

# Psychosocial impacts on healthcare professionals in the COVID-19 pandemic: Integrative review

## Impactos psicossociais em profissionais de saúde na pandemia de COVID-19: Revisão integrativa

## Impactos psicosociales en los profesionales de la salud en la pandemia COVID-19: Revisión integrativa

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# REVISA

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### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Analisar na literatura científica, pesquisas que identificaram nos profissionais de saúde os impactos psicossociais gerados pela pandemia de COVID-19. **Método:** Revisão integrativa da literatura realizada no mês de outubro de 2024, nas bases informacionais CINAHL, LILACS, MEDLINE e Scopus. Para a construção da revisão foram utilizadas as recomendações do Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). **Resultados:** Na busca inicial em todas as bases de dados selecionadas, foram identificados 2.405 registros, sendo 1.735 na CINAHL, seguido de 496 na SCOPUS, 166 na LILACS e 08 publicações na MEDLINE. Foram selecionadas 13 pesquisas. As pesquisas foram feitas através de questionários e alguns estudos utilizaram escalas para avaliação de depressão, ansiedade, estresse e resiliência. **Conclusões:** Diante da exposição dos resultados encontrados na revisão, foi possível observar as interferências psicossociais frente à COVID-19. Mesmo que esse estudo evidencie as repercussões da COVID-19 de maneira global, a identificação de outros impactos para além da saúde mental, como os aspectos socioeconômico e cultural é importante para a uma discussão ampla sobre as condições psicossociais que afetam os profissionais de saúde. Dessa forma, essa pesquisa contribuirá para o desenvolvimento de novas estratégias para o enfrentamento de suas consequências.

**Descritores:** Impacto Psicossocial; Pessoal de Saúde; COVID-19; Revisão.

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Objective: To analyze the scientific literature, research that identified the psychosocial impacts generated by the COVID-19 pandemic on health professionals. **Method:** Integrative literature review carried out in October 2024, in the information bases CINAHL, LILACS, MEDLINE and Scopus. To construct the review, the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) were used. **Results:** In the initial search in all selected databases, 2,405 records were identified, 1,735 in CINAHL, followed by 496 in SCOPUS, 166 in LILACS and 08 publications in MEDLINE. 13 studies were selected. The research was carried out using questionnaires and some studies used scales to assess depression, anxiety, stress and resilience. **Conclusions:** Given the exposure of the results found in the review, it was possible to observe the psychosocial interferences faced by COVID-19. Even though this study highlights the global repercussions of COVID-19, the identification of other impacts beyond mental health, such as socioeconomic and cultural aspects, is important for a broad discussion about the psychosocial conditions that affect health professionals. In this way, this research will contribute to the development of new strategies for coping with its consequences.

**Descriptors:** Psychosocial Impact; Health Personnel; COVID-19; Review.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Analizar la literatura científica, investigaciones que identificaron los impactos psicosociales generados por la pandemia COVID-19 en los profesionales de la salud. **Método:** Revisión integrativa de literatura realizada en octubre de 2024, en las bases de información CINAHL, LILACS, MEDLINE y Scopus. Para construir la revisión, se utilizaron las recomendaciones de los Ítems de Informes Preferidos para Revisiones Sistemáticas y Metanálisis (PRISMA 2020). **Resultados:** En la búsqueda inicial en todas las bases de datos seleccionadas se identificaron 2.405 registros, 1.735 en CINAHL, seguido de 496 en SCOPUS, 166 en LILACS y 08 publicaciones en MEDLINE. Se seleccionaron 13 estudios. La investigación se llevó a cabo mediante cuestionarios y algunos estudios utilizaron escalas para evaluar la depresión, la ansiedad, el estrés y la resiliencia. **Conclusiones:** Dada la exposición de los resultados encontrados en la revisión, fue posible observar las interferencias psicosociales que enfrenta el COVID-19. Si bien este estudio destaca las repercusiones globales de la COVID-19, la identificación de otros impactos más allá de la salud mental, como aspectos socioeconómicos y culturales, es importante para una discusión amplia sobre las condiciones psicosociales que afectan a los profesionales de la salud. De esta manera, esta investigación contribuirá al desarrollo de nuevas estrategias para afrontar sus consecuencias.

