



Impact on healthcare workers' quality of life in the COVID-19 pandemic: a literature review

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has produced significant numbers of infected and deaths worldwide. According to a World Health Organization report, as of June 3, 2020, 6,287,771 confirmed cases and 379,941 deaths have been reported for the new coronavirus, primarily affecting the American and European continents. The speed with which Covid-19 has spread between and within countries has influenced the daily lives of billions of people on the planet (WHO, 2020).

With the pandemic advance, there was an overload in health services due to suspected and confirmed cases of Covid-19 and there may be a great demand for health services for demands related to Mental Health, since the negative repercussions that affect the collectivity, especially health professionals, caused by the pandemic and that cannot be neglected (SILVA et al., 2020).

In times of great difficulties faced, one realizes that most people have the strength and ability to deal with challenges. There are situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, that generate stress and distress, and in order to face them, it is possible to identify strategies used in the past that could be useful also for the present moment. Although the scenario is different, stress management strategies can again be accessed individually or collectively to seek resilience (PAHO, 2020).

Many were the aspects that exerted influence on the mental health of the world population, especially of health professionals, such as overcrowding of the health system, lack of available beds and respirators, hundreds of deaths daily, shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), loss or removal of co-workers, extensive shifts, great responsibility in decision making, distance from friends and family, and the fear of own contagion and transmission (PRADO et al., 2020).

The need for psychological resilience in health services operating in the Covid-19 context is emphasized, because it is strongly linked to the understanding of risk and protection factors. The risk



factors restrict the probability of overcoming the imposed needs, and their impact is reduced by the protective factors. So, even with the challenges imposed by the pandemic, health professionals will have less negative impacts on mental health if they have favorable conditions to perform their work (SOUSA; ARAÚJO, 2015).

The Covid - 19 pandemic caused great and numerous problems to the population and the health care professionals were very much affected by being more involved with the whole situation. Therefore, this study describes this crisis in the lives of these professionals.

2 OBJECTIVE

This paper aimed to discuss the impact on the quality of life of health care workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3 METHODOLOGY

An integrative literature review is a method that groups together the results of primary research on the same subject with the goal of synthesizing and analyzing that data to develop a more comprehensive explanation of a specific phenomenon (COOPER, 1982; COOPER, 1989).

This study consists of an integrative literature review by accessing scientific articles through a selection made in the databases Biblioteca Nacional de Medicina (MEDLINE), Literatura Latino Americana e do Caribe de Informação em Ciências da Saúde (LILACS) and in the virtual library Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO) and Google academic.

Inclusion criteria were: electronic scientific articles available in full, in Portuguese, English and Spanish, published from 2000 to 2021. The following descriptors were used: "quality of life", "health professionals"; "pandemic"; "COVID-19".

The exclusion criteria were: incomplete articles, articles that were not available in full and/or that were not available for free and that did not involve the theme of this research.

Therefore, 2036 studies were found in the aforementioned databases, and after reading the titles, abstracts, and full texts, 36 articles were filtered for this study.

4 DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, the pandemic as a result of Covid-19, represented one of the most physically and emotionally stressful situations for mankind. In Brazil, the incidence of Covid-19 was very complex with a high number of infected people and a high mortality rate. The severe consequences produced by the disease meant that a significant number of people required hospitalization and special care (AQUINO et al., 2020; CRUZ et al., 2020).



Healthcare workers involved in the fight against the Coronavirus were under a very high level of stress because they were on the front lines of the fight against Covid-19. This is also due to the fact that the workload has increased, the number of patients has risen during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the health care facilities have neglected to provide the health care workers with protective materials, thus leaving them even more exposed. Besides the possibility of transmission to their families, confinement, and in many cases, voluntary isolation, among other circumstances (TEIXEIRA et al., 2020; BEZERRA et al., 2020).

