

**The COVID-19 pandemic and the mental health of the nursing category***La pandemia de COVID-19 y la salud mental de la categoría de enfermería**A pandemia de COVID-19 e a saúde mental da categoria de enfermagem***Abstract**

The aim was to describe the importance of mental health in the daily life of nursing professionals in the COVID-19 pandemic. This research has a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive approach, articles were used from 2017 to 2021, in which the narrative literature review was chosen. Where articles were selected and grouped in an analytical framework and analyzed through categories Three categories were created through this: 1- Contextualizing the COVID-19 pandemic, 2- Understanding mental health, 3- Nursing professionals and the COVID pandemic -19. With the pandemic of the disease caused by COVID-19, it has been causing damage on a global scale, causing panic in the population. Faced with this reality, nursing professionals are part of one of the most affected groups, being exposed to the risk of contagion and emotional pain that considerably affects their mental health. This study is relevant for nursing professionals to recognize the importance of mental health in their daily lives, aiming at a better working condition. Taking care of human complexity demands too much from nursing professionals, so this study contributes to showing the importance of mental health care for nursing professionals who are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Descriptors:** Pandemic; Mental Health; Nursing Professionals; COVID-19; Psychiatric Nursing.

**Resumen**

El objetivo fue describir la importancia de la salud mental en el cotidiano de los profesionales de enfermería en la pandemia del COVID-19. Esta investigación tiene un enfoque cualitativo, exploratorio y descriptivo, se utilizaron artículos del 2017 al 2021, en los cuales se optó por la revisión narrativa de la literatura. Donde los artículos fueron seleccionados y agrupados en un marco analítico y analizados a través de categorías. Mediante esto se crearon tres categorías: 1- Contextualizando la pandemia del COVID-19, 2- Entendiendo la salud mental, 3- Los profesionales de enfermería y la pandemia del COVID-19. Con la pandemia de la enfermedad provocada por el COVID-19, ha venido causando estragos a escala mundial, provocando el pánico en la población. Ante esta realidad, los profesionales de enfermería forman parte de uno de los grupos más afectados, estando expuestos al riesgo de contagio y dolor emocional que afecta considerablemente su salud mental. Este estudio es relevante para que los profesionales de enfermería reconozcan la importancia de la salud mental en su cotidiano, visando una mejor condición de trabajo. Cuidar la complejidad humana exige demasiado de los profesionales de enfermería, por lo que este estudio contribuye a mostrar la importancia del cuidado de la salud mental para los profesionales de enfermería que están en la primera línea de la pandemia de la COVID-19.

**Descritores:** Pandemia; Salud mental; Profesionales de Enfermería; COVID-19; Enfermería Psiquiátrica.

**Resumo**

Objetivou-se descrever a importância da saúde mental no cotidiano do profissional de enfermagem na pandemia por COVID-19. Essa pesquisa possui uma abordagem qualitativa, de caráter exploratório e descritivo, foram utilizados artigos no período de 2017 a 2021, no qual optou-se pela revisão narrativa de literatura. Onde foram selecionados artigos e agrupados em um quadro analítico e analisado através de categorias. Através disso foram elaboradas três categorias: 1- Contextualizando a pandemia de COVID-19, 2- Entendendo a Saúde mental, 3- Os Profissionais de enfermagem e a pandemia de COVID-19. Com a pandemia da doença causada pela a COVID-19, vem causando prejuízos em escala global, provocando pânico na população. Diante desta realidade, os profissionais de enfermagem fazem parte de um dos grupos mais afetados, sendo expostos ao risco de contagio e a dor emocional que afeta de maneira considerável a sua saúde mental. Este estudo é relevante para os profissionais de enfermagem reconhecerem a importância da saúde mental no seu cotidiano, visando uma melhor condição de trabalho. Cuidar da complexidade humana exige demais dos profissionais de enfermagem, portanto esse estudo contribui para mostrar a importância do cuidado com a saúde mental dos profissionais de enfermagem que estão na linha de frente na pandemia da COVID-19.

