








## Scientific evidence on mental health in nursing professionals in the hospital setting

### [Evidencias científicas sobre la salud mental en profesionales de enfermería en el contexto hospitalario]

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#### Resumen

Hoy en día, ante la situación de pandemia por el COVID 19 se ha visibilizado que el personal de salud tiene un alto riesgo de presentar problemas emocionales ante la incertidumbre de los riesgos potenciales del entorno hospitalario. Objetivo: Determinar las evidencias científicas sobre la salud mental en profesionales de enfermería en el contexto hospitalario. Método: Revisión integrativa, exploratoria en 2 bases de datos, Dialnet y Google académico, considerándose los criterios de inclusión como, idioma inglés, español y portugués. Resultados. Se ha evidenciado el incremento de la presencia de problemas de salud mental en las enfermeras como estrés, ansiedad, depresión, miedo entre otros. Ante enfermedad altamente contagiosa desconocidas que se han presentado en los últimos años, lo que pone en un alto riesgo laboral como afecta su calidad de vida de los profesionales responsables del cuidado. Se concluye que, ante la emergencia sanitaria las enfermeras deben utilizar medidas de bioseguridad y de protección personal en la práctica sanitaria como el cuidar su salud mental; para mantener una adecuada relación que implica el cuidado entre los pacientes-enfermero. Así también favorecer intervenciones oportunas de prevención en el cuidado de la salud mental de las enfermeras.

**Palabras clave:** Salud mental, profesionales de enfermería y revisión integrativa.

#### Abstract

Nowadays, given the pandemic situation caused by COVID 19, it has become clear that health personnel are at high risk of presenting emotional problems due to the uncertainty of the potential risks of the hospital environment. Objective: To determine the scientific evidence on mental health in nursing professionals in the hospital context. Method: Integrative, exploratory review in 2 databases, Dialnet and Google Scholar, considering the inclusion criteria as English, Spanish and Portuguese. Results. There is evidence of an increase in the presence of mental health problems in nurses, such as stress, anxiety, depression, fear, among others. In the face of unknown highly contagious illnesses that have appeared in recent years, which places them at high occupational risk and affects the quality of life of the professionals responsible for care. It is concluded that, in the face of the health emergency, nurses should use biosecurity and personal protection measures in health practice, such as taking care of their mental health, in order to maintain an adequate relationship involving patient-nurse care. It also favours timely preventive interventions in the mental health care of nurses.

**Keywords:** Mental health, nursing professionals and integrative review.

## 1. Introduction

Globally, it is estimated that there are about 28 million nursing professionals in the world, a number that represents more than half of all health professionals. However, there is a global shortage of 5.9 million nursing professionals. Today's health care workers, especially nurses, have realized that there are potential risks of exposure to complex situations that can lead to stressful situations due to a myriad of factors, as nurses are in direct contact with patients on the front line. The work of the nurse in day-to-day activities that focuses on patient care by providing support in meeting basic needs, pain, suffering and hopelessness (WHO, 2022).

In many countries nursing professionals are leaders or key players in multi-professional and interdisciplinary health teams. They provide a wide range of services at all levels of the health system. In this situation, the environmental conditions will generate work-related stressors, mental health problems, and emotional problems (Quintana y Tarqui- Maman, 2020).

Mental health disorder thus generates more common mental health problems and disorders; however, there is no brief clinical measure to assess. Diagnosis is presented by differentiating different problems in mental health generating challenges: presenting mental health problems with pathology, these diseases generate the visit to psychiatrists on a primary basis (Hernández, 2020). With them will have analysis to determine the clinical skills in order to arrange the auxiliary analysis to diagnose. Mental health problems, as this leads to diagnose the nature generated by proteiform and non-specific in skills, leading to: that mental health problems have very salient features in the behaviour of nursing professionals, this leads to be analysed clinically (Rodríguez et al., 2021).

