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# Psychopathological repercussions in nursing arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic: an integrative review

Repercusiones psicopatológicas en enfermería derivadas de la pandemia COVID-19: una revisión integrativa

Repercussões psicopatológicas em enfermagem decorrentes da pandemia do COVID-19: uma revisão integrativa

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to identify the psychopathological repercussions in nursing professionals resulting from the covid-19 pandemic. **Method:** This is an integrative review of the literature carried out between October 2020 and January 2021, where articles published on the Google Scholar and Virtual Health Library (VHL) database platforms were analyzed. Inclusion criteria were: publications in Portuguese, original and open access articles, indexed between December 2019 and January 2021. **Results:** the final sample of this review consisted of 06 articles, selected by the inclusion criteria previously established. **Conclusion:** in view of the above, it is clear that nursing professionals in the front line who are directly involved in the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients with COVID-19 are at risk of developing psychopathological suffering, thus compromising their mental health and consequently their life and assistance to patients.

**DESCRIPTORS:** COVID-19; Mental health; Nursing; Psychopathology.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Identificar las repercusiones psicopatológicas en los profesionales de enfermería derivadas de la pandemia del covid-19. **Método:** Se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura realizada entre octubre de 2020 y enero de 2021, donde se analizaron los artículos publicados en las plataformas de base de datos Google Scholar y Virtual Health Library (BVS). Los criterios de inclusión fueron: publicaciones en portugués, artículos originales y de acceso abierto, indexados entre diciembre de 2019 y enero de 2021. **Resultados:** la muestra final de esta revisión estuvo conformada por 06 artículos, seleccionados por los criterios de inclusión previamente establecidos. **Conclusión:** en vista de lo anterior, es claro que los profesionales de enfermería de primera línea que están directamente involucrados en el diagnóstico, tratamiento y cuidado de los pacientes con COVID-19 están en riesgo de desarrollar sufrimiento psicopatológico, comprometiendo así su salud mental y consecuentemente su vida y asistencia a los pacientes.

**DESCRIPTORES:** COVID-19; Salud mental; Enfermería; Psicopatología.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** identificar as repercussões psicopatológicas em profissionais da enfermagem decorrentes da pandemia do covid-19. **Método:** Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura realizada entre o período de outubro de 2020 a janeiro de 2021, onde foram analisados artigos publicados nas plataformas de bases de dados Google Acadêmico e Biblioteca virtual em Saúde (BVS). Foram adotados como critérios de inclusão: publicações em português, artigos originais e de livre acesso, indexados entre dezembro de 2019 e janeiro de 2021. **Resultados:** a amostra final desta revisão foi constituída por 06 artigos, selecionados pelos critérios de inclusão previamente estabelecidos. **Conclusão:** diante ao exposto, percebe-se que os profissionais de enfermagem na linha de frente que estão diretamente envolvidos no diagnóstico, tratamento e cuidado de pacientes com COVID-19 correm o risco de desenvolver sofrimento psicopatológico comprometendo assim sua saúde mental e por consequência sua vida e a assistência que presta aos pacientes.

**DESCRITORES:** COVID-19; Saúde mental; Enfermagem; Psicopatologia.

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## INTRODUCTION

On January 30th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) had become a Public Health Emergency of International Importance (ESPII) - characterized as the highest alert level. Shortly thereafter, on March 11th, 2020, WHO declared that COVID-19 has become a pandemic.<sup>(1)</sup>

In Brazil, even in March 2020, cases and deaths in the southeastern region resulting from the coronavirus were confirmed, and since then, nursing professionals have been at the forefront of care for individuals affected by the disease. In the International Year of Nursing and Obstetrics, in recognition of the essential role in the provision of health services, it became even more evident, given the challenges faced because of the pandemic, that these professionals need to demonstrate skills, such as technical and scientific knowledge, skills and emotional control to deal with the care practice, even with all the wear and tear resulting from the pandemic and the responsibility for the patients' lives.<sup>(2,3)</sup>

Undoubtedly, work in periods of outbreaks can cause problems that

affect the mental health of professionals, and these problems are more noticeable in professionals working in high-risk units.<sup>(3)</sup> Nursing has had a great prominence in this period of coping with the pandemic, however, in addition to the prominence, the profession is in a high degree of exposure and risks of contamination, violence and impacts on mental health.<sup>(4)</sup> Based on Huang, et al (2020)<sup>(5)</sup> and observing this scenario, it is possible to see that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a source of great stress for individuals and social groups, since human beings experience different levels of emotional crises. However, it is especially more difficult for those at the center of the crisis.