**Descritores:** Pandemias; Saúde Mental; Profissionais de Enfermagem; COVID-19; Enfermagem Psiquiátrica.

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## Introduction

Nursing does not consist of a set of specific skills, nursing is a profession where care is essential for its practice defined as art, science, intuition and sensitivity. Human care becomes a challenge, due to its complexities that never end and cannot be fully cared for. In the path of illness, where fragility, fears, anxieties and discomfort arise, it is where attention to the human being's emotions is most necessary<sup>1,2</sup>.

The work of a nursing professional is marked by several impositions: dealing with loss/death, pain and suffering, added to precarious working conditions and low pay, such factors together with a high level of emotional involvement can develop stress or depression syndrome. Burnout, which is associated with the physical and psychological exhaustion of professionals<sup>3</sup>.

In the daily life of nurses, ambiguous feelings are generated: either in experiences of pleasure, or in experiences of suffering. Such feelings arise because there is the possibility of being useful while they are caring and, on the other hand, they may be faced with difficult situations if they are overcome<sup>4</sup>.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of infirmity, may show signs of their state of mental health, since each person can have a vision or interpretation of a behavior, that is, mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his abilities, being able to deal with the normal stress of life, being able to work productively and making a contribution to the community, being of extreme importance for collective and individual capacity, thus being able to say that mental health means flexibility<sup>5</sup>.

At the end of 2019, a new disease was detected, which had the first report in the province of Wuhan in China, called COVID-19, caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus, its high index contagion and rapid transmissibility led the WHO to classify it as a pandemic.

The COVID-19 can manifest symptomatically or not, causing widespread panic in the population due to little knowledge about the disease<sup>5</sup>.

This research aims to gather data in order to clarify the questions that guide it: "Did the COVID-19 pandemic lead to the mental suffering of nursing professionals?" and "Is it important to take care of the mental health of nursing professionals?"

Given the above, this study aimed to investigate the importance of mental health in the daily life of nursing professionals. The objective was to describe the importance of mental health in the daily life of nursing professionals.

The justification for the study is the scarcity of studies on the subject and to support nurses on the importance of mental health care in their daily lives, with relevance to the current theme, providing a foundation for research on interventions in their work environment. In addition, the research can contribute to other investigations on the subject, based on the academic and scientific scope.

## Methodology

The present study is a narrative review of the literature, descriptive and exploratory, with a qualitative approach. Data were collected from 2015 to 2021, through the reading of scientific articles that will cover the literature focused on the nursing area on the mental health of nursing professionals in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualitative research does not focus on quantifying data, but aims to promote and compare data and information on the subject, with a solid theoretical basis regarding the research object, through the study of the researcher's interest in questioning. Scientific research with a qualitative approach seeks to find solutions to the reality experienced, whether in terms of knowledge or in the historical-social plan<sup>6</sup>.

The qualitative research method is based on the interpretation in which the subjects speak and express. It is not just a decoding of data, since, in order to understand the research object, it is necessary to understand the context in which it is inserted<sup>7</sup>.

Narrative review studies are broad publications, with the objective of describing and discussing the development of a given subject, from a theoretical and contextual point of view. Narrative reviews consist of analyzes of literature published in books, articles from printed or electronic magazines with the author's personal interpretation and critical analysis<sup>8</sup>.

The bibliographic search was carried out in the electronic database of Google Scholar, Scielo Platform, in the Virtual Health Library and in the LILACS virtual library. ), Manuals from the Ministry of Health of Brazil and WHO. The descriptors: "Mental Health", "Pandemics", "Nursing Professionals" and "COVID-19" were used to select the articles. The following inclusion criteria were used: research articles, in their entirety, available in Portuguese, English, Spanish or Chinese, which addressed the researched theme and were available online and free of charge, with no time frame. publications with information other than the topic addressed.

A synthesis of each production was developed, using the comparisons of the main results that respond to the research, emphasizing the differences and similarities, so the analysis of the data will be in the descriptive form, allowing the evaluation of the articles as a response to the research objectives and analyzed in the body of the results text of the articles found. The selected studies will be grouped in an analytical framework.