In this sense, the psychological burden is experienced by health professionals in the hospital environment for various reasons such as: high demand for services, high turnover of health personnel, changes in regular activities, among others. Likewise, the professional workload generates interaction with stressors that negatively impact on mental health (Martínez- Rodríguez et al., 2021). In healthcare institutions, nurses are responsible for the direct integral care of patients. The daily activities of care face various stressful factors, such as the failure of the service or equipment, the lack of material and human resources, environmental conditions and the exacerbation of the pace of work, among others, causing these professionals to experience work demands that cause fatigue of the body and mind, consequently making possible the complications of health problems, the development of feelings such as anxiety and anguish (Ramírez et al., 2018).

Mental health problems are presented as sensations that are most frequently experienced by human beings. This can cause pathologies of complex emotions, personality difficulties, fears, sorrows, tensions, are antecedents of discomfort in mental health pathologies. This is why when they work, performing in their work environments, where there is little control and competence development, or the work situations are of excessive care pressure and can trigger the burnout syndrome (Ayuso et al., 2019).

Burnout, also known as "emotional overload", is an inappropriate response to work-related stress that significantly affects those professionals, including healthcare workers, who need to work with patients in order to maintain the quality of their work (Hernández et al., 2020). Mental health, being a very transitory problem, is characterised in the subjective aspects by the presence of stress, psychological pathologies which affect the autonomic nervous system; this varies when it occurs with great intensity, generating in a prudent time (Cuenca et al., 2010). Therefore, among the aforementioned conditions, mental health disorders represent fairly common pathologies among the consultations, and have been presented as one of the main reasons for consultation (Torales et al., 2021).

These psychological pathologies are mostly affected to the different factors of the collectivity in a form of irritability, lack of will to rest, generated by the signs of psychological discomfort, health problems, anxiety, panic and refusal of psychological help (Sigüenza et al., 2021). In the same vein, nurses are recognised as those who have the opportunity to intervene in the improvement of education and information on health issues aimed at the population. Educational activities such as promotion and prevention, self-care actions that allow the maturity of the person to modify lifestyles in order to improve their quality of life (Diaz et al., 2020).

Likewise, nurses working in the health sector experience various emotions such as joy, pain, suffering, and so the death of the sick and patients goes through a biological and psychosocial process, with a large number of patients gradually acquiring sequence after having had the disease and silently detected by clinical observation. Individuals are always aware of the fear of death, nurses are confronted and continuously confronted with the death of patients and are always in contact with it. This can influence their attitude positively or negatively (Fernández et al., 2019).

It should be noted that different factors can increase or decrease the risk of developing symptoms of mental illness as a result of prolonged exposure to detecting stimuli that are presented as stressors. Therefore, each of the differences should be taken into account when dealing with the different characteristics generated by socio-demographic aspects. In the pandemic, mental health problems have been affected in health professionals, especially in health professionals, with an increase in episodes of anxiety, depression, work-related stress, among others. This situation has had a great impact on nurses who are in direct contact with patients, putting them at constant risk of infection, increasing their workload and stress, leading them to develop an emotional and psychological imbalance (Chávez et al., 2021).

