


Occupational health: The effects of the pandemic on the quality of life of Primary Health Care (PHC) professionals

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevenced2024.006-013>

Anamélia Damasceno de Macêdo¹, Lucas Alves de Oliveira Lima², Tatiana Elenice Cordeiro Soares³, Aline Maria de Lemos Araujo⁴, Alice Vieira Rômulo⁵, Juliana Ribeiro Lucci⁶, Thiago Souza de Oliveira⁷, Genilson Pereira Gurgel⁸, Teresa Cristina Gaio⁹ and Paulo Henrique Soles dos Santos¹⁰

ABSTRACT

The present research aimed to analyze the main effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life at work of health professionals in Primary Health Care (PHC). The research consisted of an integrative literature review, using Google Scholar and Scielo to search for scientific articles on quality of life at work of PHC health professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strict inclusion criteria were applied, resulting in the selection of a sample of three articles for detailed analysis. The studies present a comprehensive analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of work life and mental health of health workers, especially those on frontline and primary care. In addition to highlighting the social and labor dimension of the crisis triggered by the pandemic, the studies highlight the neglect of the care and respect needs of these professionals, who are often perceived only as caregivers. The lack of adequate social protection and exposure

¹ Highest education: Undergraduate student in Psychology

University: University Center of Science and Technology of Maranhão - UniFacema

E-mail: anameliamedo@outlook.com

ORCID: 0009-0007-5591-7042

² Doctor in H.c

Ivy Enber Christian University

E-mail: luksapp99@gmail.com

³ MSc in Parasite Biology

Ceuma University

E-mail: tatianaelenice@hotmail.com

⁴ Highest academic background with undergraduate area Graduated in Medicine

University: Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA)

E-mail: lemos.alinea@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6859-9537>

⁵ Postgraduate degree in Clinical Psychology from Facuminas

E-mail: alicevieira.psicologa@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0006-1243-3577

⁶ Doctor

Federal University of Western Bahia - UFOB

E-mail: julucci@hotmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-9912-2857

⁷ Doctoral Student in Educational Sciences

Institution: Inter-American Faculty of Social Sciences (FICS)

E-mail: thiagokolenda@hotmail.com

⁸ Graduating in Medicine

University: FACULDADE NOVA ESPERANÇA DE MOSSORO

E-mail: genilsongurgel@hotmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-4331-8484

⁹ Master's student in Education at the Regional and Integrated University of Alto Uruguay and the URI-FW Missions.

E-mail: kellynunes@hotmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-4330-1159

¹⁰ Doctoral student in Public Health

Institution: University of Business and Social Sciences (UCES)

E-mail: hpaulosoles@hotmail.com



to the risk of contamination contributed to feelings of anguish and insecurity, aggravated by the intensification of occupational stress. Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICPs) have emerged as a relevant alternative for professionals' self-care and health promotion, highlighting the need for holistic approaches that consider both physical and mental health. The implementation of policies and strategies to prevent mental illness and promote the well-being of professionals is crucial, requiring a sensitive look at their experiences during the pandemic. In summary, the studies underline the importance of an integrated approach to address the impacts of the pandemic on the health of health workers and ensure that they are supported to face future challenges.

Keywords: Occupational health, Quality of Life at Work, Primary Health Care (PHC), Pandemic, Covid-19.



INTRODUCTION

Occupational health is a fundamental field that aims to promote the physical, mental, and social well-being of workers in the workplace. Occupational health involves the prevention of work-related diseases, the control of occupational hazards, and the promotion of safe and healthy work environments. Occupational health practices are essential to ensure the safety and health of workers, as well as contributing to the productivity and quality of services provided by organizations. It encompasses a series of preventive measures, such as ergonomic assessments, accident prevention programs, and monitoring of exposure to harmful agents, in order to protect the physical and mental integrity of workers (LIMA; DOMINGUES JUNIOR; GOMES, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to occupational health, significantly impacting the way organizations and professionals deal with occupational health and safety. The rapid spread of the virus necessitated the implementation of emergency measures such as social distancing, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), and strict hygiene protocols. Healthcare workers faced extremely challenging working conditions, dealing with high levels of stress, risks of contamination, and emotional burden due to the nature of the pandemic. Rapid and effective adaptation of occupational health practices has become essential to protect workers and ensure the continuity of health services (OLIVEIRA et al., 2023).