The word quality of life does not have only one meaning, it is used in a more generalized and comprehensive way, needing a better understanding, reflection and determination, being frequently compared or confused with the word health, in which they are usually expressed with the same meaning. To this end, health is not simply the lack of disease, but a state of physical and mental well-being as a whole, whereas quality of life is an individual perception of the state of satisfaction about their life situation, which can only be determined by the subject itself, covering various aspects, such as physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and economic being evaluated and diversified from person to person and from circumstance to circumstance, and may involve culture, values and lived experiences (MINAYO, 2000; HARTZ; BUSS,2000; MOREIRA et al, 2019; CORRÊA; DE OLIVEIRA; TAETS, 2020).

The Brazilian contingent of health professionals is quite vast and numerous. According to the Federal Councils of Nursing, Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Psychology, Nutrition, and Social Work, Brazil has 611,133 nurses, 561,432 physicians 336,358 dentists, 234,301 pharmacists, 206,170 physiotherapists, 393,497 psychologists; 161,952 nutritionists, and approximately 200,000 social workers. Of these, about 66% are employed in covid-19 reference hospitals and primary health care units. With the pandemic, professionals were forced to change their work routine, adapt to new protocols and a reality of uncertainty regarding the management and treatment of the new disease (BUFREM, 2020; SANTANA, et al., 1021; MATSUMURA et al., 2018).

Among the main problems affecting health care workers who work on the front lines of the Covid-19 fight, the high rate of contamination among them is the main problem. The lack of supply of masks, face shields, gloves, gowns, and sterile aprons, and their inadequate use, are associated with a high rate of infection among these professionals. In Brazil, about 7.3% of healthcare workers have been affected by Covid-19, compared to 5% in the general population. This difference occurred due to the constant contact of healthcare workers with infected particles and aerosols circulating in the workplace. This exposure is daily and constant (SILVA, et al., 2021).

Duarte et al (2020) stated in a research published in Canada after the outbreak of COVID-19, where symptoms of stress in frontline health care workers were pointed out, such as: feeling of danger



for rapid spread of the virus, damage caused by the disease in the professional environment, mood swings, working in an environment with extreme risk and large number of patients to assist.

In addition, the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medications negatively affects performance because a favorable context is not provided for the professional (SILVA et al, 2017; LAI et al, 2020).

The uncertainties, work overload, and risks to which the professionals were exposed with the growing demand of infected patients requiring hospital ward and intensive care care also affect the mental health of these workers. These impacts seem to be especially more intense for women, who have had to reconcile their dedication and work-related concerns with their health, family, and household duties. The social support provided to them can have a direct impact on their quality of life and overall health. Support for professionals who have children of school age and/or are in the risk group, by age group or other clinical condition, is crucial and can be decisive for the continuity of their work activity (CORREIA; RAMOS; VON, 2020).

Not only health, but the Brazilian economy also suffered from the pandemic, which directly affected doctors, nurses, technicians, and other multidisciplinary staff. These professionals found themselves in need of increasing their working hours. The absolute majority of the workers have a workload of 60 hours a week, 50% more than what is expected for the profession. The devaluation of the work of frontline professionals has led to states of physical and psychological exhaustion, a consequence of the overload experienced during the years in the battle against Covid-19, causing the professional psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression (SILVA, et al., 2020).

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has been the result of intense concern, for having caused a crisis in the social environment, standing out as the great global challenge of recent times. It should be added that during the pandemic, the population's fear intensified, as well as healthy people were affected by stress crises, anxiety and other mental disorders (WEBBER et al., 2020).

Approximately 10% of healthcare workers in China experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Furthermore, the research pointed out that healthcare professionals were approximately 2 to 3 times more likely to have PTSD symptoms when their family members and friends became ill (PAIANO, 2020).

Burnout syndrome, a condition of physical and mental exhaustion associated with professional life, was shown to be less prevalent among those who work in the front-line care of COVID-19 patients when compared to professionals who work in other wards (13% versus 39%, respectively). According to the authors, this unexpected result may indicate that the former, by directly addressing COVID-19, gained the perception of greater control of the situation and the workplace, which favored their engagement by avoiding attrition. Moreover, they could be closer to the main decision makers and with access to more timely and accurate information (WU et al., 2020).