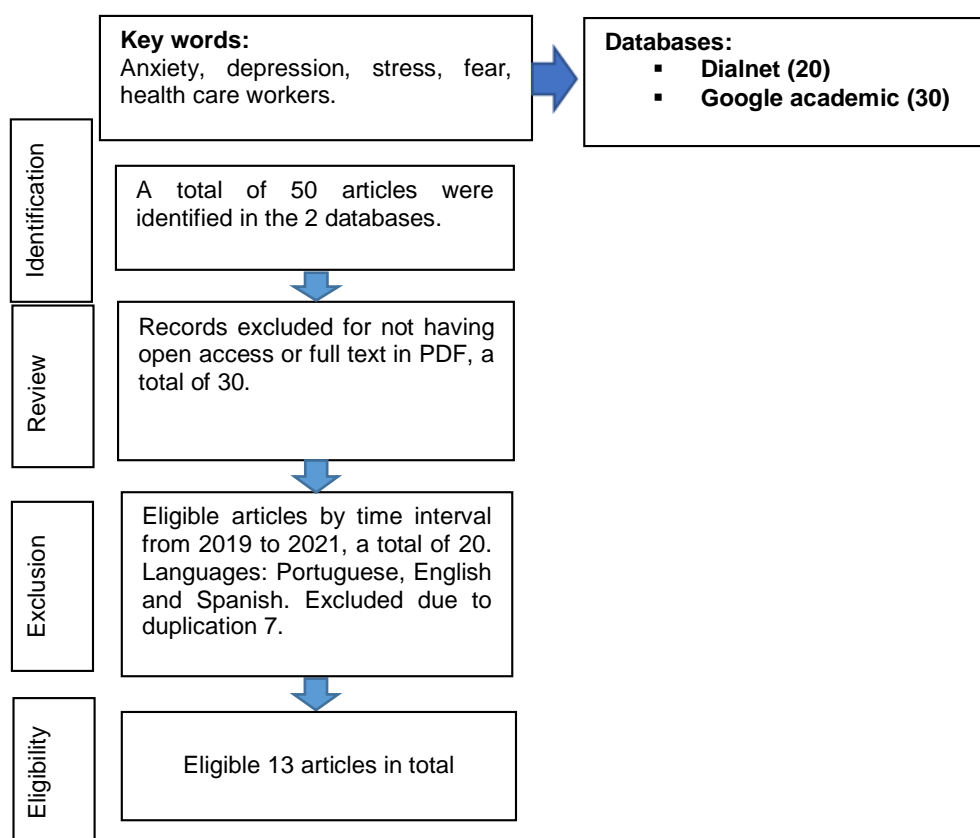
Finally, mental health problems can not only affect the quality of care provided by nurses, their capacity for clinical understanding or their professional competencies, skills and attitudes in making every decision, as well as affecting working life, but can also have a significant impact on their well-being and quality of life (Lozano-Vargas, 2020). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to protect the mental health of healthcare workers in order to investigate this phenomenon over time, and therefore the following research question is posed: What is the scientific evidence on anxiety in healthcare workers in the hospital context?

## 2. Materials and methods

The study was an integrative literature review, using the Dialnet database and Google Scholar, where scientific evidence or articles from the years 2019-2021 were included; an exhaustive exploration was carried out with the central theme "anxiety", using the Boolean search engines "or" and "and", considering "anxiety" or "burnout syndrome" and "health personnel"; using the following inclusion criteria: open access research (n = 50), published in the last five years (n = 40), in Portuguese, English and Spanish (n = 30) and as an exclusion criterion the editor's restriction, leaving 23 articles that were finally reviewed and analysed in full text; in addition, the exclusion of topics for duplicity was applied, leaving a total of 13 articles.

Having all the information collected, we proceeded according to the research question in order to meet the objectives, the database was exhaustively reviewed and to categorise them, the titles, summaries and contents of each document were evaluated, extracting the data from the pre-selected and selected studies, so that after analysing and interpreting them, we could finally present the conclusions. That said, the flow chart Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (Declaration de PRISMA Statement, 2020) was used.

For a visualisation in both databases, it is detailed:



### 3. Results

Table 1. Indexed scientific evidence on health worker anxiety in a hospital setting.

Title, author and year	Country Journal	Methods	Results and conclusions
Health workers' mental health in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (López-Martínez, 2021)	Peru. Nursing Research, liaison, teaching and management	Research, descriptive	In the health care team, nurses are more vulnerable to biological and social risk factors for developing mental health conditions such as anxiety, due to their high exposure to the virus in the course of their work and the fear of personal and family infection.

