

Bullying in nursing professionals in the care of COVID-19*Bullying en profesionales de enfermería en el cuidado de la COVID-19**Bullying em profissionais de enfermagem no atendimento à COVID-19***Roberta Nazário Aoki¹**

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5602.20200240](https://dx.doi.org/10.5935/2675-5602.20200240)**Corresponding author:**

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Submission: 02-01-2022**Approval:** 02-18-2022**Abstract**

The aim was to evaluate the studies that address the occurrence of bullying in the nursing practice environment during the care of COVID-19 patients. This is an integrative review, covering the period from January 2020 to December 2021, through the combination of the descriptors bullying/bullying "AND" nursing/nursing "AND" COVID-19/COVID -19. Sixteen studies were identified, four of which met the inclusion criteria. Studies show the exposure of professionals to acts of bullying related to COVID-19 care protocols and acts performed by other health professionals and patients affected by COVID-19. The studies selected in the review present acts of bullying such as censorship, reprimand and violence experienced by nursing professionals during the care of patients affected by COVID-19.

Descriptors: Bullying; Nursing; COVID-19; Review; Working Environment.**Resumen**

El objetivo fue evaluar los estudios que abordan la ocurrencia de bullying en el ambiente de la práctica de enfermería durante el cuidado de pacientes con COVID-19. Se trata de una revisión integradora, que abarca el período de enero de 2020 a diciembre de 2021, mediante la combinación de los descriptores bullying/bullying "Y" enfermería/enfermería "Y" COVID-19/COVID -19. Se identificaron dieciséis estudios, cuatro de los cuales cumplieron con los criterios de inclusión. Los estudios muestran la exposición de los profesionales a actos de acoso escolar relacionados con los protocolos de atención de la COVID-19 y actos realizados por otros profesionales de la salud y pacientes afectados por la COVID-19. Los estudios seleccionados en la revisión presentan actos de bullying como censura, amonestación y violencia experimentados por profesionales de enfermería durante el cuidado de pacientes afectados por COVID-19.

Descriptoros: Bullying; Enfermería; COVID -19; Revisión; Ambiente de Trabajo.**Resumo**

Objetivou-se avaliar os estudos que abordam a ocorrência de atos de *bullying* no ambiente de prática da enfermagem durante o atendimento a pacientes de COVID-19. Trata-se de revisão integrativa, contemplando o período de janeiro de 2020 a dezembro de 2021, por meio da combinação entre os descritores *bullying/bullying "AND" enfermagem/nursing "AND" COVID-19/COVID -19*. Foram identificados 16 estudos dos quais quatro atenderam aos critérios de inclusão. Os estudos mostram a exposição dos profissionais a atos de *bullying* relacionados aos protocolos de atendimento à COVID-19 e atos praticados por outros profissionais de saúde e pacientes acometidos pela COVID-19. Os estudos selecionados na revisão apresentam atos de *bullying* como censura, repreensão e violência vividos por profissionais de enfermagem durante o atendimento de pacientes acometidos pela COVID-19.

Descritores: Bullying; Enfermagem; COVID-19; Revisão; Ambiente de Trabalho.

Introduction

Bullying in the workplace is a type of violence characterized by systematic and persistent behavior, demonstrated by repeated negative acts such as: insulting remarks, victim exposure, verbal and physical abuse, offensive provocation, isolation and social exclusion, or the constant degradation of the environment work and efforts during work activities¹. Studies highlight that in the health area, bullying represents up to a quarter of all cases of violence at work, in addition to pointing out that nursing professionals are more exposed to bullying by their peers, other professionals and even patients²⁻⁵.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the daily life of healthcare professionals in caring for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic has been frequently reported in the media. Faced with the chaos experienced by several health services in the face of the exponential demand for care, several difficulties faced by professionals were brought to the public and thus it was evidence not only the work overload, but also the moral suffering caused by acts of bullying to nursing workers and the need to ensure the safety, health and well-being of those who work on the front lines of healthcare services⁶.