Given this, this study has the guiding question: What are the psychological and emotional repercussions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic for nursing professionals? The aim of this study was to identify the psychopathological repercussions on nursing professionals resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

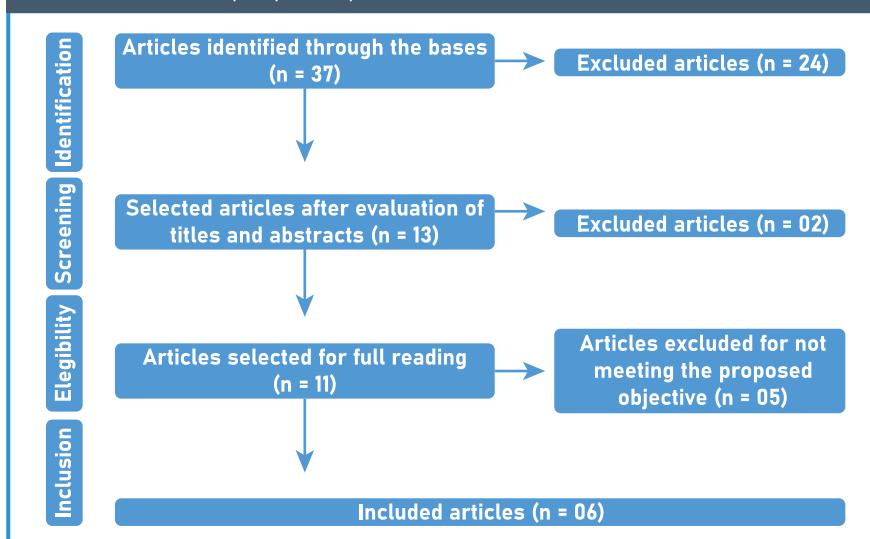
## MÉTODO

This is an integrative literature review carried out between October

2020 and January 2021, where articles published on the Google Scholar and Virtual Health Library (VHL) database platforms were analyzed. Inclusion criteria were: publications in Portuguese or English, original and freely accessible articles, indexed between December 2019 and January 2021 (considering the period of onset of the pathology). The following Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) were used: COVID-19; Enfermagem; Saúde mental; Psicopatologia and its English counterparts: COVID-19; Nursing; Mental health; Psychopathology. For this purpose, the and, or Boolean operators were used. The exclusion criteria were: duplicate articles, restricted access, theses, monographs and abstracts from annals.

This review followed the following steps: 1) Elaboration of the research problem; 2) Searching the databases with application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) Reading and critical analysis of the articles; 4) Categorization and organization of the findings; 5) Interpretation and discussion of results; 6) concluded by presenting the results and critically analyzing the data obtained relevant to the research in a descriptive manner.

Figure 1. Flowchart of research information in the databases mapping the number of identified, included and excluded records, and the reasons for exclusions. Marabá, PA, Brazil, 2021.



## RESULTS

Based on the findings in the mentioned database platforms, the titles of 37 articles were read, and those that best met the proposed theme were selected, considering the descriptors. Then the abstracts were read, resulting in 13 studies that met the inclusion criteria. After a thorough and thorough reading, 06 articles made up the corpus of this review. The data obtained were organized and analyzed critically by comparing them with the scientific literature.

The final sample of this review consisted of 06 articles, selected by the inclusion criteria previously established. Chart 1 presents the specifications of each article, with the following: authors, title, main findings, magazine and year.