The quality of life at work of health professionals has become a central concern during the pandemic, given the intensity and complexity of the demands faced by these workers. In addition to the physical challenges associated with exposure to the virus, health care workers dealt with a significant emotional burden, including the anguish of dealing with critically ill patients and grief over the loss of life (ASUNÇÃO; CORRÊA; UEHARA, 2022).

In primary health care, practitioners face specific challenges related to providing community-based health care. During the pandemic, these professionals were called upon to play a crucial role in identifying, screening, and referring suspected cases of COVID-19, while continuing to provide essential care for other health conditions. Work overload, lack of resources, and exposure to the risk of infection were amplified issues in primary care during this period (PEIXOTO et al., 2021).

Thus, the present research aimed to analyze the main effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life at work of health professionals in Primary Health Care (PHC). It is hoped that the results of this research will provide theoretical and practical subsidies to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the quality of life at work of health professionals working in Primary Health Care.



METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research consisted of an integrative literature review, an approach that allows synthesizing and critically analyzing pre-existing studies on quality of life at work. This methodological choice is justified by the need to compile and examine a variety of information sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the main effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life at work of Primary Health Care (PHC) health professionals.

Data collection was carried out in the Google Scholar and Scielo databases, using specific keywords and search descriptors related to quality of life at work, pandemic and PHC health professionals. Strict inclusion criteria were applied, which included the exclusive selection of scientific articles published between 2020 and 2023, written in Portuguese and available free of charge and in full. The research focused specifically on studies that addressed the effects of the pandemic on the quality of life at work of PHC professionals, excluding other types of documents, such as theses, abstracts, and reports, to ensure the quality and relevance of the data.

Data analysis was conducted in two distinct stages. In the first stage, the abstracts and titles of the articles were reviewed to identify those that met the inclusion criteria and were aligned with the research objective. In the second stage, the selected articles were read in full and submitted to a detailed analysis to extract relevant information on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life at work of PHC professionals. At the end of the process, a sample of three scientific articles was chosen to compose the basis of analysis and discussion of this research.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Based on the integrative literature review, it was possible to obtain a sample of three scientific articles, as shown in Chart 1.



The study revealed that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the mental health of frontline health workers, highlighting the lack of appreciation of this dimension and the urgent need for worker care. The changes imposed by the pandemic, such as the increase in patients, complexity of cases, and reorganization of services, have intensified the challenges faced by professionals. In the face of these changes, demands have emerged for mental health programs and new forms of communication to support the care process. The study also highlighted the phenomenon of scientific denialism, which has led to practices that have not been scientifically proven and had negative repercussions for health teams. In addition, the intensification of occupational stress during the pandemic was observed, especially among professionals who dealt directly with COVID-19 patients. The need for programs and actions aimed at the mental health of health professionals has become evident, emphasizing the importance of policies and strategies to prevent mental illness in the workplace. The study recognizes its limitations, such as the specific focus on the reality of certain professionals during the peak of the pandemic, but highlights the relevance of considering the experiences of these professionals for the development of effective mental health care measures.

