

# Substance use disorder among nursing professionals under a pandemic context

Transtorno por uso de substâncias entre os profissionais de enfermagem sob contexto pandêmico

Trastorno por uso de sustancias en profesionales de enfermería en contexto de pandemia

## RESUMO

Objetivo: caracterizar o transtorno por uso de substâncias entre profissionais de enfermagem sob contexto pandêmico. Método: Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, do tipo revisão integrativa da literatura. Foi realizada uma busca nas bases de dados eletrônicas: no Sistema da Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde (LILACS) e Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) nos idiomas português, espanhol e inglês publicados no período de 2019 a 2021. Resultados: Foram encontrados 19 artigos pela leitura de títulos e termos estabelecidos. Foram selecionados 04 artigos para compor a amostra final. Conclusão: Nos estudos selecionados as substâncias mais consumidas entre profissionais de saúde em pandemia foram álcool, tabaco, benzodiazepínicos, maconha, ansiolíticos, opióides. Os resultados dessa pesquisa apontam para o cuidado à saúde mental dos profissionais de Enfermagem durante a atuação no combate

**DESCRIPTORES:** Transtornos Relacionados ao Uso de Substâncias; Pandemias; Enfermagem

## ABSTRACT

Objective: to characterize substance use disorder among nursing professionals in a pandemic context. Method: This is a qualitative study, of the integrative literature review type. A search was performed in the electronic databases: the System of Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS) and Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) in Portuguese, Spanish and English published in the period 2019 to 2021. Results: 19 articles were found by reading established titles and terms. Four articles were selected to compose the final sample. Conclusion: In the selected studies, the most consumed substances among health professionals in a pandemic were alcohol, tobacco, benzodiazepines, marijuana, anxiolytics, and opioids. The results of this research point to the mental health care of Nursing professionals during their work in the fight against the pandemic.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Substance-Related Disorders; Pandemics; Nursing.

## RESUMEN

Objetivo: caracterizar el trastorno por uso de sustancias entre profesionales de enfermería en contexto de pandemia. Método: Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, del tipo revisión integrativa de la literatura. Se realizó una búsqueda en las bases de datos electrónicas: Sistema de Literatura Latinoamericana y del Caribe en Ciencias de la Salud (LILACS) y Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) en portugués, español e inglés publicadas en el período 2019 a 2021. Resultados: Se encontraron 19 artículos mediante la lectura de títulos y términos establecidos. Se seleccionaron cuatro artículos para componer la muestra final. Conclusión: En los estudios seleccionados, las sustancias más consumidas entre los profesionales de la salud en una pandemia fueron el alcohol, el tabaco, las benzodiazepinas, la marihuana, los ansiolíticos y los opioides. Los resultados de esta investigación apuntan para el cuidado de la salud mental de los profesionales de Enfermería durante su actuación en la lucha contra la pandemia.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Trastornos Relacionados con Sustancias; Pandemias; Enfermería.

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ORCID: 0000-0002-9873-8446**INTRODUÇÃO**

**A**t the end of December 2019, humanity experienced the effects of a pandemic with the circulation of a new virus called – Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)–, caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 virus.<sup>1-5</sup>

In relation to the World Health Organization (WHO), until December 31st, 2021, 509,569,178 confirmed cases and 6,217,517 deaths from the new coronavirus were reported worldwide.<sup>6</sup> Brazil is the second country with the most deaths from Covid-19 in the world, only behind the US with about 616,018 deaths.<sup>7</sup>

We know that for health care teams around the world, measures such as social isolation did not apply and several reorganizations were necessary in health services to meet the demand of patients infected by the new coronavirus.<sup>8</sup>

The pandemic brought greater attention to the mental health of health professionals, especially nursing professionals, in relation to the psychological impacts caused by the pandemic, symptoms such as: anxiety, depression, fear, among others, characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, in response to the epidemic, the consumption of alcohol and other substances increased in this period, and that patients with already installed substance use disorder showed an increased risk of exposure to the infection.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the Brazilian population, data from the “behavior survey” survey, conducted by Fiocruz from April to May 2020, people aged between 30-39 years old, 25.6% of these, reported increased alcohol consumption during the pandemic. In relation to young

adults and the elderly, consumption increased by about 11.4%.<sup>11</sup>

Data published in digital media from the Ministry of Health pointed to an increase in the search for care in the Unified Health System (SUS) during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 36% of the Brazilian population increased the consumption of marijuana (first months of the pandemic), a 50% increase in relation to attendances for the use of sedatives and 54% for the use of hallucinogens.<sup>12</sup>

Given the above, it is necessary to develop research aimed at dealing with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs in response to the effects of a pandemic. In order to contribute to this demand, my study proposal aims to characterize substance use disorder (SUD) among nursing professionals in a pandemic context.

