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## Prevalence in the Use of Anxiolytics Among Nursing Professionals: an Integrative Review

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Anxiety disorders have increased significantly in the last century, mainly due to the profound transformations that occurred in the economic and cultural context that were accompanied by the pressures of a modern, technological and mainly increasingly competitive society. Health professionals have a weakness and ease regarding the use of psychotropic drugs due to excessive stress, excessive workload, charges, dissatisfaction in the workplace or family. **Objective:** To identify prevalence of anxiolytic use by nursing professionals between 2013 and 2018.

**Methodology:** Integrative review conducted in the LILACS, VHL and Pubmed databases, including quantitative research articles in Portuguese and English. Those whose methodological descriptions provided insufficient information were excluded. **Re-**

**sults:** The searches led to 400 articles which, after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, formed a corpus of 07 articles. The results indicate a high prevalence of anxiolytic use among health professionals for female nursing workers, married, with working hours of 40 hours or more per week, aged between 18 and 47 years. Among the main side effects of anxiolytic consumption were sleepiness and decreased reflexes. **Conclusion:** There is a need for stricter control in dispensing these drugs, as in their indications, thus preventing inappropriate consumption or the occurrence of dependence by professionals. Psychosocial support is fundamental for the rational use of these drugs and in improving the quality of life of health professionals.

**Keywords:** Prevalence and Anxiolytics, Health Professionals, Mental Health, Nursing.

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of humanity, there has been widespread use of chemicals through teas, solutions and herbs that cause changes in the level of consciousness of those who use it and produce adverse physical and mental reactions, legally or illegally for the purpose of obtaining sensations associated with pleasures, euphoria or decreased symptoms related to anxiety, insomnia, depression, among other psycho-depressive problems, due to the profound transformations in the economic and cultural sphere accompanied by pressures from a modern, especially increasingly competitive, social and technological society<sup>1</sup>.

In this context, the benzotiazepine class psychotropics stand out, being the most observed in medical prescriptions, since they are the drugs used as the first line of treatment for anxiety and insomnia disorders<sup>2</sup>. The first drug in this class was chlórdiazepoxide, synthesized in the 1950s and still used today<sup>3</sup>. Research indicates that there is excessive and inappropriate use among individuals using benzodiazepines<sup>4</sup>.

In Brazil, one of the factors that contribute to the indiscriminate use of psychotropic drugs is the free distribution of these drugs through government programs, without greater control measures, which facilitates their acquisition. Inadequate medical prescriptions also contribute to the maintenance of chronic benzodiazepine use. Most consumers receive prescriptions from general practitioners or other medical specialties rather than psychiatrists. This reality promotes the emergence of several complications resulting from prolonged use of these drugs, such as tolerance and dependence<sup>5</sup>.

The most likely individuals to use benzodiazepines for anxiety or sleep disorders are health professionals, with prevalence between 20 and 80%, because they have a fragility caused by excessive stress, excessive workload, dissatisfaction in the workplace or family<sup>6, 7</sup>. Health professionals, such as doctors

and nurses, are the most susceptible to the use and development of tolerance and dependence related to the use of some psychotropic substance, due to the greater possibility of self-administration and free access to these substances in the workplace<sup>8</sup>.

The accomplishment of this research becomes relevant to reach a specific knowledge about the subject, besides promoting a better rationalization of anxiolytic consumption among health professionals, and may subsidize more effective health actions in demedicalization.

Given the above, this study aims to identify the prevalence of anxiolytic use among nursing professionals through an integrative literature review from 2013 to 2018.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was an integrative bibliographic review, defined as a research developed through materials already elaborated, providing a broader view on a given subject, conducted by a research question constructed in a clear and objective<sup>9,10</sup>.

The Integrative Review is a method widely used internationally in nursing research and evidence-based practice, as it summarizes findings from studies with different methodologies in the same review<sup>11,12</sup>.

For the bibliographic survey, the period from April to June 2018 was used, obeying the following stages of construction: 1) delimitation of the theme and construction of the conducting question; 2) use of inclusion and exclusion criteria of studies and choice of scientific bases for electronic search; 3) identification / tracking of descriptors and data to be listed in the selected studies with their categorization; 4) interpretation of the selected studies with fluctuating reading and complete reading; 5) elaboration of the results and discussions found in the databases; and 6) synthesis of data and presentation of the knowledge produced on the verified bases.

The main question for this study was: "What is the prevalence of anxiolytic use among nursing

professionals according to the literary publications of 2013 and 2018?" As an eligibility criterion, scientific articles published in journals between 2013 and 2018, in English and Portuguese. Incomplete scientific articles, paid for and outside the research context, were excluded.

The Virtual Health Library (VHL), Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS) and PubMed were consulted using controlled descriptors obtained from the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS): "Prevalence", "Anxiolytics", "Health Professionals", "Mental Health" and "Nursing", combined by Boolean operators "AND" and / or "OR".

