

The influence of quality of life on the work of nursing professionals in public health

A influência da qualidade de vida no trabalho dos profissionais de enfermagem na saúde pública

Influencia de la calidad de vida en el trabajo de los profesionales de enfermería en salud pública

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Identificar e analisar os principais fatores que influenciam a QV dos enfermeiros no contexto da saúde pública, considerando aspectos econômicos, psicossociais e ambientais. **Metodologia:** Trata-se de uma revisão bibliográfica integrativa com abordagem qualitativa. A busca foi realizada nas bases PubMed e BVS, com descritores como "qualidade de vida", "trabalhadores de enfermagem" e "saúde pública". Foram analisados estudos publicados entre 2003 e 2024. **Resultados:** Enfermeiros de países de alta renda, como Canadá e Alemanha, possuem melhores condições de trabalho e menor burnout, enquanto em países de baixa renda, como Brasil e Filipinas, prevalecem longas jornadas e altos níveis de exaustão emocional. **Conclusão:** A QV dos enfermeiros é diretamente impactada por remuneração, suporte psicológico e condições de trabalho. Países de baixa renda enfrentam maiores desafios, exigindo políticas que melhorem essas condições para promover o bem-estar dos profissionais e a eficácia dos sistemas de saúde pública. **Descritores:** Qualidade de Vida; Profissionais de Enfermagem; Saúde Pública.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify and analyze the main factors influencing nurses' QoL in the public health context, considering economic, psychosocial, and environmental aspects. **Method:** This is an integrative literature review with a qualitative approach. The search was conducted in the PubMed and BVS databases using descriptors such as "quality of life," "nursing workers," and "public health." Studies published between 2003 and 2024 were analyzed. **Results:** Nurses in high-income countries, such as Canada and Germany, have better working conditions and lower burnout rates, while in low-income countries, such as Brazil and the Philippines, long work hours and high levels of emotional exhaustion prevail. **Conclusion:** Nurses' QoL is directly impacted by remuneration, psychological support, and working conditions. Low-income countries face greater challenges, requiring policies that improve these conditions to promote the well-being of professionals and the effectiveness of public health systems. **Descriptors:** Quality of Life; Nursing Workers; Public Health.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Identificar y analizar los principales factores que influyen en la CV de las enfermeras en el contexto de la salud pública, considerando aspectos económicos, psicossociales y ambientales. **Metodología:** Se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura con enfoque cualitativo. La búsqueda se realizó en las bases de datos PubMed y BVS, con descriptores como "calidad de vida", "trabajadores de enfermería" y "salud pública". Se analizaron estudios publicados entre 2003 y 2024. **Resultados:** Las enfermeras de países de ingresos altos, como Canadá y Alemania, tienen mejores condiciones de trabajo y menor burnout, mientras que en países de ingresos bajos, como Brasil y Filipinas, predominan las largas jornadas de trabajo y los altos niveles de agotamiento emocional. **Conclusión:** los artículos analizados revelan una clara necesidad de concienciación y formación continua de los profesionales de salud para prevenir la violencia obstétrica, lo que justifica la importancia del folleto de buenas prácticas. **Descritores:** Calidad de vida; Trabajadores de Enfermería; Salud pública.

Introduction

The quality of life (QoL) of nursing professionals in the workplace is widely recognized as a central element for the promotion of humanized and effective care in public health. Nurses play a fundamental role in health systems, being responsible for the direct and continuous care of patients, requiring both technical skills and psychological preparation to face intense and challenging situations. In addition to the physical and technical demands, these professionals deal with significant emotional pressures resulting from direct contact with patients in diverse and often adverse conditions.¹

The QoL of nurses directly reflects on the safety and quality of care offered to the population. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), quality of life is defined as an individual's perception of their position in life, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects, in relation to their goals, expectations, and concerns, considering the person's cultural context and values². For nurses, these aspects are added to specific factors of the work environment, such as remuneration, psychological support, professional development opportunities, and adequate structural conditions. These elements are crucial for the well-being of professionals and the effectiveness of health services provided to the population.

On the other hand, a low QoL among nursing professionals has been widely documented, bringing negative consequences for the professionals themselves, for patients and for health institutions. The absence of psychological support and adequate working conditions is often associated with burnout, which manifests itself as emotional exhaustion, affective detachment from patients, and a perception of low personal fulfillment³. These conditions directly affect the quality of care, increasing absenteeism and team turnover, which compromises the continuity and effectiveness of care.

Studies indicate that the reality faced by nurses varies significantly between different countries. In high-income nations such as Canada, Sweden, and Germany, psychological support policies and clear regulations on working hours contribute to higher job satisfaction and lower burnout rates⁴. In contrast, in low- and middle-income countries such as Brazil, India, and the Philippines, financial constraints, poor infrastructure, and inadequate policies result in long working hours and harsh conditions that intensify occupational stress. This international comparison is essential to evaluate the different approaches and how they influence the QoL of nurses in public health.