## Results and Discussion

In the analysis and discussion of the results of the narrative review of the literature, 30 articles were identified using the defined search criteria, where the references were read in full and of these 23 studies were excluded, as they addressed different themes with the inclusion of the process with the method of organization of results. Thus, seven were included in this review. From the analysis, three categories emerged: 1- Contextualizing the COVID-19 pandemic, 2- Understanding mental health, 3- Nursing professionals and the COVID-19 pandemic.



Chart 1. Variables used for analysis of localized publications. Cabo Frio, RJ, Brazil, 2021

Title	Journal	Year	Objective	Descriptors	Languages
Mental health survey of 230 physicians in a tertiary infectious disease hospital for COVID-19	Revista Brasileira de Higiene Industrial e Doenças Ocupacionais	2020	Investigate the mental health status of frontline medical clinic staff in a hospital in the 2019 novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic, and to provide a theoretical basis for psychological intervention.	Anxiety COVID-19 Medical staff Stress disorder post-traumatic	Mandarin
The mental health of medical workers in Wuhan, China, dealing with the 2019 novel coronavirus	Lancet psychiatry	2020	Understanding the mental health response following a public health emergency can help health professionals and communities prepare for a population's response to a disaster.	COVID-19 Coronavirus Mental health SARS-CoV-2	English
Pandemic of fear and COVID-19: impact on mental health and possible strategies	Revista Debates in Psychiatry	2020	Understanding the psychological and psychiatric repercussions of a pandemic, the emotions involved such as fear and anger must be considered and observed.	Pandemic COVID-19 Mental Health	English
Saúde mental dos profissionais de enfermagem do Brasil no contexto da pandemia COVID-19: ação do conselho federal de enfermagem	Cogitare Enfermagem		Reflect on the mental health of Brazilian nursing professionals in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.	Nursing Mental health Pandemic Nursing professionals	Portuguese
Protocolo para tratamento psicológico em pandemias: as demandas em saúde mental produzidas pela COVID-19	Revista Debates in Psychiatry	2020	Discuss and suggest studies for the development of protocols for mental health care in the face of the emergency situation and crisis provided by COVID-19.	Mental health COVID-19 Pandemic Protocol Psychological impacts	Portuguese
Depressão e ansiedade em profissionais de enfermagem durante a pandemia da COVID-19	Escola Anna Nery	2021	Analyze the prevalence of symptoms of depression or anxiety and associated factors in nursing team professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Coronavirus infections Mental suffering Mental health Depression Anxiety	Portuguese
The mental health care model in Brazil analyses of the funding, governance's processes and mechanisms of assessment	Revista Saúde Pública	2017	Analyze the current stage of the mental health care model of the Unified Health System, according to its funding, governance processes and evaluation mechanisms.	Mental Health Services Health Services Administration Personal Health Management Service Evaluation	English

### Contextualizing the COVID-19 Pandemic

In this category, it was contextualized about COVID-19, which is a respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus that presented itself as the second main cause of the common cold (after rhinovirus). There are seven known human coronaviruses (HCoVs), including SARS-CoV (which causes severe acute respiratory syndrome), MERS-COV (Middle East respiratory syndrome), and SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes coronavirus disease). 2019 - COVID-19). The new coronavirus agent was discovered on December 31, 2019, after cases registered in Wuhan, China<sup>9</sup>.

Coronaviruses (CoVs) are a large family of viruses, those that cause respiratory illnesses in humans, this name was given to it due to its characteristic resembling that of a crown, the first appearance of this infectious agent was

identified in humans was in 1937, However, it was only described as a coronavirus in 1965 when a microscopic analysis was carried out, making it possible to visualize its shape. From the common cold to more serious illnesses like Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) the coronavirus. CoVs are divided into four genera; alpha-, beta-, gamma- and delta-CoV, the most common types that infect humans are alpha coronavirus 229E and NL63, and beta coronavirus OC43, HKU1 all of which are known to cause respiratory disease<sup>5</sup>.

The WHO declared, on January 30, 2020, that the outbreak of the disease caused by the new coronavirus has become a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. On March 11, 2020, COVID-19 was characterized by the WHO as a pandemic due to its rapid expansion in the world<sup>10</sup>.