Thus, with the aim of deepening my knowledge in Nursing about substance use disorder among nursing professionals under a pandemic context and in order to contribute to the qualification of the practice of nursing care in the face of this problem, is defined as the guiding question for this study: How is substance use disorder characterized among nursing professionals in a pandemic context?

Thus, the objective of this study is to characterize substance use disorder among nursing professionals in a pandemic context.

**METHOD**

Integrative review (IR) study, research method recommended by Cooper<sup>13</sup>, which includes the analysis of several primary studies on a given subject, establishing comparisons between them, in order to define broader conclusions

about a specific phenomenon. The integrative review is an enriching method for nursing, as the professional often does not have the time to read the large volume of existing scientific knowledge, in addition to the difficulty in performing a critical analysis on the subject.<sup>14</sup>

Cooper<sup>13</sup> guides five steps for IR, which are: problem formulation; data collect; data evaluation; analysis and interpretation of data and presentation of results.

The topic to be addressed was selected and later, the guiding question to be answered was defined: How is substance use disorder characterized among nursing professionals in a pandemic context?

The searches were carried out in the following electronic databases: in the System of Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS) and Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) in Portuguese, Spanish and English published from 2019 to 2021.

The following descriptors were defined: Transtornos Relacionados ao Uso de Substâncias; Pandemias; Enfermagem Descriptors in Science and Health (DeCS) and in MeSH (Medical Subject Headings): Substance-Related Disorders. Pandemics. Nursing.

National and international articles from nursing and other areas were included; written in Portuguese, Spanish and English; published from 2019 to 2021. Original articles from qualitative and quantitative research that addressed the research topic were selected; full articles, available online or containing abstracts indexed in the databases (when not available in full text, they were accessed in journals).

Articles that required payment of

fees, not free of charge, for access to the full text, duplicate studies and technical reports were excluded. Doctoral theses, master's dissertations, monographs, documents and event proceedings were also excluded.

Initially,<sup>19</sup> articles were included for reading titles and established terms. After reading titles and abstracts, 18 articles were selected to be read in full. With the critical reading of the texts, 04 were selected to be used in this integrative review.

In order to record the data collected from the articles, a Study Assessment Form (Appendix A) was prepared, filled in after reading the articles, thus enabling the analysis of the information found.

For the analysis and interpretation of the results, in order to synthesize and compare the data recorded in the instruments, a general synoptic table was prepared to record the elements that answer the guiding question (Appendix B).

For validation of the research, a search for articles in the databases was performed by two individual researchers using the same strategy of crossing the descriptors.

## RESULTS

The results of this research are presented below, through the presentation of charts, tables and graphs and the discussion of the data found.

Table 1 shows the titles of the 04 articles that make up the sample of this work:

## DISCUSSION

With the emergence of the new virus – Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus 18 that devastated planet earth, several measures for the contingency of the virus were adopted, one of which is social isolation.<sup>19</sup>

It is known that the measure of remaining in social isolation was not applied to nursing professionals. Several reorganizations of health services around the world were necessary to absorb the demand of patients suspected or infected by the new coronavirus.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the professional category Nursing, worldwide, there are about 28 million Nursing professionals in the world according to the second recent report by the WHO and the International Council of Nurses (ICN).<sup>6</sup> Regarding Brazil, there are currently about 2 million professionals working in the most different organizational structures of the health system.<sup>20</sup>

He knows that Nursing attributions range from health promotion to disease prevention, in addition to initial patient reception, active listening and support to the patient and their families.<sup>21</sup>

In this context, for a Nursing professional to provide quality care to patients and their families, they must be satisfied and motivated in relation to their work. It is necessary to implement

spaces that offer mental health care, specialized professional attention and monitoring of this professional are considered important factors in the mental health care of these professionals who acted in the fight against the pandemic.<sup>22</sup>

