

Mental health and pandemic*Salud mental y pandemia**Saúde mental e pandemia***Aline Voltarelli***

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Mental health is considered a second pandemic faced by Brazil, the emotional suffering of family losses, the feeling of fear, and the lack of socialization concomitant with a lack of job stability have considerably increased the level of stress and psychological suffering of Brazilians, study evidence that health professionals on the front line fighting COVID-19 demonstrate greater vulnerability to mental disorders considering exhaustion and suicidal ideation¹.

The World Health Organization predicted the need to maintain Mental Health assistance services and expand care in 2020 in the face of depressive and anxiety disorders, which had an estimated global increase of 25% with the pandemic².

The network of community-based services suffers from a budget gap, while the costs of psychiatric hospitals grow. Prevention – when conditions such as insomnia, irritability, and discouragement persist for several weeks, seeking professional help is essential.

The treatment mainly seeks to strengthen adaptive mechanisms that are weakened. In certain cases, medication has benefits, but it should be used with caution.

Mental Health is biopsychosocial and may not be isolated from the individual's actual living, working, and sociability conditions. It is observed that work overload is related to toxic stress. It has a global and annual impact due to depression and anxiety, with a high cost to the global economy of nearly a trillion dollars.

The International Labor Organization (ILO/UN) report states that the impact of mental health on work is as relevant in low-income countries as it is in developed countries.

The increase in anxious and depressive disorders is a trend in recent years, but it reached much more alarming levels after the health crisis due to mental health integrating all levels of care, and nursing has a fundamental role, not only in recognizing and referral cases but also in offering comprehensive care and emotional comfort to patients².

Work is a potential factor in promoting Mental Health, as it provides temporal structure, a sense of effort, social contact, collective purpose, social identity, and regular activity, which is essential in the organization of routine.

Mental Health means much more than the absence of a mental illness or disorder. Health is well-being and is deeply linked to individuals' behavior. Some memory lapses, anxiety, and depression may be related to the brain consequences of COVID-19, in addition to the social impacts of isolation and loss.

In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global prevalence of anxiety and depression grew by around 25%, according to estimates by the World Health Organization. Data before the pandemic already indicated depressive episodes as one of the main causes of sick pay. that are not related to work accidents, corresponding to 30.67% of the total, followed by other anxiety disorders. But it can also contribute to mental illness, with conditions such as "work overload, unrealistic deadlines, lack

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of clear instructions, non-participation in decision-making, job insecurity, isolated working conditions, surveillance, and inadequate care arrangements for young children”.

Health workers in eleven Latin American countries demonstrate high rates of depressive symptoms, psychological distress, and suicidal thoughts, according to the results of a study led by the University of Chile and Columbia University (in the United States), with the collaboration of the Organization Pan American Health Conference (PAHO).

Health workers interviewed in 2020 manifested symptoms that led to the suspicion of a depressive episode, while between 5% and 15% of workers said they thought about committing suicide. The study also reveals that, in some countries, only around a third of those who said they needed psychological care received it.

The pandemic demonstrated the exhaustion of health workers and, in countries where the health system collapsed, professionals suffered from exhausting journeys and ethical dilemmas that had an impact on their mental health, the pandemic is not over, the importance of emotional and financial situation, concern about infecting family members, conflicts with relatives of people who were infected and changes in daily work functions were some of the major factors that affected employees' mental health. On the other hand, having confidence that the health institution and the government would be able to deal with the pandemic, obtaining support from co-workers, and considering oneself a spiritual or religious person were cited as some of the factors that helped protect their mental health.

It is urgent to develop specific policies that authorize organizing actions to protect the mental health of these workers. Therefore, it is recommended to modify the work environment and ensure adequate working conditions. In addition, providing decent remuneration, stable contractual conditions, and developing spaces where teams can talk, have a moment of decompression, vent, and practice self-care.

In this way, the document asks for support for health workers to care for their children and elderly people under their care, as the majority are women and caregivers. It is recommended to put the guidelines into practice to protect the mental health of health center workers, making mental health services more accessible to these workers.

Two years after the pandemic, many workers still do not receive the support they need and this could lead to them developing different mental disorders in the coming years, something we must be prepared for.

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