## Understanding Mental Health

Mental health is a fundamental part of health. The WHO constitution states that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Mental health is the gateway to physical health. All our pains, insecurities, fears and worries activate the hypothalamus, which produces hormones that alter our entire metabolism. Many people suffer from pathologies such as cancer, heart attack, stroke, skin diseases, weakened immunity, among others, in response to life's difficulties. An important point to emphasize is that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities<sup>5</sup>.

Mental health includes, among many factors, the ability to feel well-being and harmony, the ability to positively handle adversity and conflicts, recognition and respect for limits and disabilities, satisfaction in living, sharing and relating with other individuals, social, psychological and biological factors that affect an individual's level of mental health at any given time<sup>15</sup>.

It is understood that unconditional acceptance is what guarantees respect for the experiences of others, or emotional suffering regardless of any condition so that an empathetic understanding can be achieved. Emotional support goes beyond the obvious, it is being able to detect and recognize the subjective behind words and being attentive to analyze each gesture and expression in a holistic way<sup>16</sup>.

Each individual reacts differently to stressful situations, and in the pandemic it is no different, depending on several factors such as education, life history, individual characteristics and the community where they live. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has produced an increase in symptoms of anxiety, stress, fear, depression and exhaustion, especially in nursing professionals, who suffer from uncertainties, anxieties, low pay, precarious working conditions, making it increasingly more susceptible to developing disorders such as Burnout syndrome, which is emotional and physical exhaustion, where the main cause is overwork, common in professionals who work under pressure and with a high level of responsibility<sup>10,17</sup>.

## Nursing Professionals and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Nursing professionals were instituted in accordance with Law No. 7,498/86, which provides for the Regulation of Nursing Exercises, where nursing is divided into three levels: auxiliary, nursing technician, nurse and midwife. The training of nursing assistants and technicians is at a medium level, therefore requiring a high school education. The university nursing course is at a higher level and, as of 2010, the mandatory workload of the undergraduate course has increased to 4,000 hours, distributed over 10 periods over a period of five years, in accordance with Resolution CNE/CES n.º 3/2001<sup>18</sup>.

In Brazil there are thousands of nursing professionals and according to the Federal Nursing Council (COFEN) they are active, registering a total of 2,488,210 distributed in: 433,536 Nursing assistants; 1,440,543 nursing technicians; 613,808 Nurses and 323 Midwives, who form

The first patients had severe pneumonia of unknown cause, the only factor in common among those infected was the fact that they had worked in the vicinity of a market that sold fish, seafood and live wild animals<sup>5</sup>.

The most common symptoms associated with COVID-19 infection are fever, cough and difficulty breathing. There may also be a sore throat, runny nose, headaches and/or muscle aches and tiredness. In more severe cases, it can lead to severe pneumonia with acute respiratory failure, kidney and other organ failure, and eventual death<sup>11</sup>.

The mutations of a virus are given when, upon entering a cell, the virus replicates, that is, it creates a copy of itself to spread. With each replication, an error occurs in the copy of the genome that can have a more or less important impact on the behavior of the virus and a virus with one or more mutations is said to be a variant of the original virus, the more circulating the more they can change and these alterations result in a variant that better adapts to the environment compared to the original virus<sup>10</sup>.

SARS-CoV-2 tends to change more slowly than other viruses such as HIV or flu viruses, this condition can be explained by the virus's internal proofreading mechanism which can correct the error when it makes copies of itself, most changes have little or no impact on virus ownership. However, depending on where the alterations are located in the genetic material of the virus they can affect the properties of the virus such as its transmission being able to spread more easily or the gravity being able to cause more serious illnesses, so in the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021, the variants of SARS-CoV-2 have been identified in high-incidence settings that appear to be more transmissible than existing strains. The possibilities of several variants are enormous, but some are drawing more attention around the world: 'Cluster5' which was identified in Denmark, B.1.1.7 identified in the United Kingdom, B.1.351 identified in South Africa and B.1.1.248-B.1.1.28/P1 that was identified in Japan in a Brazilian traveler<sup>12</sup>.

