Nursing (COFEN) also made emotional help available to nursing professionals during the pandemic crisis, in order to prevent the development of psychological disorders in nursing professionals.⁹

In addition to consultations with mental health professionals, it is important to encourage the self-care of these professionals as support resources: healthy eating, adequate hydration, sleeping regularly, avoiding the use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco and other drugs, perform physical and relaxation exercises, practice pleasurable activities, remain connected to their effective social network through the virtual environment and maintain faith and reli-

gious or spiritual activities.^{9,17}

In addition, other methods also help as a support tool, such as empathic listening, since it provides reception and empathy, where the professional feels understood



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in their vulnerabilities and strengthened to identify their potential. In addition, non-violent communication is expressed as an effective resource in welcoming the professional, as it brings several benefits to

the understanding of conflicts, anguish and suffering experienced through self-knowledge and self-connection.¹⁸

Non-pharmacological methods are being highlighted as a treatment for mental disorders, for example, we have auriculotherapy, which consists of a technique belonging to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which contributes to the psychi-organic regulation of the individual through stimuli in energy points, located in the ear. In a study carried out in a public hospital in Belo Horizonte, the intervention of this practice had a positive effect on professionals who had anxiety, depression and stress. Thus, auriculotherapy can contribute to reducing the levels of mental illness, being a valuable therapy for nursing professionals.¹⁰

In view of the above, it is possible to highlight that nursing professionals working in the COVID-19 pandemic are increasingly with impaired mental health, due to fear, insecurity and apprehension with the advancement of the disease.¹³ Thus, it is necessary that the safety and health of nursing professionals are priorities on the government agenda, in addition to recognizing the important role that nursing exercises mainly in times of pandemic. It is expected that recognition will be through unions, councils or associations ensuring labor rights, social protection and safety at work, whether in the public or private sphere.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Health professionals are more likely to suffer from mental disorders after the onset of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, since they constantly deal with situations that cause a high level of stress and anxiety, in addition to the need for quick decision-making. Faced with the scenario caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus, full of uncertainties and news, professionals are increasingly exposed to the new disease generating psycho-emotional impact.

It is noteworthy that before the pande-

mic there was already an increase in the number of cases of Burnout syndrome, depression and anxiety in nursing professionals, and their exposure to the psychological and physical sufferings of patients with COVID-19,

increased the risks of developing even more serious psychological problems, ari-

ing from the stress in the daily performance of routines that involve care.

As it is a relatively new topic, it is necessary to carry out studies that address the issue of mental health of health professionals during the pandemic for a better understanding of the factors related to this problem. In view of this, it is extremely im-

portant that managers dialogue with their nursing team, so that these professionals feel welcomed, and ensure improvements in working conditions such as working hours and fair remuneration, provision of PPE and employee appreciation. 🌱

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