

# Risk factors associated with burnout syndrome in nursing teachers

Fatores de risco associados à síndrome de burnout em docentes de enfermagem

Factores de riesgo asociados al síndrome de burnout en profesores de enfermería

## RESUMO

O objetivo desse estudo foi compreender os fatores de risco associados a Síndrome de Burnout (SB) em docentes do curso de enfermagem. O método refere-se a uma pesquisa com abordagem qualitativa, tratando-se de um estudo exploratório descritivo, executado no município de Coroatá-MA com 14 enfermeiros docentes. Os dados foram coletados através do auxílio de um formulário com 16 perguntas relacionadas a saúde mental no âmbito do trabalho, devido ao período pandêmico foi enviado o link do formulário para os participantes. Os resultados foram divididos em categorias, de acordo com os questionamentos do instrumento de pesquisa e analisados à luz da articulação hermenêutica-dialética. Observou-se que a sobrecarga de trabalho afeta a saúde dos profissionais acarretando exaustão física e mental. Nesse contexto, a má remuneração, precarização do trabalho, relacionamentos interpessoais prejudicados dentro do ambiente de trabalho, pouco tempo para lazer e desvalorização do profissional docente, são fatores que propiciam o estresse ocupacional podendo gerar a SB.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Docentes de Enfermagem; Estresse Ocupacional; Esgotamento Profissional.

## ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to understand the risk factors associated with Burnout Syndrome (BS) in professors of the nursing course. The method refers to a research with a qualitative approach, being a descriptive exploratory study, carried out in the city of Coroatá-MA with 14 teaching nurses. Data were collected using a form with 16 questions related to mental health within the scope of work, due to the pandemic period, the form link was sent to the participants. The results were divided into categories, according to the questions of the research instrument and analyzed in the light of the hermeneutic-dialectical articulation. It was observed that work overload affects the health of professionals, causing physical and mental exhaustion. In this context, poor remuneration, precarious work, impaired interpersonal relationships within the work environment, little time for leisure and devaluation of the teaching professional, are factors that provide occupational stress and can generate BS.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Faculty Nursing; Occupational Stress; Burnout Professional.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este estudio fue comprender los factores de riesgo asociados al Síndrome de Burnout (SB) en profesores del curso de enfermería. El método se refiere a una investigación con enfoque cualitativo, siendo un estudio exploratorio descriptivo, realizado en la ciudad de Coroatá-MA con 14 enfermeras docentes. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de un formulario con 16 preguntas relacionadas con la salud mental en el ámbito de trabajo, debido al período de pandemia, el enlace del formulario fue enviado a los participantes. Los resultados fueron divididos en categorías, de acuerdo con las preguntas del instrumento de investigación y analizados a la luz de la articulación hermenéutico-dialéctica. Se observó que la sobrecarga de trabajo afecta la salud de los profesionales, provocando desgaste físico y mental. En ese contexto, la mala remuneración, el trabajo precario, las relaciones interpersonales deterioradas dentro del ambiente de trabajo, el poco tiempo para el ocio y la desvalorización del profesional docente, son factores que brindan estrés ocupacional y pueden generar SB.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Docentes de Enfermería; Estrés Laboral; Agotamiento Profesional.

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**INTRODUÇÃO**

The activities performed by teachers demand a lot of attention and responsibility, teaching is a complex social practice. Therefore, teachers do not consider and perform only teaching actions, on the contrary, it involves occupation, work relationship and how to reflect on teachers' autonomy and sense of responsibility, individually and collectively.<sup>(1)</sup>

There is a precariousness in the work process, and this causes an impact on the health of workers, it is observed, therefore,

the importance of creating new healthy and pleasurable ways of working, especially in the work process of the nursing professor, which is one of the categories most affected by chronic stress.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Burnout Syndrome (BS) is conceptually considered as work stress, which is characterized by the emotional and physical exhaustion of the worker. Burnout is defined as the combination of the words "burn" and "out" = exterior, that is, the term refers to burning the physical and emotional energy of a worker, it is considered a risk for professionals, especially teachers.<sup>(3)</sup>

In Brazil, about 30% of workers suffer from chronic stress and syndromes, which is the second reason for requesting leave. Teachers can also acquire this

syndrome, as there are many factors that can cause psychophysical illness, including: long working hours, customer service, low wages and little appreciation.<sup>(4)</sup>

Due to social and economic factors, they are susceptible to developing emotional changes, mental behavior disorders and the desire to escape, which can have a negative impact on their personal and professional lives.<sup>(5)</sup> Thus, the following question arises: What are the risk factors that characterize Burnout Syndrome in nursing teaching professionals?