Chart 1. Details of the selected studies. Marabá, PA, Brazil, 2021.

| Nº | AUTHORS  | TITLE   | MAIN FINDINGS   | JOURNAL/YEAR                            |
|----|--|---|---|---|
| 01 | Ramos-Toescher AM, Tomaschewisk-Barlem JG, Barlem ELD, Castanheira JS, Toescher RL. <sup>(6)</sup> | Mental health of nursing professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic: support resources.                         | As a result of the new coronavirus pandemic, psychological interventions aimed at nursing professionals have played an extremely important role in shaping the current scenario.  | Esc. Ana Nery. 2020                     |
| 02 | Pereira MD, Torres EC, Pereira MD, Antunes PFS, Costa CFT. <sup>(7)</sup>                          | Nurses' emotional distress in the hospital context in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic                         | The state of global calamity in the field of health has caused mental health problems mainly for nurses, since they are exposed to risk of contamination, lack of materials, high demands, intense experiences such as pain, suffering and arduous death that generates feelings of stress, tension, nervousness, fatigue, aggression, panic episodes and even depression.                                      | Research, Society and Development. 2020 |
| 03 | Souza NVDO, Carvalho EC, Soares SSS, Varella TCM, Pereira SEM, Andrade KBS. <sup>(8)</sup>         | Nursing work in the Covid-19 pandemic and repercussions for workers' mental health                              | The scarcity of personal protective equipment, weakness in the description of protocols and flows for the effective control of infections, prolonged hours of work, inadequate professional training for the crisis scenario and uncertainties in relation to therapeutic measures. Thus marking a scenario that raises the potential for negative impact on the mental health of nursing workers.              | Rev Gaúcha Enferm. 2021                 |
| 04 | Portugal JKA, Reis MHS, Barão EJS, Souza TTG, Guimarães RS, Almeida LS, et al. <sup>(9)</sup>      | Perception of the emotional impact of the nursing team in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: experience report. | The feeling of impotence and emotional exhaustion caused by the lack of cooperation from patients, with regard to measures to prevent the spread of the disease, associated with factors such as, lack of efficient training, insufficient personal protective equipment and the fear of contaminating themselves (or to contaminate their own family), they have been triggering preexisting mental illnesses. | REAS. 2020                              |

|    |   |  |   |  |
|----|---|--|---|--|
| 05 | Barbosa DJ, Gomes MP, Souza FBA, Tosoli Gomes AM. <sup>(10)</sup>               | Stress factors in nursing professionals in combating the COVID-19 pandemic: Synthesis of evidence              | It threatens not only people's physical health, but also their mental health, especially in terms of emotion and cognition.   | Comunicação em Ciências da Saúde. 2020 |
| 06 | Bannwart OI, Vieira MPM, Trindade LJM, Teodoro SNG, Vieira FSF. <sup>(11)</sup> | The mental health of nursing professionals in the context of the new Coronavirus pandemic: A systematic review | Among nursing professionals, the factors that trigger mental health imbalance may be related to the work process, such as the shift, the relationship between the work team, the patient, family members, work overload, wear and tear, lack of personal protective equipment (PPE's), social support, conflict of interest and coping strategies developed to avoid contamination. | Revista Científica Cognitionis. 2020   |

Source: Costa LES, Oliveira FV, Carneiro AGM, Ribeiro SAA, Barros ACS, Tavares PPC. 2021

## DISCUSSION

Nursing professionals are responsible for managing nursing teams and materials in hospital care, promoting comprehensive care to patients. And in the context of the pandemic it would be no different, they remain on the front lines fighting an invisible enemy called the Coronavirus, which has kept the society enclosed, but these professionals, unlike the enclosure, are increasingly exposed and working in the daily struggle to save lives. Observing this scenario, it is possible to see that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a source of great stress, since different individuals experience different levels of emotional crises. However, it is especially more difficult for those at the center of the crisis. <sup>(11,12)</sup>

In this scenario, fear, anxiety, depression, (among other disorders) are some problems that can harm psychologically and emotionally the work of nursing professionals. Causing physical and mental coping to be compromised, which generates ineffective work productivity, coupled with an increase in the accident rate, compromised assistance, which, under the conditions of a pandemic, should not exist, since it results in losses and affects patient safety and quality of work. <sup>(3)</sup>