Initially, 400 publications were found, but after reading the respective themes, 150 were discarded. Of the 250 remaining articles from the

first selection, 200 were excluded after reading the abstracts because they had one or more exclusion criteria and 20 because they were repeated in different databases. After reading the full articles, 23 were excluded because they did not directly address the issue in question. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 07 publications. After applying these criteria and selecting the articles, they were analyzed and discussed.

## RESULTS

The scientific articles included in this review are in Table 1 according to the journal name, article title, author (s) and year of publication; Table 2, according to the scenario in which it was possible to conduct research and applied methodology; and Table 3, referring to the objectives and results found.

**Table 01: Summary of the researched studies regarding the journal, title, author (s) and year of publication.**

	PERIODIC	TITLE OF ARTICLE	AUTHOR AND YEAR OF PUBLICATION
01	Revista de Enfermagem UFPE on line	Uso de medicamentos psicoativos entre profissionais de saúde	Maciel et al (2017) <sup>11</sup>
02	Arquivos de ciências da saúde	Depressão e uso de medicamentos em profissionais de enfermagem	Pereira et al (2017) <sup>12</sup>
03	Revista Eletrônica de Enfermagem	Ansiedade e consumo de ansiolíticos entre estudantes de enfermagem de uma universidade pública	Marchi et al (2013) <sup>1</sup>
04	Infarma Ciências Farmacêuticas	Uso de fármacos psicotrópicos por profissionais da saúde atuantes da área hospitalar	Schneider e Azambuja (2015) <sup>13</sup>
05	CINERGIS	Uso de psicotrópicos pelo enfermeiro: sua relação com o trabalho	Vieira et al (2016) <sup>14</sup>
06	Revista Enfermagem UERJ	Estresse ocupacional e consumo de ansiolíticos por trabalhadores de enfermagem	Oliveira et al (2014) <sup>15</sup>
07	Revista de Enfermagem da UFSM	Adoecimento e uso de medicamentos psicoativos entre trabalhadores de enfermagem de unidades de terapia intensiva	Vieira et al (2013) <sup>16</sup>

**Table 02:** Summary of the researched studies about the research scenario and the applied methodology.

	RESEARCH SCENARIO	METHODOLOGY
01	Ramalho School Hospital of Portugal and General Hospital of the State of Alagoas.	Descriptive study with a quantitative approach, with a sample of 123 health professionals.
02	Pronto Socorro Hospital, located in the city of Montes Claros, MG.	Cross-sectional, quantitative, descriptive study with a sample of 86 nursing professionals.
03	São Paulo State Public School of Nursing	Cross-sectional and descriptive study with a quantitative approach, with a sample of 308 nursing students.
04	Hospital located in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul.	Cross-sectional observational analytical study with a quantitative approach, with a sample of 106 health professionals.
05	Philanthropic Hospital of the city of Campo Mourão, Paraná.	Qualitative descriptive exploratory study with samples from 17 nursing professionals.
06	University Hospital of Rio de Janeiro.	Quantitative and descriptive study with a sample of 91 nursing professionals.
07	Pediatric, neonatal and adult ICU of a teaching hospital located in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil	Descriptive study with a quantitative approach involving 49 nursing workers.

## DISCUSSION

With changes in the lifestyle of the population, there is a growing demand for medicines that relieve symptoms such as stress and anxiety. This accentuated demand, coupled with inadequate prescriptions from unprepared professionals, contributes to the abuse of benzodiazepines (BZDs), increasing the likelihood of adverse reactions, intoxication and also dependence on these drugs<sup>3</sup>.

When choosing to use anxiolytics, it is essential to clarify to the user the duration of drug treatment, as well as to monitor the use of these drugs. Anxiolytics may cause dependence, intoxication, cognitive and behavioral changes. The use of this type of medication may be a strategy that users present to face their anguish<sup>2,3</sup>.

Excessive use of anxiolytic medications among nursing professionals is directly linked to the

overload of activities, accumulation of duties and strenuous working hours, which makes it difficult to perform tasks and conditions the increase of responsibilities in the working hours<sup>12,6,7</sup>.

Nursing workers, especially females, are among the professionals who suffer the most physical and mental pressure from workplace exhaustion and, when working in public health institutions, are most vulnerable. Causing, usually depressive crises and anxiety disorders<sup>17</sup>.

Among health professionals, especially nursing professionals, it consists mainly of women. These women sought their own independence and expanded their functions in society, going beyond domestic activities, gaining space in the labor market<sup>13</sup>. However, this advance brought more responsibilities, which consequently opened a gap for the onset of anxiety disorders and other psychic disorders, which explains the high consumption of anxiolytics and other medications by nurses<sup>18</sup>.