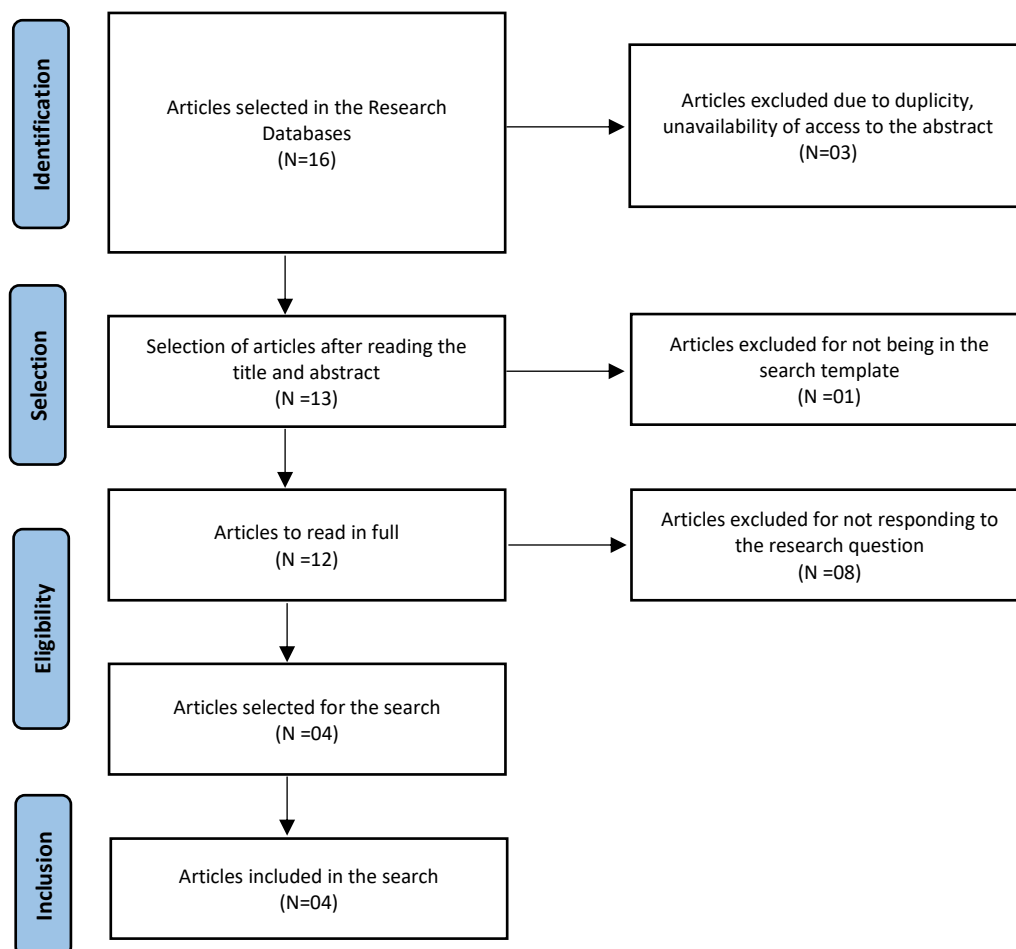
Studies that identify the occurrence of bullying in health services and that present peculiarities of the routine of nursing professionals, especially in critical moments of public health such as the COVID-19 pandemic, should be highlighted as a strategy for early identification of acts of violence and mitigation of possible harm to nursing professionals.

Considering that acts of bullying can lead to physical and emotional disorders that will directly affect care and the quality of health care, the objective of this study was to verify the occurrence of bullying suffered by health professionals during the care of patients affected by COVID-19.

Methodology

This is an integrative review study, which followed the steps: a) identification of the problem and elaboration of the research question; b) definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria and search in databases; c) definition of the information to be collected in the studies obtained in the search; d) categorization and analysis of this information; e) interpretation of results and f) presentation of the review⁷.

Figure 1. Flowchart prepared and adapted from the PRISMA recommendations for the process of identification, selection and inclusion of articles. Campinas, SP, Brazil, 2022



In the first phase, the formulation of the guiding question is highlighted: Were nursing professionals victims of bullying during care for patients with COVID-19? After defining the guiding question, we proceeded to the study selection phase.

In the second phase, the criteria for inclusion for the search in the databases were defined publications in full with all descriptors in Portuguese or English, from January 2020 to December 2021. The annals of congresses, letters to the editor, editorials and dissertations.

In the third phase, the search for studies was carried out electronically. The primary source databases Web of Science (WOS), MEDLINE/PubMed and Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS) and SCOPUS were consulted. To identify the target studies of the theme, the search strategy used standardized descriptors in the Descriptors in Health Sciences (DeCS) and in the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and the operators bullying/bullying "AND" nursing/nursing "AND" COVID-19/COVID-19 were selected.

The search in the databases resulted in 16 studies, which underwent a new selection stage. After applying the exclusion and analysis criteria, 04 studies were obtained as a result. The study selection flow is represented in Figure 1 and

considered the flowchart proposed in the PRISMA recommendations⁸.

After reading all the selected studies in full, the results will be categorized and characterized in terms of the occurrence of bullying suffered by nursing professionals in the care of COVID-19 patients.

The discussion of the review results was complemented by studies that sought to expand the evidence of the selected articles, allowing a more critical analysis of the categories found in the study.

