International Journal of Neuroscience Research (ISSN:2572-8385)

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Maria Zilda Lacerda Assunção de Mello^{1*}, Alexia Venâncio Fideles¹, Raissa Lemos Fontes¹, Ramon Gonçalves de Melo Valente², Vitória Maria Gomes Rabelo¹, Héberte de Santana Arruda³.

¹Acadêmica de Medicina da Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, Recife.; ²Acadêmico de Medicina da UNINASSAU, Recife.; ³Mestrando do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Dentística/Endodontia da Faculdade de Odontologia de Pernambuco.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess the impact on mental health of health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Methods:** Narrative review of the literature, of a descriptive character, carried out through bibliographic survey through a search strategy based on the terms: Mental health, Health professionals and Covid-19. Inclusion criteria were adopted: articles published in Portuguese, English and Spanish indexed in the PUBMED / MEDLINE, SciELO and VHL databases published between February 2020 and August 2020. **Results:** The COVID-19 pandemic established a chaos in all sectors of society, the health sphere was the most affected. The routine of health professionals was abruptly altered by the constant confrontation of an enormous pressure that goes from working in an environment with a high risk of contamination without adequate protection, excessive working hours, frustration, lack of contact with family to experiences of discrimination by a small part of society who see them as potential vectors of disease transmission. **Conclusion:** The pandemic was extremely harmful to the health of health professionals, affecting their emotional balance. It was shown that the pandemic scenario caused a lot of damage, as these professionals were exposed to high and intense workloads, which caused physical and mental exhaustion, leading to a feeling of weakness and professional insecurity.

Keywords: Mental health. Health professionals. Covid-19.

*Correspondence to Author:

Maria Zilda Lacerda Assunção de Mello

Acadêmica de Medicina da Universidade Católica de Pernambuco, Recife.

How to cite this article:

Maria Zilda Lacerda Assunção de Mello, Alexia Venâncio Fideles, Raissa Lemos Fontes, Ramon Gonçalves de Melo Valente, Vitória Maria Gomes Rabelo, Héberte de Santana Arruda. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS. International Journal of Neuroscience Research, 2021; 5:14.

eSciPub
eSciPub LLC, Houston, TX USA.
Website: <https://escipub.com/>

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has been generating a high degree of stress among health professionals on the front lines, including workers directly involved in dealing with the patient as well as those in support services, in combating a virus of unknown pathophysiology and varied clinical manifestations. The lack of information, the high exposure to viral load and the fear of contagion (often fatal) have compromised the mental health of these professionals because the pressure to deal with an unknown situation which has been killing thousands of people around the world, exposing prolonged and exhausting work shifts to meet the needs of their patients, deal with the various daily deaths, the lack of hospital and outpatient facilities, and in addition, the need to abdicate being close to loved ones in order to protect them. have made the diagnosis of depression, anxiety, insomnia and mental disorders recurrent among this class of professionals, affecting mental balance, which is indispensable for the function they perform, thus neglecting their mental health so that the population have faster and more humane care¹⁻³.

Covid-19 is a disease that has been declared a pandemic, since it covered the entire population of the planet, presenting a rapid profile of transmissibility among people who may trigger several symptoms or none. It is caused by the class of coronaviruses present in severe acute respiratory syndrome 2, SARS-CoV2, which affects single-stranded RNA⁴. The most common clinical manifestations attack the respiratory system, but due to its high malignancy, other body systems go bankrupt. The expressive number of cases scared the world and health professionals, as they had to deal with the lack of hospital structure. Outpatient clinics and intensive care units had to be created, literally, overnight to accommodate the number of individuals with severe respiratory symptoms. Governments declared a state of public calamity so that funds could be released more quickly so that health would not collapse,

which was inevitable⁵. As there are still no specific drugs and vaccines approved for this disease, patients are being treated with broad spectrum and symptomatic antibiotics. In some countries, research is at an advanced stage, testing on humans, however, a specific treatment capable of inhibiting the enzyme that replicates DNA and that causes the virus to enter the cell and replicate itself has not yet been developed. so fast⁴.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), social distance is essential to the safety of the population, however, for health professionals, the orientation was exactly the opposite with the call for doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, among others, aiming to combat the pandemic⁶. Faced with this situation, over the months, it was noticed that some professionals started to develop symptoms corresponding to Burnout Syndrome, defined as a psychic disorder characterized by the state of emotional tension and stress caused by exhausting work conditions that impairs the physical aspect person, leading to professional exhaustion⁸. In addition to anxiety and depression, feelings of hyperstimulation, anger, loss of motivation at work, difficulty concentrating and / or sleeping were identified among emergency service workers. If this symptom persists over the months, it can trigger a feeling of lack of control and uncertainty caused by the countless daily deaths leading to high levels of depersonalization and low professional achievement, resulting in exhaustion⁵.

The pandemic drastically changed the routine of health professionals, which led to the removal of many of them not only due to contagion, but also due to the intense suffering to which they were subjected⁸. In the face of the chaos that was installed in the world by Covid-19, the purpose of this review was to assess the mental health of professionals who work at the front line and need to deal with all the frustrations of the health system, the lack of information on the pathophysiology of a virus unknown, physical

and mental exhaustion, fear of death after experiencing countless daily losses, all without any psychological support.