The pandemic context brought greater attention to the mental health of nursing workers who were on the front lines in the fight against the pandemic. With the worsening of morbidity and mortality rates during the pandemic, factors such as: work overload, stress, anxiety, fear of being infected and infecting family members were present, highlighting the exacerbation of psychological suffering.<sup>16,23</sup>

In this context of change of routine of daily life, in stressful events, the human being tends to look for ways to relieve tension, one of these, the abuse of psychoactive substances, alcohol and other drugs, as an escape valve.<sup>10,15</sup>

The pandemic highlights the increase in the prevalence of mental disorders, the worsening of pre-existing psychiatric conditions, in addition to the incre-

Quadro 1 - Títulos e autores dos artigos selecionados como amostra do estudo, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil, 2021

Nº Artigo	Título	Autores	Metodologia
01	COVID-19 and substance use disorders: a review of international guidelines for frontline healthcare workers of addiction services (2022)	Ostinelli et al. <sup>15</sup>	Qualitativa do tipo Revisão Sistemática
02	Stress and substance abuse among workers during the COVID-19 pandemic in an intensive care unit: A cross-sectional study (2022)	Pestana et al. <sup>16</sup>	Quantitativo do tipo Observacional, Unicêntrico e Transversal
03	Alcohol and other substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review (2021)	Roberts et al. <sup>10</sup>	Qualitativa do tipo Revisão Sistemática
04	Consumo de álcool, outras substâncias e a pandemia da COVID-19: implicações para a pesquisa e para a prática clínica (2021)	Diehl et al. <sup>17</sup>	Qualitativo do tipo Revisão Narrativa de Literatura

Fonte: Autor, 2022.

ase in the harmful use of psychoactive substances.<sup>3,17</sup>

In a study conducted by Lapeyre-Mestre et al.<sup>24</sup>, in a pandemic context, in France, there was an increase in demand for opioids such as methadone, heroin and oxycodone, in addition to benzodiazepines, cannabis and nitrous oxide. The authors attribute this increase in consumption of these mentioned substances to the stressful events of the pandemic experienced by the general population.

Regarding alcohol consumption, with the restriction of social relationships in a pandemic, psychological suffering, restriction of interpersonal contact and social isolation, the WHO has warned of dangers related to alcohol abuse, since the aforementioned substance impacts the functioning of the body as a whole, which has reduced care practices, in addition to compromising the immune system.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, data from the Global Drug Survey, in a pandemic, about 55.1% of the world population report drinking more because of stress and 43.5% because they have more idle time.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to health professionals, opting for the consumption of psychoactive substances provides the calming of negative feelings arising from the pandemic and stressful work context that professionals experienced during this period.<sup>17</sup>

In this sense, the most consumed substances among health professionals during a pandemic were alcohol, tobacco, benzodiazepines, marijuana, anxiolytics, and opioids.<sup>26</sup>

According to the articles mentioned, stress was a triggering factor for substance abuse, another facilitating factor for access to anxiolytic/benzodiazepine medications, is the ease of obtaining these medications without a prescription.<sup>23, 26, 27, 29</sup>

In short, the pandemic generated impacts around the world, with regard to the change in daily life routine, psy-

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chological effects on professionals who worked on the front line. It is known that one of the consequences of this pandemic context was the abuse of psychoactive substances by nursing professionals, demonstrating their vulnerabilities and mental health care needs to this category, regardless of the reasons and justifications given by them in order to clarify substance abuse.

It is worth looking at this public, providing spaces for listening and welcoming this professional category, not opting for punitive issues, but for educational purposes and referrals to appropriate treatments.

## CONCLUSION

With the pandemic of the new coronavirus, the world has experienced several changes in the habits of the general population, in addition to highlighting care for our physical and emotional health.

It should be noted that the Nursing category is considered essential and core in health services, therefore, with the pandemic and the year of "Nursing Now" - the year of Nursing, problems related to the mental health of these professionals gained prominence and attention.

The new coronavirus pandemic brought a focus to the mental health of nursing professionals, highlighting factors that trigger mental suffering, such as: stress, anxiety and depression.

In this context, debate on the subject is necessary, in addition to giving voice to nursing professionals, so that they can bring their experiences and experiences related to the pandemic and mental health theme. It is, therefore, essential to the care of the Nursing professional, spaces that provide dialogue, reception of demands, psychological assistance to the psychological effects of the pandemic and TUS, raising the referral of demands to specialized services.

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