There is a prevalence of anxiolytics among married nursing professionals who work at or above 40 hours per week. The authors suggest that this prevalence is associated with work overload, which ends up compromising the family contact of health professionals, ruining

the dialogue with their families. It is also assumed that psychoactive drug use is linked to the conflicts these professionals face to meet work demands and also to reconcile them with family responsibilities<sup>19</sup>.

**Table 3:** Summary of the researched studies regarding the objectives and results found.

	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	RESULTS
01	To identify psychoactive drug use among 123 health professionals.	80.5% were female, 37.4% had 16 years or more of experience in the area, 14.6% considered themselves stressed, 13% suffered from insomnia, 9.76% stated that psychoactive use was related to insomnia, 37.4% used anxiolytics while working, 63.04% had a prescription. 65.21% had used anxiolytics for less than a year; 34.78% used anxiolytics at age five.
02	To identify levels of depression and medication use in nursing professionals in the city of Montes Claros - MG.	Of the 86 nursing professionals, 62.8% were female, 51% were married; 46.5% worked at night, 58.1% had high school / technical; 59.3% had no depression; however, 40.7% had depression; 29.1% reported using anxiolytics and antidepressants;
03	To analyze the presence of anxiety in nursing students at a public university in the state of São Paulo; to evaluate the knowledge of students using anxiolytic drugs and to characterize the pattern of drug use.	Of the 308 nursing students, 85.4% were female; 84% (n = 260) of the students never used anxiolytics; however, 16% (n = 48) used these drugs, of which 35% were bachelors in nursing and 65% graduated in nursing; 35.4% had severe anxiety according to the application of the Beck Anxiety Inventory. 37.5% used diazepam and 16.7% used clonazepam; 62% had doubts about anxiolytic interactions with other medications and 57% did not know the side effects of anxiolytics.
04	To evaluate the use of psychiatric drugs by hospital health professionals.	Of the 106 professionals, 75.5% worked the morning shift; 91.5% were female; 47.2% were between 18 and 29 years old; 49.1% were married; 74.5% were nursing technicians; 40.6% were from the Adult Inpatient Unit sector; 56.6% worked in the hospital for a period of 4 years or less; 85.8% worked from 21 to 40 hours per week; 30.4% used antidepressants; 17.4% used anxiolytics; 21.7% use the drugs for a period of 2 years or less; 73.9% stated that the drugs used were causing side effects and 8.7% increased the dose of the drug without prior medical consultation.
05	To identify among the nursing professionals of a philanthropic institution if the psychoactive medication and the occurrence of work overload.	Of the 17 participants, 16 were female; 7 were formed five years ago and 9 less than five years ago. Of the 17 participants, 9 had postgraduate degrees; 8 worked during the day, 4 in the afternoon and 5 at night; The average age was 27.9 years, ranging from 23 to 47 years; 5 professionals were married, 12 were single; 7 had children; 13 reported having another job; 11 claim to be responsible for more than one service unit during working hours. 70.5% use anxiolytics, of which 44% self-medicate.
06	To identify the consumption of anxiolytics by nursing workers and correlate them with occupational stress.	Of the 91 workers (100%), 72 were female (79.1%); 27 were nurses (29.7%); 64 were nursing technicians (70.3%), 42 were married (46.1%), 37 were single (40.7%) and 3 were widowed (3.3%) aged 25 to 64 years (84.5%); 39 (42.9%) used anxiolytics throughout their lives; 18 (19.9%) used anxiolytics in the last year and 9 (9.9%) used anxiolytics in the month of data collection. According to the interviewees, the main indication for the use of these medications was due to stress at work or conflicts with the team. The main effects related to the use of anxiolytics were pain, drowsiness and decreased reflexes.
07	To identify the disease and the use of psychoactive medicines among nursing workers of Intensive Care Units.	Of the 49 nursing workers, 24.4% reported having some mental illness, among which depression is the most common, with 14.2%. The night shift was the most significant in relation to workers diagnosed with mental problems, with 43.7%; where 28.5% used anxiolytics; 12.2% used antidepressants; 24.4% reported that these medications were purchased on prescription and 63.2% reported that they used anxiolytics and antidepressants on their own.

## CONCLUSION

It is observed that there is, in fact, a prevalence of anxiolytic use by nursing professionals, and that this profile is predominantly composed of married women, who work 40 hours or more per week, aged between 18 and 47 years.

It is also possible to observe that the main side effects resulting from the use of anxiolytics by nurses are drowsiness and decreased reflexes. This is worrying because they need to be fully focused on the work environment, as they play a crucial role in patient care, such as medication administration, venous access with the use of sharp objects, device handling, among others.

Therefore, it is correct to state that the excessive use of anxiolytics by nurses is harmful for those who use it and for those who depend on the care of these professionals, in this case, the patients. Managers need to understand early the risk factors and health promotion of working nurses, as well as the safety of patients in health facilities, in order to establish the conditions for the health maintenance of professionals in the workplace. The quality of life of each team member should be a priority in health facilities.

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