It is noteworthy that the problems do not affect all health professionals in the same way, therefore, it is necessary a specific attention directed to the specificities of each one of them (TEIXEIRA et al., 2020). Therefore, the emotional suffering triggered, in addition to promoting a decrease in the quality of life of the health professional, impairs the assistance provided (CARVALHO et al., 2020; RIBEIRO; VIEIRA; NAKA, 2020), the quality of care and patient safety (DAL'BOSCO et al., 2020).

Given this, it is possible to affirm that the workers who are directly involved in the diagnosis, therapy and care of patients with COVID-19 are exposed to the risk of developing anguish. The increasing number of suspected and confirmed cases and the large number of deaths increase the tension and responsibility of these professionals who are not immune to this disease, but even so, they need to give continuity to the services, experiencing a scenario of panic and excessive stress, to which may be linked to the development of BS (BORGES, et al., 2021).

These workers do not have adequate support, given the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), lack of specific drugs for the treatment of the disease, insufficient ventilators and other essential medical equipment in the care of critically ill patients and shortage of intensive care beds, which caused to the professional extreme stress of having to decide what the priority of each patient, potentiating the development of feelings of charge, inability and guilt, and thus affecting the professional performance (AYANIAN, 2020; BEZERRA et al, 2020; LÓSS et al., 2020; MOREIRA; SOUSA; NÓBREGA, 2020; MOREIRA; SOUSA; NÓBREGA, 2020; BORGES et al., 2021; CARVALHO et al., 2020; RIBEIRO; VIEIRA; NAKA, 2020; AYANIAN, 2020; BORGES et al., 2021).

Barbosa et al., (2020) mention that health professionals are considered a part of the population more emotionally susceptible to stress factors, because besides the constant threat of infection, they are affected by other factors such as: increased workload, fear of contamination, misinformation, revolt against the ineffective measures adopted by the government. The high number of sick and dead during the pandemic causes an occupational psychosocial high, for the teams that work in the front line.

In a systematic review study conducted between December 31, 2019 and July 17, 2020, which consisted of the inclusion of 44 studies, being systematic reviews and meta-analyses, which investigated the prevalence of the mental health condition of health care workers and the impact of the outcomes on these professionals during the SARS-COV 2 pandemic. The objective proposed in this research was to identify the impact and risk factors in order to aid in future interventions. The authors observed the prevalence of 6 mental health conditions in health care workers during the SARS-COV 2 pandemic in a total of 15 countries. These conditions were depression, anxiety, insomnia, acute stress reaction, occupational burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder, with nurses and physicians being the most affected. The main risk factors for this clinical condition were suspected or confirmed SARS-



COV 2, insufficient individual protection measures, lack of family and/or social support, little knowledge about SARS-COV 2, pre-existing medical or psychiatric history, little professional experience (less than 10 years) and young professionals (SANGHERA et al, 2020).

With the pandemic of COVID-19 there has been increased workload, physical exhaustion, inadequate personal equipment, nosocomial transmission, and the need to make ethically difficult decisions about rationing care can have dramatic effects on the physical and mental well-being of health care workers (PAPPA et al, 2020).

There is a need for attention to the health of workers performing their work activities in intensive care settings, so that the political, institutional, and social aspects provide quality of life at work. The lack of resources for these services is also a problem that affects professional performance, which reinforces the aspects that have been presented in this discussion (SILVA et al, 2017; LAI et al, 2020).

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to the study, it can be noticed that many were the mental and physical health problems that health professionals were victims of and that can extend throughout their lives. Related to isolation, lack of equipment to work, long working hours, little psychological support, direct contact with patients, among other factors that contributed to cause damage that can be irreparable to the health of these professionals.

And the time of the pandemic of COVID-19 was one of intense work for health professionals. It is essential that measures be taken to mitigate the damage caused to these professionals, through actions and assistance projects in an attempt to recover health and reduce the damage caused to these professionals, because the quality of life of these professionals was very affected for all the reasons mentioned throughout the discussion of this work.

Therefore, there must be an initiative from public agencies to elaborate public health policies directed to these causes. It is important to emphasize that this duty is not only the state's responsibility, but also that of the private sector, which should also promote the health care of these professionals.

So, that through this study other researches may arise with new ideas to enrich science and the construction of new knowledge and practices to actually be active in this sense.



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