Results

When accessing the databases with the crossing of DeCS and MeSH descriptors, a total of 16 articles were identified, six in MEDLINE/PubMed, seven in Web of Science, three in SCOPUS and in the LILACS database no article was identified. Twelve articles were excluded due to duplicity or because they did not refer to the theme and criteria proposed in this study, and four studies were selected. The results were organized in a descriptive table (Table 1) containing characteristics of the selected studies: year of publication, country of publication, authors, title, study objectives and main results.

Chart 1. Characterization of studies by country and year of publication, study title, authors, objectives and main results. Campinas, SP, Brazil, 2022

Year	Title	Authors	Objective	Main Results
2021 ⁹	Experiences of New Zealand registered nurses of Chinese ethnicity during the COVID-19 pandemic	Song J, McDonald C.	To investigate the experiences and challenges of Ethnic Chinese New Zealand registered nurses working during the COVID-19 pandemic.	47.06% of those reported negative experiences, including racial discrimination, bullying and judgment in the workplace.
2021 ¹⁰	Has the Covid Pandemic Strengthened or Weakened Health Care Teams? A Field Guide to Healthy Workforce Best Practices	Thompson R, Kusy M.	Identify lessons leaders can learn from the coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic that can help them strengthen and sustain a healthy workforce culture.	Teams that remained united and strengthened had in common close and positive leadership in the face of the challenges of the pandemic.
2021 ¹¹	Workplace Bullying and Patient Aggression Related to COVID-19 and its Association with Psychological Distress among Health Care Professionals during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Japan	Asaoka H, Sasaki N, Kuroda R, Tsuno K, Kawakami N.	To examine the prevalence of workplace bullying and patient aggression related to COVID-19 and its association with psychological distress among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 outbreak in Japan.	Of the 111 professionals who responded to the survey, 19 (17.1%) experienced some type of workplace bullying or patient aggression related to COVID-19.
2021 ¹²	Hearing the voices of Australian healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic	Rajah MA, Veness B, Berkovic D, Parker C, Greg K, Darshini A.	Explore working conditions and issues faced by Australian healthcare professionals.	Nurses reported lack or limited access to PPE and bullying or censorship by nurses from infection control sectors to other nurses limiting access to PPE and censoring the demonstrations of insecurity and fear.

Discussion

The evaluation of studies that address bullying among nursing professionals during the care of COVID-19 patients allowed us to systematize some results. The absence of national studies on the subject and few publications that portrayed the problem of bullying in health services during the pandemic stands out.

Regarding the objective of this study, it is about identifying whether nursing professionals were victims of bullying during the care of COVID-19 patients, the results of the integrative review can be categorized into two categories: bullying related to compliance with health

protocols and bullying practiced by professionals, patients and family members during health care during the pandemic.

Regarding bullying in compliance with health standards, Australian professionals reported pressure and censorship from experts regarding the use of personal protective equipment and personal demonstrations of insecurity on the part of nursing professionals. This coercive behavior reveals that the corruption of power and the lack of leadership are present in organizations and intend to silence and manipulate other professionals, which are hallmarks of bullying^{12,13}.



Bullying by colleagues, patients and family members has already been described in other studies related to violent acts against nursing professionals. Uncivil conduct in the workplace can manifest itself with racial comments, superficial listening, rudeness, withholding information, and verbal attacks. The active presence of managers in the nursing practice environment is shown to be a positive factor in the control and protection of professionals during nursing care for COVID-19 patients^{9-11,14}.

Regarding the acts of bullying practiced by patients during the pandemic period, the studies showed an already existing practice in the nursing routine that became more alarming when organizational attributes of health institutions were buried by the sudden increase in demand and consequent work overload, shortage of specialized professionals and overcrowding, factors already described in other studies on bullying in the health area^{9,11,15-17}.

Recent studies in this review show that despite the efforts of several organizations that propose protocols and codes of professional ethics, that bullying still persists in the daily practice of nursing professionals in several countries, a

scenario often characterized by the precariousness and undervaluation of professionals. It is necessary to establish strategies capable of improving the organizational climate and safety of professionals, minimizing stressors and favoring teamwork and professional satisfaction¹⁸⁻²¹.

Conclusion

This study has limitations regarding the lack of variety of research in the literature that addresses the worrying issue of cases of bullying suffered by nursing professionals in times of great demand for health services, evidencing a gap to be explored and that may favor the safety climate of institutions.

Few studies have addressed the practice of bullying in nursing professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The evidence of acts of violence that censor professional performance and harm professionals in physical and moral spheres should mobilize health service managers to promote preventive actions that guarantee the safety and well-being of professionals who are overloaded after months of direct assistance to COVID-19 patients.

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