Emotional impact on nurses during the pandemic (Oliva & Chavarry, 2021)	Perú, Revista científica de enfermería. 2021.	Reflective study.	In times of pandemic due to the presence of COVID-19, nursing professionals have developed various problems such as stress, anxiety, fear and even depression as a result of job burnout, work overload, fear of contracting the disease and of their families. The conclusion is that there is a need to reinforce the emotional care of the nursing professional, with actions that provide a better environment for health personnel and therefore better working conditions.
Mental health of medical and nursing staff at the National Institute of Respiratory and Environmental Diseases during the COVID-19 quarantine, Paraguay (Chávez, 2021)	Paraguay, 2021. Public health journal.	Original article. Descriptive, cross-sectional study.	The frequency of anxiety, depression and burnout syndrome were high, highlighting the vulnerability of health care staff and the need to provide psychological support to staff in this hospital.
Stress during the pandemic in nurses working on the frontline in a COVID-19 hospital in Lima (Aldazabal, 2020)	Perú. Revista de investigación científica ágora. 2020.	Original research. Quantitative study, cross-sectional descriptive design.	According to the stress level in nurses, the low level predominated; in terms of its dimensions, the low level predominated in the physical and social environment, and the medium level in the psychological environment.
Self-perceived health in frontline nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic (Becerra & Ybaseta, 2020)	Perú. Revista médica Panacea. 2020	Original article. Descriptive and cross-sectional study.	During the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of self-perceived ill health is of high tendency, there are statistical differences in some socio-demographic variables. It is necessary to promote joint actions that contribute to the well-being of the nursing worker.
Influence of perceived emotional intelligence on anxiety and work stress in nurses (Mesa, 2020)	España. 2020	Original article. Descriptive and correlational study	Women score significantly higher than men in work stress, anxiety and emotional attentiveness. With age and years of work experience, work stress, anxiety and emotional alertness significantly decrease and clarity and reparation significantly increase.

Psychosocial factors, psychological stress and burnout in nursing: a trajectory model (Brito et al., 2020)	México. Enfermería universitaria 2020.	Original article. Cross- sectional, observational, analytical study.	Implications for the discipline, it is proposed to implement effective intervention strategies to maintain low levels of psychological demands, high levels of job control, high levels of social support, and moderate levels of stress in nursing staff to prevent.
Stress anxiety and depression with coping styles in nurses in contact with COVID- 19 Cuzco. Perú (Virto et al., 2020)	Perú. Revista científica de enfermería. 2020.	Scientific article. Correlational study, cross- sectional, quota design.	The relationship of social coping may have implications for strengthening family relationships of health care staff. The relationship with avoidant coping could lead to subsequent problems for staff.
Stress, burnout and depression in intensive care unit nurses (Do Santos et al., 2019)	Brasil. Enfermería Global. 2019.	Scientific article. Quantitative analytical and cross- sectional approach.	Intensive care units are unhealthy, potentially stressful environments with a high rate of absenteeism. The participants in the study work double shifts, most of them are women and have children, with worrying levels of stress, burnout and depression.
Relationship between stress, anxiety and depression at work in nursing professionals (Fernández et al., 2020).	México, Revista de enfermería neurológica.	Original article. Observational, cross- sectional study	The work environment affects the presence of stress, depression and anxiety, it is recommended to identify triggers and evidence, therefore, it is inferred that after the intervention it is reduced.
Psychosocial risk factors affecting professionals in nursing (Orozco et al., 2019)	Colombia. Revista Colombiana de enfermería. 2019	Research article.	The nursing professional is exposed to a large extent to psychosocial risk factors: quantitative demands, pace of work, double presence and emotional demands. These can negatively affect their physical and mental health, as well as the quality of care provided.
Social representations of the Chilean nurse's role in mental health and psychiatry 1960-1975: A historical view (Quiroz et al., 2019)	Chile. Cultura de los cuidados. 2019	Qualitative research, constructivist paradigm, descriptive type, documentary review and oral history.	Social representation. As subcategories: Value Ideology in the choice and development of professional careers; *Professionalism and social determinants; *Comprehensive care as a social response. The mental health risks of nursing professionals are related to stress, anxiety, depression, among others.
Burnout syndrome, occupational stress and quality of life in nursing workers (Vidotti et al., 2019)	Brasil. Enfermería Global. 2019	Research article. Cross- sectional study.	Burnout syndrome was related to high levels of stress and to the negative perception of the quality of life of nursing workers.