Thus, the present study aims, through an integrative and comparative review, to identify the main factors that influence the QoL of nurses in various socioeconomic contexts. The analysis of occupational support practices and policies in countries of different levels of development aims to contribute to the development of interventions and public policies that favor better working conditions and value these professionals.

Methodology

This study was developed with a qualitative approach, adopting the method of integrative literature review. This method was chosen due to its ability to integrate and synthesize multiple qualitative, quantitative, and mixed studies, providing a comprehensive and detailed view of the factors that affect

the quality of life (QoL) of nursing professionals in various socioeconomic contexts. The integrative review allows for the identification, analysis and critical evaluation of the available evidence, offering a multidimensional perspective on the occupational health of nurses and the variables that influence their well-being in the work environment.

The integrative review followed six methodological steps:

1. Identification of the problem and formulation of the research question: The objective was to identify the main factors that impact the QoL of nurses in the context of public health in different countries, considering economic, organizational, psychosocial and environmental variables.
2. Establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria: Defined to ensure the relevance and specificity of the selected studies.
3. Literature search: Performed in multiple databases to maximize the scope of the review.
4. Critical evaluation of the included studies: Considering the methods used, validity, quality and applicability of the results.
5. Data analysis: Organized into thematic categories according to the factors that influence the QoL of nurses.
6. Presentation and discussion of the results: Based on the evidence extracted from the selected studies, proposing recommendations for the improvement of nurses' working conditions.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

To ensure the relevance of the studies analyzed, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were established:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Articles published between 2003 and 2024.
- Studies in Portuguese and English.
- Research that specifically addressed the QoL of nurses in the context of public health, considering aspects such as working conditions, occupational stress, social support and mental health.
- Empirical data or systematic reviews that met rigorous methodological standards.
- Studies conducted in different countries, allowing comparisons between varied socioeconomic contexts.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies that focused on other health professionals, such as physicians or nursing technicians, or that were not related to the public health sector.
- Articles that addressed the QoL of nurses in private contexts or that did not present empirical data or systematic reviews.
- Studies that did not directly address occupational factors related to public health.

Data sources and collection procedure

Data collection was carried out in two main databases: PubMed and the Virtual Health Library (VHL). These databases were chosen because of their scope in the field of public health and because they allow access to relevant studies on the QoL of nurses.

The following descriptors were used:

- "Quality of life"
- "nursing workers"
- "Public health"

The combination of these descriptors was adjusted to meet the specificities of each database. The search also considered different terms in English and Portuguese, such as "quality of life", "nursing workers", and "public health", to ensure a broad coverage of studies. The search in multiple sources allowed us to cover studies from different regions and economic contexts, favoring a more robust and comprehensive comparative analysis.

Data analysis and evaluation

The data were analyzed qualitatively and organized into four main thematic dimensions, according to the variables identified as influencing factors for the nurses' QoL:

Wage Conditions and Working Hours: Involved comparing wages, regulations on working hours, and economic conditions in different countries. The impact of remuneration and working hours on the physical and emotional well-being of nurses was analyzed, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where multiple jobs are common to supplement income.

Occupational Stress and Mental Health: Focused on analyzing the presence and effectiveness of psychological support programs, both in the workplace and outside of it. Studies on burnout, emotional exhaustion, and the relationship between occupational stress and nurses' mental health were analyzed in this dimension. Studies that related occupational stress to the quality of care provided to patients were also considered.

Social Support and Interpersonal Relationships: The level of social support and interpersonal relationships between colleagues and supervisors in the work environment was evaluated. This dimension considered team cohesion, collaboration among professionals, and the impact of interpersonal relationships on motivation, occupational resilience, and nurses' satisfaction.

Infrastructure and Working Conditions: It addressed the physical infrastructure of the hospitals and health units where nurses work, including the availability of adequate materials and equipment to carry out their duties. This dimension compared working conditions in high-, middle- and low-income countries, assessing the impact of infrastructure on the safety and well-being of nurses.

These categories allowed a systematic and in-depth evaluation of the working conditions that affect the QoL of nurses. The thematic analysis of the studies offered a solid basis for the formulation of practical recommendations,

with a view to improving the working conditions of professionals in different socioeconomic contexts.

Results and Discussion

The results of the review indicate that nurses' quality of life (QoL) is influenced by several factors, such as remuneration, working hours, occupational stress, social support, and infrastructure. Nurses from high-income countries, such as Canada and Germany, have better salary conditions, regulated working hours, and institutionalized psychological support, resulting in lower burnout⁵. In contrast, professionals in low- and middle-income countries, such as Brazil and the Philippines, face lower wages, long hours, and greater stress. Quantitative data demonstrate that in low-income countries, 70% of nurses report high emotional exhaustion compared to 30% in high-income countries⁶.

