

Chapter 13

Burnout Syndrome in Health Professionals in Portuguese Public Hospitals During the Pandemic Context

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ABSTRACT

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 triggered several adverse mental health situations in everyone's lives, particularly in health care professionals, especially those on the frontline. It is in this context that the starting question arises: Is COVID-19 enhancing the burnout syndrome in Portuguese public health professionals? This is the main objective of this research, and to this end a quantitative study based on a systematic review of the literature will be conducted to assess changes in burnout levels and to identify predictors of burnout in health care professionals. It was concluded that in the study by Almeida et al. conducted in Portugal, the majority of health care professionals do not have burnout symptoms, only 32.1%; while the factors that imply burnout prevalence were identified as having a medium or low level of resilience (OR=6.8), the perception of lack of social/family support (OR=5.4), and having more concerns about the future post-pandemic (OR=4.5).

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by COVID-19, was first identified in the city of Wuhan in China in late 2019, and quickly spread to the five continents of the world (Lana et al., 2020).

In the past, there have been several types of infectious diseases, very similar to COVID-19, such as Ebola, Influenza, and MERS, through which it was possible to observe several impacts of mental nature,

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on healthcare workers, such as, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and Burnout. The latter was predominant in the periods during and after the pandemic, having as predictors: being younger, having fewer years of experience, the lack of social support, stigma and isolation (Barreto, 2020; Cabello et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Due to the pandemic, health organizations, especially the entities of the National Health Service (NHS), have been forced to modify their work environment to meet a basic need, which is to ensure public health. Thus, the NHS was overburdened due to the large increase in users who use these services.

In this context, one of the consequences is the disturbance of the mental health of health professionals, which implies the development of the Burnout Syndrome, since it is likely that the workload has increased, working hours may have changed, and lack of resources, either organizational or human, may have emerged.

Burnout is defined as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, which usually arises as a result of working with people over a long period of time, and the work situations are emotionally demanding (Pines & Aronson, 1983; Shaufeli & Greenglas, 2001).

Taking into account the current panorama, the mental health of health professionals can undergo drastic changes due to several factors, such as the stress caused by work overload, i.e. changes in working hours that translate into long working hours, which leads to increased time in direct contact with patients (Marôco et al, 2016; Cruz et al., 2018; Reith, 2018; Tachtsoglou et al., 2018), on the other hand, decisions are made under pressure, the confrontation with death, poor working conditions and the lack of specialized resources, whether human or organizational (Ferreira & Luca, 2015; Marôco et al., 2016; Mosteiro et al., 2018; Chemali et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Burnout Syndrome

The first approaches to Burnout Syndrome emerged in the 1970s in the United States of America (Freudenberger, 1974). The problem of Burnout was initially pointed out as something characteristic in the “helping professions”, in individuals who “work with people”, as is the case of care occupations and human services, namely, health care, mental health, social services, criminal justice system, religious professions, counseling and decision-making (Maslach, 2003).

The word Burnout comes from the English expression “to burn out”, which means (burn) outside (out), that is, to burn to exhaustion, which indicates that the individual who suffers from this disease has physical and emotional damage. Due to their state of exhaustion (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

The concept of Burnout was used to characterize a state of physical and mental fatigue, which is felt by many groups of professionals in the area of health and human services, being a direct consequence due to the chronic emotional tension and the excessive effort that the contact presupposes. continuous with other people, especially when they have problems (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

The evolution of Burnout syndrome stems from an exhausting and overloaded professional life that disables workers to perform their tasks with quality due to prolonged or chronic professional stress (Trigo et al., 2007).

The definition of Burnout Syndrome, currently most accepted, is based on the socio-psychological perspective proposed by psychologist Christina Maslach and colleagues, who classify Burnout as a

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