Nursing comprises the largest professional category of health services worldwide, being directly linked to

the care of patients with the virus. Given this, they are more likely and vulnerable to acquire the virus and develop psychological impacts, after all, the pandemic situation generates stress, fear, anguish and among other negative feelings to the well-being of emotional health, which when not treated, can evolve to more severe conditions, such as chronic depression. It is worth mentioning that negative emotional changes in nursing can compromise the quality and efficiency of health care for the population. <sup>(6)</sup>

Since the beginning of the pandemic outbreak of covid-19, numerous nursing professionals have been infected by the virus, presented the mildest form or evolved to the most severe form, leading to deaths. Faced with this scenario, these professionals are exposed to constant emotional wear, because in addition to the concern with assistance and risk of contamination, they still face the scarcity of personal protective equipment and lack of efficient training, especially regarding handling with the patient and the correct use of PPE, which further aggravates your emotional state. <sup>(9)</sup>

One of the points that most worried the frontline professionals of coping with covid-19, is that in addition to the apprehension to conserve life and health, the fear of infecting their relatives still weighs on them, therefo-

re, many ended up choosing to isolate themselves completely from family life. <sup>(9)</sup> The high number of deaths of co-workers and patients caused by the virus causes a great psychopathological risk to professionals working on the front line, as it arouses anguish and anxiety, and reinforces the feeling of helplessness in the face of the scenario experienced. <sup>(9,10)</sup>

COVID-19 is a disease with a high degree of transmissibility among individuals, which may be asymptomatic or symptomatic. Because of this state of global calamity generated by the pandemic, mental health problems such as stress, among others, make nurses experience a routine of fear and uncertainty. The hospital environment demands intense activities from the nurse, dealing with pain, suffering, death and recoveries, favoring the manifestation of oscillations and emotional upheavals. <sup>(7)</sup>

Currently, the professional nurse has to fight challenges imposed by the pandemic of COVID-19, such as the high risk of contamination, the illness that can trigger anguish, fatigue, feeling of incapacity for not being able to save lives, threats, offenses and distance from society and a high rate of deaths. All these wear and tear compromise the physical and mental health of the worker, thus causing somatizations, which also impact the quality of care provided to the patient. <sup>(7)</sup>

Linked to this are the physical

and psychological impacts on the worker's health, which can result in emotional disturbances, which when associated with devaluation, low pay and other unfavorable work conditions, trigger psychopathologies such as Burnout syndrome, characterized by physical and psychological wear and tear of professionals who perform their functions, depression and even suicide. <sup>(7)</sup>

It should be noted that nursing plays a fundamental role in the various areas of combating COVID-19, such as prevention, mitigation and combat. However, this professional needs to have appropriate working conditions to develop his work safely, needing psychological counseling due to the amount of lives lost in a short period of

time. If not, it can develop several psychopathologies, resulting from fear of being exposed to the virus, overwork, devaluation and fear of being transmitting this virus to your friends, acquaintances and family. <sup>(8)</sup>

The current health situation in Brazil shows the state of vulnerability that nursing is being exposed and conditioned, especially with regard to professionals working in hospital units that are subjected to exhaustive work, which results in an imbalance in the demand-professional relationship. And in this scenario of action, the risk of contamination, somatization due to fear, stress and physical and emotional stress, it is emphasized that although nursing is the art of caring, it is necessary that the profession and professionals are cared

for and valued for so that the health care balance is maintained. <sup>(4)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In view of the findings, it was possible to identify that nursing professionals in the front line, directly involved in the diagnosis, treatment and care of patients with COVID-19, are at serious risk of developing psychopathological suffering, thus compromising mental health and, consequently, their own lives, as well as the care provided to patients. For this reason, it is important to offer specialized professional support to nursing professionals, through a multiprofessional team, ensuring better working conditions and support to members of the nursing team, favoring improved care processes. ■

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