Authors	Objective	Methodology	Conclusion
Martins et al. (2020)	Systematize the knowledge acquired from workshops held with Primary Care professionals in the city of Guaiuba-CE, seeking to understand the effects of the pandemic on their mental health	Experience report	The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on the quality of work life of primary care health professionals. While the media focus turned to the spread of the virus, it was important to highlight that the consequences went beyond the biological aspect, also affecting the social aspect. In this context, health professionals were often perceived only as caregivers, ignoring their own needs for care and respect. The precariousness of work in the health sector became evident, especially given the lack of adequate social protection and constant exposure to the risk of contamination. This led to feelings of anguish and insecurity, directly affecting the mental health of these professionals.
Pereira et al. (2022)	Identify the possible repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers' health, the care strategies used and the offer of Integrative and Complementary Practices	Descriptive study, with a qualitative approach AND Qualitative approach	This study revealed the impact of the pandemic on workers' health, with an emphasis on mental health, leading to the search for care strategies that included Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (PICS). Faced with the interruption in the provision of these practices to the population due to the COVID-19 pandemic, professionals with training in PICS began to make them available to their co-workers. The pandemic has brought several challenges to healthcare workers, highlighting the importance of self-care and worker health. One strategy mentioned was the resumption of PICS, initially offered to workers and later to the general population. In addition to adapting services to ensure the health and safety of workers during the pandemic, the creation of support networks and the systematic provision of PICS during the workday can contribute to mental health care and health promotion.
Reiser e Mattos (2023)	Understanding the repercussions on the mental health status of health professionals in Primary Health Care	Qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study	The study revealed that the pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of frontline healthcare professionals, highlighting the lack of appreciation for this dimension and the urgent need for worker care. The changes imposed by the pandemic, such as the increase in patients, complexity of cases and reorganization of services, intensified the challenges faced by professionals. Faced with these changes, demands for mental health programs and new forms of communication to support the care process emerged. The study also highlighted the phenomenon of scientific denialism, which led to scientifically unproven practices and had negative repercussions for healthcare teams. Furthermore, the intensification of occupational stress during the pandemic was observed, especially among professionals who dealt directly with patients with COVID-19. The need for programs and actions aimed at the mental health of healthcare professionals has become evident, highlighting the importance of policies and strategies to prevent mental illness in the workplace. The study recognizes its limitations, such as the specific coverage of the reality of certain professionals during the peak of the pandemic, but highlights the relevance of considering the experiences of these professionals for the development of effective mental health care measures.

Source: Survey data (2024).



Based on the above, it is observed that Martins et al. (2020) reveal an impactful portrait of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the quality of life at work of primary care health professionals. By highlighting that the impacts of the pandemic go beyond the biological aspect, also reaching the social aspect, the authors highlight the complexity of this public health crisis. In the midst of the spread of the virus and the widespread concern about physical health, the neglect of health professionals' needs for care and respect is evidenced.

The text highlights the predominant perception of professionals only as caregivers, disregarding their own health and well-being needs. This lack of recognition and support is amplified by the precariousness of work in the health area, evidenced by the lack of adequate social protection and constant exposure to the risk of contamination. As a result, professionals face feelings of distress and insecurity, directly impacting their mental health.

This analysis reveals not only the immediate challenges faced by health workers during the pandemic, but also highlights broader structural issues related to working conditions and professional recognition. The precariousness of work in healthcare is not a new phenomenon, but the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated these issues, requiring an urgent and comprehensive response. In addition, the analysis underscores the importance of considering not only the physical health but also the mental health of health professionals, highlighting the need for appropriate support and care measures.

The study conducted by Pereira et al. (2022) highlights the significant impact of the pandemic on workers' health, with special emphasis on mental health, highlighting the need to search for care strategies. In this context, Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICPs) have emerged as an important alternative, especially considering the interruption in the supply of these practices to the population due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A notable response was the initiative of health professionals trained in ICPs, who began to make these practices available to their co-workers. This highlights the importance of worker self-care and health as fundamental elements during this challenging period.

The challenges faced by health workers during the pandemic are multifaceted, highlighting the pressing need to care for the physical and mental health of these professionals. The resumption of ICPs, initially aimed at workers and later at the general population, is pointed out as a potential strategy to deal with these challenges. In addition to adaptations in services to ensure the health and safety of workers, the creation of support networks and the systematic provision of PICS during the working day emerge as crucial measures to promote the well-being and mental health of professionals.

The study conducted by Reiser and Mattos (2023) offers important insights into the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of frontline health workers. The results revealed a significant



deterioration in this dimension, highlighting the lack of appreciation of the mental health of these workers and the urgent need for care. The changes imposed by the pandemic, such as the increased workload, the complexity of cases, and the reorganization of services, have exacerbated the challenges faced by these professionals.

Faced with this scenario, demands for mental health programs and new communication strategies that could support the care process emerged. The study also draws attention to the phenomenon of scientific denialism, which resulted in practices that were not scientifically based and had negative repercussions for health teams. In addition, an intensification of occupational stress was observed, especially among professionals who dealt directly with patients infected with COVID-19.

