

# Mental disorders in nursing professionals in oncology service units: An integrative review

Transtornos mentais em profissionais de enfermagem em unidades de serviços oncológicos: Uma revisão integrativa  
Transtornos mentales en profesionales de enfermería en unidades de servicios de oncología: Una revisión integrativa

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este estudo analisou a presença do esgotamento físico e mental com os transtornos mentais, em profissionais de enfermagem nos serviços oncológicos. **Método:** Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura que seguiu a estratégia PICO para identificar os fatores associados aos Transtornos Mentais em Profissionais de Enfermagem em Serviços Oncológicos. A busca dos artigos foi realizada em três bases de dados eletrônicas: Medline, Lilacs e Scielo. Foram utilizados os descritores "Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder", "Mental Disorders", "Depressive Disorder", "Nurses", "Oncology Nursing". Com textos completos, publicados no período de 2012 a 2022, no idioma inglês, português e espanhol e foi usado o operador booleano AND. **Resultados:** Os resultados revelaram que os profissionais de enfermagem apresentam transtornos mentais em nível mínimo. **Conclusão:** Observou-se associação entre depressão e burnout em profissionais de enfermagem. É necessária a realização de atividades que promovam o bem-estar dos profissionais de enfermagem que atuam nos setores de oncologia.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Transtorno da Personalidade Passivo-Agressiva; Transtornos Mentais; Transtorno Depressivo; Enfermeiras e Enfermeiros; Enfermagem Oncológica.

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study analyzed the relationship between the feeling of burnout and mental disorders in nursing professionals in oncology services. **Method:** This is an integrative literature review that followed the PICO strategy to identify factors associated with Mental Disorders in Nursing Professionals in Oncology Services. The search for articles was carried out in three electronic databases: Medline, Lilacs and Scielo. The descriptors "Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder", "Mental Disorders", "Depressive Disorder", "Nurses", "Oncology Nursing" were used. With full texts, published from 2012 to 2022, in English, Portuguese and Spanish and the Boolean operator AND was used. **Results:** The results revealed that nursing professionals have mental disorders at a minimal level. **Conclusion:** An association was observed between depression and burnout in nursing professionals. It is necessary to carry out activities that promote the well-being of nursing professionals working in the oncology sectors.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder; Mental Disorders; Depressive Disorder; Nurses; Oncology Nursing.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Este estudio analizó la relación entre el sentimiento de burnout y los trastornos mentales en profesionales de enfermería de oncología. **Método:** Se trata de una revisión integrativa de la literatura que siguió la estrategia PICO para identificar factores asociados a los Trastornos Mentales en Profesionales de Enfermería en Servicios de Oncología. La búsqueda de artículos se realizó en tres bases de datos electrónicas: Medline, Lilacs y Scielo. Fueron utilizados los descriptores "Trastorno de Personalidad Pasivo-Agresivo", "Trastornos Mentales", "Trastorno Depresivo", "Enfermeras", "Enfermería Oncológica". Con textos completos, publicados de 2012 a 2022, en inglés, portugués y español y se utilizó el operador booleano AND. **Resultados:** Los resultados revelaron que los profesionales de enfermería presentan trastornos mentales en un nivel mínimo. **Conclusión:** Se observó asociación entre depresión y burnout en profesionales de enfermería. Es necesario realizar actividades que promuevan el bienestar de los profesionales de enfermería en los sectores de oncología.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Trastorno de Personalidad Pasiva Agressiva; Trastornos Mentales; Trastorno Depresivo; Enfermeras y Enfermeros; Enfermería Oncológica.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

**H**ope is recognized as an important component that influences mental health promotion.<sup>1</sup> Given that it manifests itself through well-being, optimism, empathy, confidence, self-esteem and resilience.<sup>1</sup> It is understood in an individualized and subjective way, being influenced by factors inherent to everyday situations, social, interpersonal and family relationships, physical and mental well-being and adequate working conditions for good professional performance.<sup>2</sup>

Health professionals can use hope as a me-

ans of care, especially when they understand the subjectivity of the other and respect pain, feelings and limitations.<sup>3</sup> The work performed by nursing professionals is of great importance in stimulating hope and empowering others, enhancing cognitive functions and stimulating mental health, mainly in specific services where the uncertainties of tomorrow and the idea of finitude are more present, among them, oncology.<sup>4</sup>

Nursing care for the person in the oncology service is differentiated, as it favors emotional involvement due to the length of stay and characteristics of the treatment.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the role of

nursing is important to stimulate hope and encourage the person in the coping process.<sup>6</sup>

However, when hope is compromised, the person experiences a feeling of exhaustion that affects the perception of themselves, the other and the world, interpersonal relationships, work activities, causing pessimism so that they cannot recognize hope around them.<sup>7</sup>

When the nursing professional feels at the limit of their physical and mental exhaustion, this can have consequences on their performance and compromise their ability to perceive the subjectivity and needs of the person undergoing cancer treatment.<sup>8</sup>