The present study had as general objective: to understand the risk factors of Burnout Syndrome, in professors of the Nursing course, specific objectives: To identify how these factors can interfere in the lives of these professionals; Report the view of professionals regarding the susceptibility to develop the syndrome and Know the main symptoms reported by teachers that may be related to the syndrome.

**METHOD**

It refers to a research with a qualitative approach, being a descriptive exploratory study. Data analysis was carried out in the light of the hermeneutic-dialectic articulation. The research was carried out in the municipality of Coroatá in the State of Maranhão, with professors working at the State University of Mara-

não (UEMA) at the Center for Higher Studies of Coroatá (CESCOR), and the Evangelical College of the Middle North (FAEME).

The study population consisted of all 17 nursing professors working at the respective UEMA and FAEME institutions. However, the sample consisted of 14 professors who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate in the research. The inclusion criteria of the research were: Professional teachers of the Bachelor's degree in Nursing, with training in nursing. Professors who were starting their contract during the study period were excluded.

Data collection comprised the months from January to March 2022. Data were collected using a form with 16 questions related to mental health at work and sociodemographic data using the Google Forms platform. Due to the pandemic period, data collection took place by sending the link with the form together with the Free and Informed Consent Term (ICF) to the participants.

A análise desta pesquisa foi delineada a partir da articulação hermenêutica-dialética. Esta, se estabelece nas práxis e na busca pela compreensão da realidade<sup>(6)</sup>.

This method includes two levels of interpretation. The first, called "Level of fundamental determinations", is related to the socio-historical context of the group in question. The second level of

interpretation called “Meeting with the empirical facts” is divided into three stages: “Ordering the data”, related to the organization of the empirical material, involving transcription and notes of the observations made during the field research; “Classification of the data”, associated with the reading of the organized material, in order to construct the empirical categories; “Final analysis”, comprises the synthesis between the empirical and the theoretical, with the purpose of finding foundations for the questions and objectives formulated.<sup>(7)</sup>

The study was submitted to Plataforma Brasil and evaluated by the Research Ethics Committee, with the response of approval to carry out the research, opinion number: 5,185,518 and CAAE: 53665021.9.0000.5554. All participants were instructed on the study procedures and invited to sign the informed consent.