METHODS

A descriptive narrative review of the literature was carried out through a bibliographic survey using a search strategy based on the terms: Mental health, Health professionals and Covid-19. The articles found were analyzed to verify compliance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The following inclusion criteria were adopted: articles published in Portuguese, English and Spanish indexed in the PUBMED / MEDLINE, SciELO and VHL databases published between February 2020 and August 2020. As exclusion criteria: incomplete articles, studies without information on sampling and analysis performed; theses and dissertations. Considering the scientific bases analyzed, nine related references met the established selection criteria.

RESULTS

The pandemic arrived and created chaos in all sectors of society, the state of public calamity was decreed so that funds were released in a less bureaucratic way, aiming to supply the minimum necessary in the midst of the crisis that was installed. Health professionals were caught by surprise with contamination happening quickly, hospitals lacking the structure to accommodate such a demand, and there is no preparation for coping with the situation, which reflected in their psychological balance⁵. Specific areas for the treatment of covid-19 were isolated, field hospitals were set up, and these workers worked in intense regimes, sometimes even doubling their hours since several colleagues were removed for being contaminated or for being classified as a group of workers. risk, a fact that certainly contributed to the psychological upheaval of these workers⁴. The routine of these professionals has been marked by constant coping with enormous pressure, ranging from working in an environment with a high risk of contamination

without adequate protection, excessive working hours, frustration, lack of contact with family to experiences of discrimination due to a small part of society that sees them as potential vectors of disease transmission⁸. In addition, dealing with a growing group of patients with Covid-19, belonging to all age groups, the constant concerns about not infecting family members, especially the elderly, the immunocompromised or with chronic diseases as well as treating and losing colleagues of work that became contaminated in the exercise of the profession led to a picture of psychological suffering, which results in mental illness of this class of workers, inducing, in some cases, aversion to work⁷.

The fear of exposure to the virus, living with the suffering of patients, the direct relationship with the imminence of death, social isolation in favor of health in addition to the excessive workload, over the months began to reflect on the quality of life of these professionals with various reports of anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, even triggering Burnout syndrome, assessed with possible post-traumatic stress disorders, depression anxiety⁷. People affected by professional stress often find that the difficulties they went through in their work routine were a result of the syndrome only after reaching extreme levels. Generally, this professional class tends to delay the management of their concerns by trying to demonstrate that it is all under their control, however in the face of the chaos installed in the hospitals, the fear for life and a state of uncertainty about the future, there was no time to thinking / planning a psychological follow-up and this situation undermined the emotional balance, leading some to discredit their professional skills³.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic was extremely harmful to the health of these professionals, it affected their emotional balance, as well as that of their families. The routine and the current scenario caused a lot of damage because these professionals were exposed to high and intense workloads, which caused physical and mental

exhaustion, leading to a feeling of weakness and professional insecurity.

It is essential to emphasize that the WHO guidelines must still be followed, the pandemic is not over, the distance is necessary and the population needs to stimulate and recognize all the efforts of the health professionals who worked and work in the front line against COVID-19, leaving to socialize with your loved ones to ensure care for those in need.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Almaguer AYC, Alvarez AKG, Santos EDZ. Gestão da segurança psicológica do pessoal de saúde em situações de emergência por COVID-19 em contexto hospitalar ou de isolamento. Rev. Cubana Enferm [Internet]. 2020 (2); vol. 36.
- [2]. Zhang WR, Wang K, Yin L, Zhao WF, Xue Q, Peng M, et al. Mental health and psychosocial problems of medical health workers during the COVID-19 epidemic in China. Psychother Psychosom. Jul/2020. vol. 89. nº 4: p. 242-250.
- [3]. Schmidt B, Crepaldi MA, Bolze SDA, Silva LN, Demenech LM. Saúde mental e intervenções psicológicas diante da pandemia do novo coronavírus (COVID-19). Estudos de Psicologia (Campinas). Mai/2020. vol.37.
- [4]. Pereira MD, Torres EC, Pereira MD, Antunes PFS, Costa CFT. Emotional distress of nurses in the hospital setting in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. RSD [Internet]. Jun/2020. vol. 9. nº 8.
- [5]. Miranda F, Santana L, Pizzolato A, Sarquis. Condições de trabalho e o impacto na saúde dos profissionais de enfermagem frente a COVID-19. Rev. Cogitare Enfermagem. 2020. vol. 25.
- [6]. Teixeira CFS, Soares CM, Souza EA, Lisboa ES, Pinto ICM, Andrade LR, et al . A saúde dos profissionais de saúde no enfrentamento da pandemia de Covid-19. Ciênc. saúde coletiva [Internet]. Set/2020. vol. 25. nº 9.
- [7]. Luceño-Moreno L, Talavera-Velasco B, García-Albuérne Y, Martín-García J. Symptoms of posttraumatic stress, anxiety, depression, levels of resilience and Burnout in Spanish health personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Int J Environ Res Public Health. Jul/2020. vol. 17. nº 15.
- [8]. Walton M, Murray E, Christian MD. Mental health care for medical staff and affiliated healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eur Heart J Acute Cardiovasc Care. 2020 Apr. vol. 9. nº3.