Exhaustion can be potentiated by difficulties in the nursing work process as well as by personal aspects of the professional, causing lability and emotional exhaustion, which contribute to the break in interaction, blocking of feelings and withdrawal from work, as attempts to avoid suffering.<sup>9</sup>

The role of nursing professionals in oncology services provides ambivalent feelings such as sadness, fear, despair, anger, revolt, patience, tranquility, love, calm, sensitivity, balance, happiness and hope.<sup>10</sup> In these services, professionals live under strong emotional stress, witness pain, suffering, loss of patients, sadness of family members, work overload, conflicting interpersonal relationships, low pay and double working hours, circumstances that allow emotional exhaustion and the onset of mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and suicide.<sup>11</sup>

Nursing professionals are more affected by mental disorders when compared to the general population.<sup>12</sup> These can be potentiated by the presence of hopelessness.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the objective of this study was to search the world scientific literature for what has been produced on this topic, as well as to analyze the presence of physical and mental exhaustion with mental disorders, in nursing professionals in oncology services.

## METHOD

This is an integrative literature review, based on the methodological recommendations Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses – PRISMA.<sup>14</sup> Method that is characterized by gathering and synthesizing research results on a topic, in a systematic and orderly manner. The research question was defined from the PICO strategy, which provides for the definition of the participant (P), intervention (I), comparison (C) and outcome/outcomes (O).

It is intended to answer the guiding question: What factors identified in the literature (O) are associated with Mental Disorders (I) in oncology nursing professionals (P)? Then, the keywords “Passive-Aggressive Personality Disorder (Transtorno da Personalidade Passivo-Agressiva)”, “Mental Disorders (Transtornos Mentais)”, “Depressive Disorder (Transtorno Depressivo)”, “Nursing (Enfermagem)”, “On-

cology (Oncologia)”, were defined from the vocabulary of the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS), as it is a common research terminology.

These were combined with each other, using the Boolean operator AND in the databases and/or electronic libraries: Medical Literature (MEDLINE), consulted via PubMed, Virtual Health Library (VHL), Embase, SciELO, Scopus and Web of Science (WOS), Cinahl. The same search strategy was performed in all databases and/or electronic libraries.

The inclusion criteria for the articles for analysis were: population group of oncology nursing professionals, published between 2012 and 2022, available in full, in Portuguese, English and Spanish, dealing with the discussed topic. Opinion articles, editorials, other reviews, duplicate articles and publications that did not address the theme were excluded.

The collection period took place from October 2021 to January 2022. For data analysis, an analytical framework was built (Chart 1) that made it possible to gather and synthesize the key information from the studies. The collection instrument gathered the following in-

formation: title, author(s)/year of publication/country, objective, method, main results.

## RESULTS

A total of 193 studies were identified in the aforementioned databases, as illustrated in (Figure 1), which followed the PRISMA recommendations 14 to describe the search process in the literature.

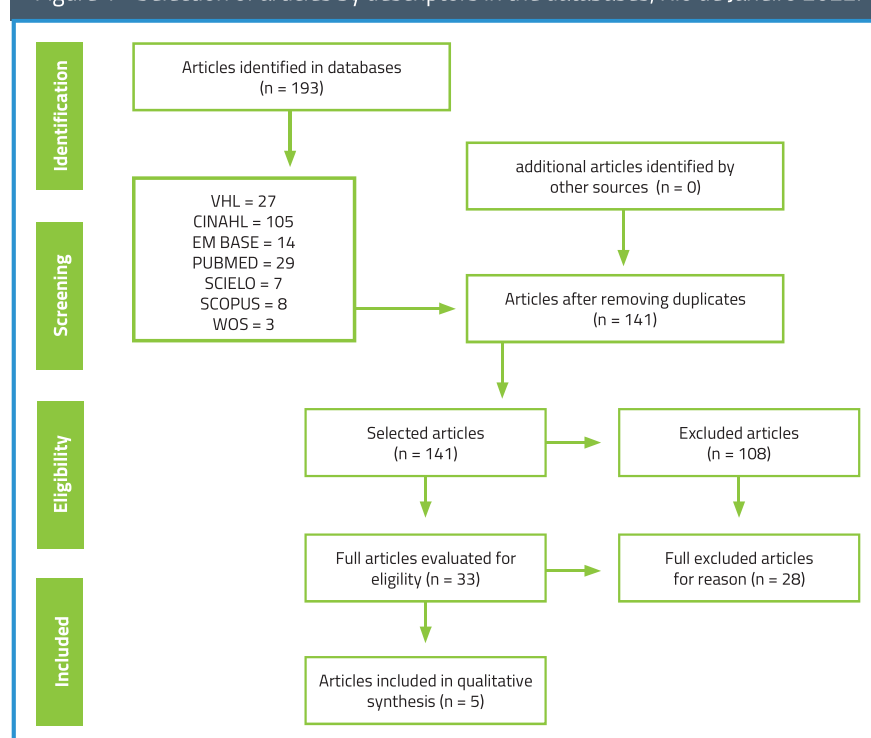
Of these, 52 duplicate articles were excluded, leaving 141 unique articles. Then, the titles and abstracts were read, observing the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

As a result of this process, 108 articles were excluded and another 34 articles met the eligibility criteria. Then, the full and in-depth reading of these studies began by two reviewers, independently.