Wage conditions and working hours

Wage inequality and long working hours proved to be critical factors for the quality of life (QoL) of nurses, especially in middle- and low-income countries, such as Brazil and the Philippines. The need to accumulate multiple jobs, associated with low pay, generates work overload, physical and emotional exhaustion, and high levels of stress. In data collected, about 65% of Brazilian nurses reported working more than 12 hours a day to support their families, increasing the incidence of occupational diseases¹.

In high-income countries such as Canada and Germany, wage regulation proportional to the cost of living and controlled working hours provide a healthy work-life balance. These countries demonstrate that better wage conditions are directly related to a lower incidence of burnout and greater job satisfaction. Data show that German nurses report 20% higher satisfaction with the work environment when compared to those in low-income countries⁷. This directly reflects on the lower incidence of occupational health problems and absenteeism. Thus, the results suggest that health systems in low-income countries could benefit significantly from adopting similar policies, adapted to their economic realities⁸.

Occupational stress and mental health

High levels of occupational stress in countries with fewer resources, such as Brazil and the Philippines, were associated with high demand for care and lack of institutional psychological support. The absence of regular support programs contributes to the increase in burnout and emotional exhaustion among professionals, which affects the quality of care provided³. In Brazil, data from recent studies indicate that more than 50% of nurses report physical and emotional exhaustion on a weekly basis, with many reporting difficulties in maintaining continuity of care¹.

On the other hand, in countries such as Sweden and Germany, where psychological support is institutionalized, burnout rates are lower, and job satisfaction is higher. Quantitative data indicate that Swedish nurses who participate in regular psychological support programs report a 40% reduction

in burnout rates⁹. This highlights the importance of implementing mental health support programs as a key strategy for improving the quality of life at work and the effectiveness of public health services in low- and middle-income countries⁷.

Social support and interpersonal relationships

Social support in the work environment is another determining factor for the QoL of nurses. In countries with organizational cultures that promote collaborative work and mutual support, such as in the United States and Canada, professionals report higher satisfaction and lower stress levels. About 60% of North American nurses indicated that support between colleagues and supervisors contributes to greater motivation at work and resilience in the face of day-to-day challenges⁸.

Social integration and support between colleagues and superiors create a more cohesive and healthier environment, reflecting positively on the occupational resilience of nurses. On the other hand, in countries with less social support, such as the Philippines, where only 35% of nurses report significant support from their teams, isolation and emotional burden increase, which contributes to dissatisfaction and professional exhaustion³. These findings underscore the need for organizational policies that foster social cohesion and mutual support, promoting a more collaborative and resilient work environment¹.

Infrastructure and working conditions

Adequate infrastructure is essential to ensure the quality of life of nurses and safety in the workplace. In low-income countries, such as Brazil and South Africa, the precariousness of equipment and the lack of adequate infrastructure result in overload and stress, negatively affecting both professionals and patients³. Data show that 55% of Brazilian nurses reported a lack of basic materials to perform their work efficiently, which directly compromises the quality of care¹.

In developed countries, such as Canada and Australia, investment in adequate infrastructure and equipment provides safer and more efficient work environments. This not only improves the quality of life for nurses but also promotes patient safety and well-being. Studies indicate that Australian nurses who work in health facilities with adequate infrastructure have a 30% reduction in stress levels, compared to those who work in inadequate conditions⁹. These results reinforce the importance of strategic investments in infrastructure in low-income countries, to improve working conditions and health care outcomes⁸.

Study limitations

This study has some limitations. The absence of longitudinal data prevents an in-depth analysis of changes and trends in nurses' working conditions over time. In addition, the predominance of studies conducted in low- and middle-income countries limits the generalization of results to high-income contexts, where health systems have greater support and infrastructure.

It is recommended that future studies carry out longitudinal and comparative investigations between different contexts, allowing for the identification of more accurate practices and trends that promote nurses' QoL, taking into account both the development of health policies and the specific needs of each region.

Conclusion

The integrative review demonstrates that the quality of life (QoL) of nurses in public health is influenced by a complex set of economic, organizational and psychosocial factors. In low-income countries, work overload, inadequate remuneration, and lack of psychological support are critical factors that lead to burnout and high turnover, compromising the continuity and quality of care provided. On the other hand, in high-income countries, policies to regulate working hours, wage appreciation and psychological support contribute to a safer and more efficient work environment, with lower burnout rates.

Social support and collaborative organizational culture stand out as important protective factors, promoting resilience and satisfaction among nurses. Even in contexts with limited resources, strategies aimed at creating a healthy work environment can favor the QoL of professionals. Thus, the implementation of psychological support policies, regulation of working hours and wage appreciation should be considered a priority in middle- and low-income countries, where these challenges are more significant.

The findings reinforce that valuing nurses is an essential strategic investment to ensure the well-being of professionals, patient safety, and the sustainability of public health systems. The adaptation of good practices observed in developed countries, even if in models adjusted to more modest contexts, can contribute significantly to the strengthening and humanization of public health care. In summary, the promotion of nurses' QoL is an essential pillar for the effectiveness and sustainability of public health systems globally.

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