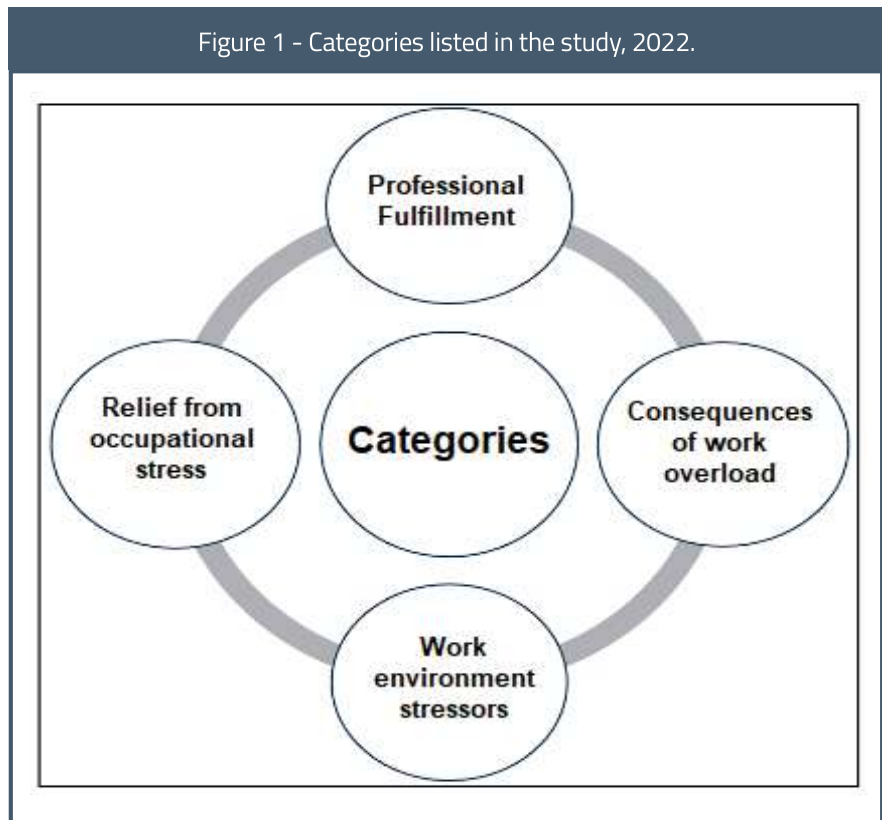
## RESULTS

14 professors from the respective institutions participated in the study, 09 participants from UEMA/CESCOR and 05 participants from FAEME, being aged between 23 and 35 years, with a greater predominance of females, most are single, more than half of the participants report not having children.

Among the professionals in the study, most work in teaching and nursing care, with an average of 4 years of service, a common predominance in the institutions, is that a significant number of professionals work in other cities, as well as in other institutions. The speeches of the participants were divided into categories, according to the questions of the research instrument. The categories are arranged in Figure 1.

### Professional fulfillment

[Professional fulfillment comprises many visions and different perspectives in the professional environment, as each one exposed their perception of professional satisfaction, about how remote



Source: Prepared by the author (2022).

teaching affected their mental health and, consequently, their relationships at work, for the interviewees, the devaluation of teaching work is still evident].

*I see my work as something promising, even in the face of the devaluation that we still face. I feel satisfied with the interpersonal relationships in my work environment. (V1)*

*I don't see any "recognition" or "promotion of position" coming, but I feel satisfied to be able to promote the restoration of my clients' health. (V2)*

[The teaching professional understands that the pandemic brought many limitations and with that he had to adapt quickly to changes and new methodologies of work and communication, for some the adaptation to this change was satisfactory, but for others

there was an overload of work and thus generating more stress].

*Amazingly, it took a lot of time to readjust the classes and materials, but on the other hand, it allowed me to spend a longer period at home and in that regard it was good. (V3)*

*Because this process of change and adaptation often brings with it insecurity and increased activities, causing overload and stress. (V7)*

### Consequences of work overload

[In fact, it was recognized by professionals that work overload affects the sleep pattern and makes it difficult for professionals to have leisure time with their families. It was evidenced that some feel mentally drained and many plan ahead to try to get a moment with

the family].

[As for insomnia]:

*Often. (V2)*

*Yup. Mainly mental exhaustion. (V3)*

[As for leisure and family]:

*I've been trying, but I feel like I need to organize myself better about it. (V6)*

*Through advance planning. (V7)*

### Work environment stressors

[It is known that stress at work is quite common, especially when there is a coexistence between people of different thoughts, life habits and culture. As for relationships in the work environment and difficulties during the pandemic, one of the participants' speech can be seen how this affects performance in the work process]:

*Due to the pandemic period, these relationships have become limited, thus needing more effort, dedication and empathy. (V1)*

[The others gave answers as "yes" or "no", but it was observed that most had already been in uncomfortable situations with co-workers].

### Relief from occupational stress

[In the face of all the stressors that teachers are subjected to on a day-to-day basis at work. Some turn to an outlet as a way to relieve stress. According to the professionals interviewed in the questionnaire applied, the use of alcohol and drugs (medicines) is evident as a way to minimize stress]:

*Yes. Herbal medicines. (V1)*

*Sometimes. (V6)*

[Other respondents gave vague answers, but it was observed that most of the survey participants use alcohol to relieve stress. Figure 2 shows, in word cloud format, the risk factors that may be associated with Burnout Syndrome in nursing professors that were raised by the study].