Any disagreements between the evaluators that emerged during this stage were worked on and resolved by consensus, which resulted in a final sample of 5 articles.

## DISCUSSION

Figure 1 - Selection of articles by descriptors in the databases, Rio de Janeiro 2022.



Source: The authors, 2022

Table 1. Categorization of scientific production included in the review, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2022

Titles	Author(s)	Objective	Method	Results	Level of Evidence
Emotional Distress and Occupational Burnout in Health Care Professionals Serving HIV-Infected Patients:	López-Cas-tillo et al.	To examine levels of emotional stress and burnout among healthcare professionals working with HIV patients in two different settings, Infectious Disease Units (ID) and a Hemophilia Unit (H), and compares them with those of professionals working in Oncology Units	Quantitative Study	Perceived stress was higher in both O and IM, and the number of stressful circumstances was especially higher in O. No significant differences in psychological morbidity were found between the groups, with the following exceptions: a better status among Team H, who also showed less overall burnout; emotional exhaustion was lower in ID and H than in the other two groups; the ID team showed less personal fulfillment.	Low
Burnout and its relationship with personality factors in oncology nurses,	Fuente-So-lana et al.	To assess burnout levels in oncology nurses, assess the stage of burnout suffering they are in and analyze the relationship between burnout and personality factors.	Quantitative Study	According to the burnout phase model, 29.6% of the sample is in the most severe phases.	Moderated
Psychological exhaustion of nursing professionals who care for patients with neoplasms	Gasparini et al.	Identify, analyze and understand the social representations of nursing professionals about the burnout syndrome.	Qualitative Study	Seven professionals participated; after analysis, two categories emerged: "Professional stress, the naturalization of suffering and self-care strategies"; and "Re-significations, learning in the oncology sector and gaps in the network". Representations about stress and the relationship of professionals with daily practice were predominant.	Moderated
Work-related violence and associated variables in oncology nursing professionals	Santos et al.	To identify the prevalence of violence at work (verbal/physical) and the related variables in nursing professionals working in oncology. Cross-sectional study, in which physical or verbal aggression was assessed through self-report.	Cross-sectional study	It is noteworthy that workers who suffered violence presented burnout at a high level in all subscales, higher average score on the work stress scale and worse sleep quality. The findings of the present study point to the need for institutional measures to prevent and control occupational violence.	Very low
Shift work of nursing professionals and blood pressure, burnout and common mental disorders	Oliveira et al.	To analyze the influence of shift work on blood pressure, presence of burnout and common mental disorders in nursing professionals.	Cross-sectional study	The presence of emotional exhaustion was associated with normal waking blood pressure and depersonalization with altered sleep blood pressure.	High

Source: The authors, 2022

Oncology nurses care for patients with specific characteristics in relation to other units.<sup>15</sup> During the disease, cancer patients often present psychological problems, feelings of vulnerability, anxiety, fear and depression, which has been associated with increased stress in nurses.<sup>15</sup> In addition, oncology nurses have to deal with ethically complex clinical decision-making situations,<sup>6</sup> lack of training for end-of-life care in novice nurses, complexity of cancer treatments, bereavement, communication of bad news and

death of patients.<sup>6</sup>

These situations may not be present in other services with chronic patients such as primary care, in emergency services where the contact time with patients is shorter or in services where the patient spends a large part of the time under sedative effects such as the operating room.<sup>16</sup> For these reasons, it is expected that the burnout of oncology nurses varies with nurses from other units.

The specific characteristics of oncology

units and their relationship with burnout in nurses have been studied in recent years, with moderate and high prevalence in each dimension.<sup>11</sup> In addition, different risk factors for burnout in oncology nurses were studied.<sup>13</sup>

For example, sociodemographic variables such as age and marital status, occupational variables such as work experience, workload, shift, work support, difference between outpatient or inpatient units, and psychological variables, such as the need for approval, trust, and com-



passion fatigue.<sup>13</sup>

Despite all the above points, it is necessary to advance in the study of the syndrome.<sup>17</sup> The estimate of the prevalence of the disorder in each dimension in oncology nurses could be complemented with a classification of professionals according to the stage of severity or stage of global development of burnout in which they are.<sup>18</sup>

Studies have been done in other services that report significant relationships between some psychological variables and burnout syn-

drome,<sup>19</sup> reporting on significant relationships between nurses' personality factors and burnout.<sup>2</sup> However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no research in oncology nursing where burnout risk profiles include personality characteristics and other psychological variables.<sup>19</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the association between burnout and some mental disorders in oncology nursing professionals was evidenced. The fin-

dings showed that a small portion of nursing professionals have psychological support, which is essential for the maintenance of mental health, especially when one constantly experiences the loss, pain and suffering of the other, which can contribute to their illness, decreased hope, impairments in interpersonal relationships and in the provision of care.

Thus, it is suggested that more research be carried out on aspects of hopelessness and mental disorder in oncology nursing workers to promote their mental health.

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