The urgent need to implement programs and actions aimed at the mental health of health professionals has become evident, highlighting the importance of policies and strategies to prevent mental illness in the workplace. The study recognizes its limitations, such as the specific focus on the reality of certain professionals during the peak of the pandemic, but emphasizes the relevance of considering the experiences of these professionals for the development of effective mental health care measures.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The panorama outlined by the studies offers a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of life at work and on the mental health of health professionals, particularly those working on the frontline and in primary care. It is evident that the crisis triggered by the pandemic transcended the limits of the biological aspect, entering the social and work field, where professionals were often perceived only as caregivers, neglecting their own needs for care and respect.

The precariousness of work in the health area was manifested in a glaring way, reflected in the lack of adequate social protection and constant exposure to the risk of contamination, resulting in feelings of anguish and insecurity that directly impacted the mental health of these professionals. In addition, the intensification of occupational stress during the pandemic, exacerbated by the increased workload and the complexity of cases, highlighted the urgency of care and support strategies aimed at the mental health of professionals.

The studies also highlight the importance of Integrative and Complementary Health Practices (ICPs) as a significant alternative for self-care and health promotion of health professionals. The initiative by professionals with PICS training to make them available to their co-workers during the pandemic highlights the need for holistic approaches that consider not only the physical health but also the mental health of workers.



In this context, it is crucial to implement policies and strategies aimed at preventing mental illness and promoting the well-being of health professionals. A close and sensitive look at the experiences of these professionals, especially those who faced frontline challenges during the peak of the pandemic, is needed in order to develop effective mental health care measures in the workplace. In sum, the studies highlight the urgency of an integrated and comprehensive approach to address the health impacts of the pandemic on health workers, recognizing their vital importance and ensuring that they are given the support they need to face future challenges.



REFERENCES

1. ASSUNÇÃO, N. M.; CORRÊA, A. P. V.; ANDRÉ UEHARA, S. C. da S. (2022). SAÚDE AMBIENTAL E COVID-19 NO CONTEXTO DA ENFERMAGEM DA ATENÇÃO PRIMÁRIA – SCOPING REVIEW. *Revista Enfermagem Atual In Derme*, 96(39).
2. LIMA, L. A. de O.; DOMINGUES JUNIOR, P. L.; GOMES, O. V. de O. (2023). SAÚDE MENTAL E ESGOTAMENTO PROFISSIONAL: UM ESTUDO QUALITATIVO SOBRE OS FATORES ASSOCIADOS À SÍNDROME DE BURNOUT ENTRE PROFISSIONAIS DA SAÚDE. *Boletim de Conjuntura (BOCA)*, 16(47), 264–283. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10198981. <https://revista.ioles.com.br/boca/index.php/revista/article/view/2653>
3. MARTINS, R. U. et al. (2020). SAÚDE MENTAL DOS PROFISSIONAIS DA ATENÇÃO BÁSICA EM TEMPOS DE PANDEMIA: MENTAL HEALTH OF BASIC CARE PROFESSIONALS IN PANDEMIC TIMES. *Cadernos ESP*, 14(1), 133–137.
4. OLIVEIRA, F. E. S. et al. (2023). Transtornos mentais comuns em profissionais da Atenção Primária à Saúde em um período de pandemia da covid-19: estudo transversal na macrorregião Norte de saúde de Minas Gerais, 2021. *Epidemiologia e Serviços de Saúde*, 32(1):e2022432.
5. PEIXOTO, D. S. et al. (2021). A atuação da fisioterapia no nível de atenção primária durante a pandemia do Covid-19 em uma unidade de saúde no interior do Ceará: relato de experiência. *Brazilian Journal of Health Review*, 4(4), 18306-18317.
6. PEREIRA, E. C. et al. (2022). Saúde do trabalhador, práticas integrativas e complementares na atenção básica e pandemia da COVID-19. *Rev. Esc. Enferm. USP*.
7. REISER, M. N.; MATTOS, L. B. (2023). REPERCUSSÕES DA COVID-19 NA SAÚDE MENTAL DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE SAÚDE DA ATENÇÃO PRIMÁRIA À SAÚDE. *Revista Enfermagem Atual In Derme*, 97(3), e023128.