### DISCUSSION

According to the results, we noticed some life habits mentioned by the participants about the use of substances to de-stress and long working hours, making it impossible to practice physical activities and leisure. It is noteworthy that the incorporation into a healthy lifestyle is a relevant condition for the preservation of health status. However, it was pointed out that there are no positive behaviors in the control of stress and physical activity, suggesting that these are one of the main factors that affect the health pattern of teachers.<sup>(8)</sup>

Factors such as physical and mental exhaustion due to lack of support and

work overload contribute to the emotional exhaustion of teachers. Situations like these will cause insecurities at work, to deal with these emotions and often not knowing how to deal with conflicts. However, when teachers deprive themselves of practicing healthy habits integrated into their lifestyle, they can be putting their mental health at risk. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is essential for promoting health and reducing the risk of Burnout.<sup>(9)</sup>

In view of this perspective, the academic environment is considered a place that generates a lot of stress in the career of the teaching professional due to psychosocial and organizational factors of work, devaluation, low salary, the constant exposure to risk agents, the lack of human and material resources and the physical exhaustion due to the increase in the intensity and pace of work.<sup>(10)</sup>

Considering the first category of results, since the participants do not see teaching as something promising and do not feel satisfied with interpersonal relationships within the work environment,

Figure 2 – Risk factors that may be associated with Burnout Syndrome in nursing professors, 2022.



Source: Prepared by the author (2022).

this can be seen as a factor susceptible to the occurrence of the syndrome. Identifying profiles and early signs of the development of Burnout is essential for preventive interventions.<sup>(11)</sup>

BS affects professionals who have greater interaction with people, initially it was extensively investigated in professionals who work in the health area, but there was an increase in the symptoms of this syndrome in professionals in the area of education, which was verified by long years of research.<sup>(12)</sup>

The results of the present work show some factors that contribute to the beginning of the burnout syndrome and they are presented in the speeches of the participants. Professional devaluation and work overload are mentioned by the participants and this was evidenced because of technological advances and changes in the labor market, which corroborate the increase in competitiveness and requirements for qualification. In this context, professionals feel subject to accepting long working hours and low wages, contributing to increased occupational stress.<sup>(13)</sup>

Most teachers work double shifts, from the results we can see that there are reports of insomnia, consumption of alcohol and medication to relieve the stress caused by work, this given the connections with other institutions and the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students that are exhausting, these are high scores that trigger stressors that lead to the development of Burnout Syndrome.<sup>(14)</sup>

Another factor found in the results is the little leisure time with the family members who are fragile and it is verified in the teachers' reports. The time dedicated to work is exceeded and most of the time the professional takes work home, increasing stress and becoming a source of physical and mental exhaustion and occupational dissatisfaction. These stressful elements make the teaching profession have a strong incidence of factors that lead to Burnout.<sup>(8)</sup>

**In Brazil, about 30% of workers suffer from chronic stress and syndromes, which is the second reason for requesting leave. Teachers can also acquire this syndrome, as there are many factors that can cause psychophysical illness, including: long working hours, customer service, low wages and little appreciation.**

## CONCLUSION

In view of the results, it can be considered that university professors in the city of Coroatá are a vulnerable group to acquire a condition of Burnout Syndrome (BS). It should be noted that young, single, female, and childless teachers represent a group most likely to develop BS.

In view of the question that guided the study, it is evident that overwork, physical and mental exhaustion, poor pay, precarious work, impaired interpersonal relationships at work, little time for leisure, devaluation of the teaching professional, the lack of professional fulfillment, ties with multiple institutions are factors that generate occupational stress in these professionals. In this context, some symptoms such as insomnia and mental exhaustion reported by the participants were seen, thus making these professionals vulnerable to the development of BS.

However, we should not generalize the results obtained, therefore, they do not necessarily apply to other locations or professional classes. Furthermore, as it is something new, it is a subject that has not been addressed much and little research has been carried out, it is hoped that this study may provide support for the development of strategies such as psychological support, physical activity and healthy eating practices, interpersonal relationships outside the work environment that can help protect and prevent Burnout Syndrome in university professors in this post-pandemic period.

Among the limitations of the research, it can be mentioned the fact that the participants showed a certain difficulty in approaching and discussing the answers, some chose vague answers such as "yes" or "no" on the subject, making analysis and research results difficult, in this sense, other factors that may be associated with the syndrome in this class could have been addressed.

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