This disease represents a large-scale infectious public health event that radically changes the structures and investments of health systems in the world, becoming a critical event that the international community registers in history. As unique characteristics of this event, the suspicion of its origin in the human-environment-animal interface and its rapid expansion as a result of unprecedented levels of human interconnectivity, mobility and global trade stand out<sup>13</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing enormous damage to individuals, especially frontline workers, nursing professionals, who deal daily with situations that impact their well-being, facing uncertainties, anxieties and concerns. Due to the emergence of the constant mutation of the virus, resulting in increased job insecurity. Health professionals do not feel protected when facing COVID-19, and the main reason, for 23% of them, is related to the lack, scarcity and inappropriate use of PPE (64% revealed the need to improvise equipment) and directly affecting the physical and mental health of professionals. Being of extreme necessity to the attention in the physical and mental health of the professionals<sup>14</sup>.



the largest health category working with patients<sup>19</sup>.

Professionals learn to work in different scenarios, one moment of pressure, another in a creative way, with empathy, dedication, responsibility, respect for the dignity and individuality of each patient, it is a profession in which the way it is performed makes all the difference, demonstrating knowledge, attention, safety, acting professionally will be providing quality care always aiming at the patient's well-being, however, they face additional challenges during outbreaks of infectious diseases, including service overload, shortage of human and material resources, uncertainty of effectiveness of treatments used and still concerns with the management of their own health, and that of their families and patients<sup>16</sup>.

These professionals, therefore, easily become targets of stressful experiences in the context of pandemics, such as: overload, fatigue, exposure to large-scale deaths, frustrations related to the quality of care, threats, aggression and increased risk of being infected. In this case, fear and uncertainty emerge that can negatively influence the behavior and general well-being of these professionals and, consequently, interfere with sustaining the quality of health care for the population<sup>20</sup>.

In the current scenario, where nursing professionals have been suffering from the uncertainties and fears of COVID-19, the Federal Nursing Council determined the National Commission on Mental Health Nursing to carry out care to be carried out by specialist nurses, masters or doctors in mental health to the professionals who are on the front lines working in the pandemic, this feat was achieved on the legal and ethical basis of Laws n.º 7498/89, COFEN Resolution n.º 599/2018, which approves a technical standard for the nursing team in mental health and psychiatry and COFEN Resolution No. 564/2017 approves the Code of Ethics for Nursing Professionals and explains the ethical basis of care<sup>21</sup>.

The impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of nursing professionals working in the countries, together with the perception of reality itself, made evident the relevance of implementing strategic psychosocial care services, based on evidence, as a way to mitigate stress and intense suffering.

According to study<sup>22</sup>, the activities developed by the nursing team, as causes of mental suffering, have promoted debates and discussions, due to the high prevalence of mental disorders, which include depression and anxiety, as

well as situations related to stress.

It should be noted that actions such as those that the representative body of the COFEN profession has promoted with virtual consultations are of great relevance; since their collaboration, either directly for these professionals, or indirectly, for the population that is assisted through the SUS, avoiding the risk of collapse in the system due to lack of professionals, due to psychological suffering, since the contributing factors for the mental sufferings are related to working conditions<sup>23</sup>.

Interpersonal involvement among nursing professionals leads to a moment of suffering in this period of the COVID-19 pandemic, which should reflect on a possible space for intervention and listening to these professionals, since nursing is the profession whose priority characteristic is the permanence with the patient for whom care is developed.

## Conclusion

In the present study, knowledge was systematized about the importance of mental health in the daily life of nursing professionals in the Pandemic the importance of caring for the human complexity that demands from health professionals, who are involved, feelings of fear, anxiety and discomfort, and for that the human's emotional attention becomes more and more necessary every day.

The effects of the new coronavirus pandemic extrapolated the health area. They permeate society as a whole, those who live and will still go through changes caused by COVID-19. Social isolation, distancing, public health actions, economic measures, unemployment, a large number of deaths.

The current scenario that nursing professionals are experiencing is bringing great harm to the life of the category, both professionally and psychologically, triggering several factors that harm their health, such as anxiety, stress, fear of the risk of becoming infected and of infecting others. their family members, ambivalence, depression and physical or psychological exhaustion.

It is necessary to take actions aimed at improving working conditions and the need for emotional support for these professionals, who, due to the nature of their work, live in adverse conditions on a daily basis and, therefore, may experience psychological distress. appreciation of the profession through its competent and representative bodies and public.

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