#### 4. Discussion y conclusions

The study shows that there is an increase in health problems among health professionals in public hospitals and clinics. The main results obtained in the evaluations of the intervention report that during the pandemic period, given the increase in the number of cases, preventive activities have been carried out for this population group because, being a qualified human resource to take on the care of patients, they need to maintain continuous contact with various simple and complex pathologies, which can lead to the appearance of stress. The most common age range of professionals (20-30 years), which is necessary to consider a period of sensitisation to Burnout syndrome. It is important to apply coping strategies to avoid the impact on mental health (Acosta-Quiroz et al., 2020).

It is worth noting the increase in anxiety situations experienced by nurses in units or services where the pandemic increased the number of critical patients in relation to the age of the patients. Anxiety generators have been in critical services, with the highest number in the pediatric ICU. In this sense, death is a taboo subject, which leads to omission or denial and little interest in raising it openly. The results reflect proposals for improvement in the field of training, as they express the need to create training workshops to promote emotional health; and in the field of management, indicating the benefit of assigning patients at risk of death to more experienced professionals, and the need to request a specific profile and specific training when assigning professionals to critical care units (Carlos et al., 2020; Esquivel et al., 2021).

In the healthcare team, nursing staff are more vulnerable to biological and social risk factors for developing mental health conditions such as anxiety, due to their high exposure to the virus in the course of their work and the fear of contagion, both personal and family (Martinez, 2020; Ramírez, 2020). In times of pandemic due to the presence of COVID-19, nurses have developed various problems such as stress, anxiety, fear and even depression as a result of job burnout, work overload, fear of infection of themselves and their families (Carlos et al., 2020; Torres, 2020),

The frequency of anxiety, depression and burnout syndrome were high, which highlights the vulnerability of health personnel and the need to provide psychological support to staff in this hospital. In terms of stress in nurses, low levels predominated; in terms of its dimensions, low levels predominated in the physical and social environment, and medium levels in the psychological environment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of poor self-perceived health is of high tendency; there are statistical differences in some socio-demographic variables. It is necessary to promote joint actions that contribute to the well-being of the nursing worker (Morales et al., 2021; Urzua et al., 2020),

Implications for the discipline, it is proposed to implement effective intervention strategies to maintain low levels of psychological demands, high levels of job control, high levels of social support, and moderate levels of stress in nursing staff, in order to prevent. The relationship of social coping may have implications for strengthening family relationships of health care workers. The relationship with avoidant coping may have implications for later staff problems. Intensive care units are unhealthy, potentially stressful environments with a high rate of absenteeism (Morales et al., 2021). The study participants work double shifts, most of them are women and have children, with worrying levels of stress, burnout and depression (Prieto 2019; Valero et al., 2019; Vargas et al., 2020).

The work environment affects the presence of stress, depression and anxiety, it is recommended to identify the triggers and evidence, therefore, it is inferred that after the intervention is reduced. The nursing professional is exposed to a large extent to psychosocial risk factors: quantitative

demands, pace of work, double presence and emotional demands can negatively affect their physical and mental health, as well as the quality of care provided (Muñoz, 2020).

Finally, experience and training are key elements that help professionals cope with death, and management must ensure that terminally ill patients are cared for by professionals with this profile. It is worth noting that the COVID-19 Contagion Concern Scale is a valid and reliable brief measure that can be used for research and professional purposes. The frequency of anxiety, depression and burnout syndrome were high, highlighting the vulnerability of health staff and the need to provide psychological support to staff in this hospital. The pandemic thus poses the challenge of caring for the mental health of health workers as well as the general population and health professionals. Thus, the use of brief screening instruments for mental health problems, validated in our population, would be very useful to prevent the impact on public health.

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