**Descritores:** Impacto Psicossocial; Personal de Salud; COVID-19; Revisión.

REVIEW

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated several challenges and concerns around the world. With a high rate of transmissibility, it is a serious public health problem, essentially for health professionals who worked on the front line against the virus. In addition to the various changes that COVID brought in the health field, it could have negative impacts on the mental health of these professionals.<sup>(1)</sup>

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), psychosocial factors are one of the biggest concerns in the world of work. These factors are considered the interaction between the environment, the content, the working conditions, the culture of the worker and his needs, and his extra-work experience.<sup>(2)</sup>

It is known that work overload and inadequate working conditions were aspects that intensified due to the pandemic context. In view of the changes that COVID-19 brought, the impact on mental health reflected the intensity experienced during the pandemic, occupational stress, professional devaluation, as well as negligence in the mental health of professionals, evidencing the need to strengthen workers' health.<sup>(3)</sup>

The COVID-19 health crisis has been able to highlight weaknesses in health management and services, having a greater degree of impact on less developed countries and marginalized populations. The interruption of essential services, the infodemic of fake news, denialism in relation to the vaccine, and all the repercussions that the pandemic brought, led health professionals to a state of exhaustion, chronic stress, anxiety, and depression. Actions to protect work and workers become fundamental in the face of these conditions.<sup>(4)</sup>

Although the end of the COVID-19 pandemic has been triggered, the consequences of this moment persist and with that, it is necessary to verify the effects caused in order to develop coping strategies for each affected scenario. Thus, the objective of this study was to analyze in the scientific literature, research that identified the psychosocial impacts generated by the COVID-19 pandemic on health professionals.

## Method

It is an integrative review of the literature, being a methodological approach that allows the inclusion of experimental and non-experimental studies, incorporating the research into the definition of concepts, the review of theories and evidence, and the analysis of methodological issues. This research method offers scientific support and for this review it is divided into six stages: 01) elaboration of the research question; 02) search in the literature with the definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria; 03) data collection; 04) analysis of the studies included in the review; 05) discussion of the results; and 06) presentation of the integrative review.<sup>(5-6)</sup>

To formulate the research question, the acronym PICO was used: health personnel (P= population); psychosocial impacts (I= phenomenon of interest); and COVID-19 (Co= context). Thus, the following question was defined: What is presented in the literature about the psychosocial impacts that affected SUS health professionals due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The search was carried out in October 2024, in the informational databases Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE) and Scopus, through the Federated Academic Community (CAFe) of the Portal of Journals of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).

The Medical Subject Headings (DeCS/MeSH) was used to define the descriptors: Psychosocial Impact, Health Personnel, COVID-19, associated with the related terms: Health Care Professional and COVID-19 Pandemic. The search strategies used in each database are described in the following table.

**Quadro 1 - Estratégias de busca nas bases de dados. Niterói, RJ, Brasil, 2024.**

<b>Bases</b>	<b>Estratégias</b>
<b>CINALH</b>	impacto psicossocial AND pessoal de saúde OR profissional de saúde AND covid-19 OR pandemia covid 19
<b>LILACS</b>	impacto psicossocial AND pessoal de saúde OR profissional de saúde AND covid-19 OR pandemia covid 19
<b>MEDLINE</b>	(psychosocial impact) AND (health personnel) OR (health care professional) AND (covid-19) OR (covid 19 pandemic)
<b>SCOPUS</b>	(psychosocial impact) AND (health personnel) OR (health care professional) AND (covid-19) OR (covid 19 pandemic)

Original articles that answered the research question were included in the review. The exclusion criteria included notes, books, letters to the editor, theses and dissertations, review articles, experience reports, comments, abstracts, interviews, and the like. As search filters, the time frame from 2020 to 2024 was applied, and in Portuguese, English, and Spanish.

For the organization and selection of the studies, the Rayyan application<sup>(7)</sup> was used, where the researchers performed the exclusion of duplicates, the screening of the articles according to the eligibility criteria, so that they could be read in full and included in the review. The data extracted from the included studies were arranged in an analysis matrix prepared by the authors containing: title, journal/webqualis, year of publication, language, country, study design, setting, participants, and research objectives.

The level of evidence of the studies was assessed through seven levels of classification: level I, systematic review or meta-analysis; level II, a randomized controlled clinical trial; level III, clinical trials designed without randomization; level IV, cohort and case-control studies; level V, systematic review of descriptive and qualitative studies; level VI, descriptive or qualitative study; and level VII, opinion of authorities and/or report of expert committees.<sup>(8)</sup>

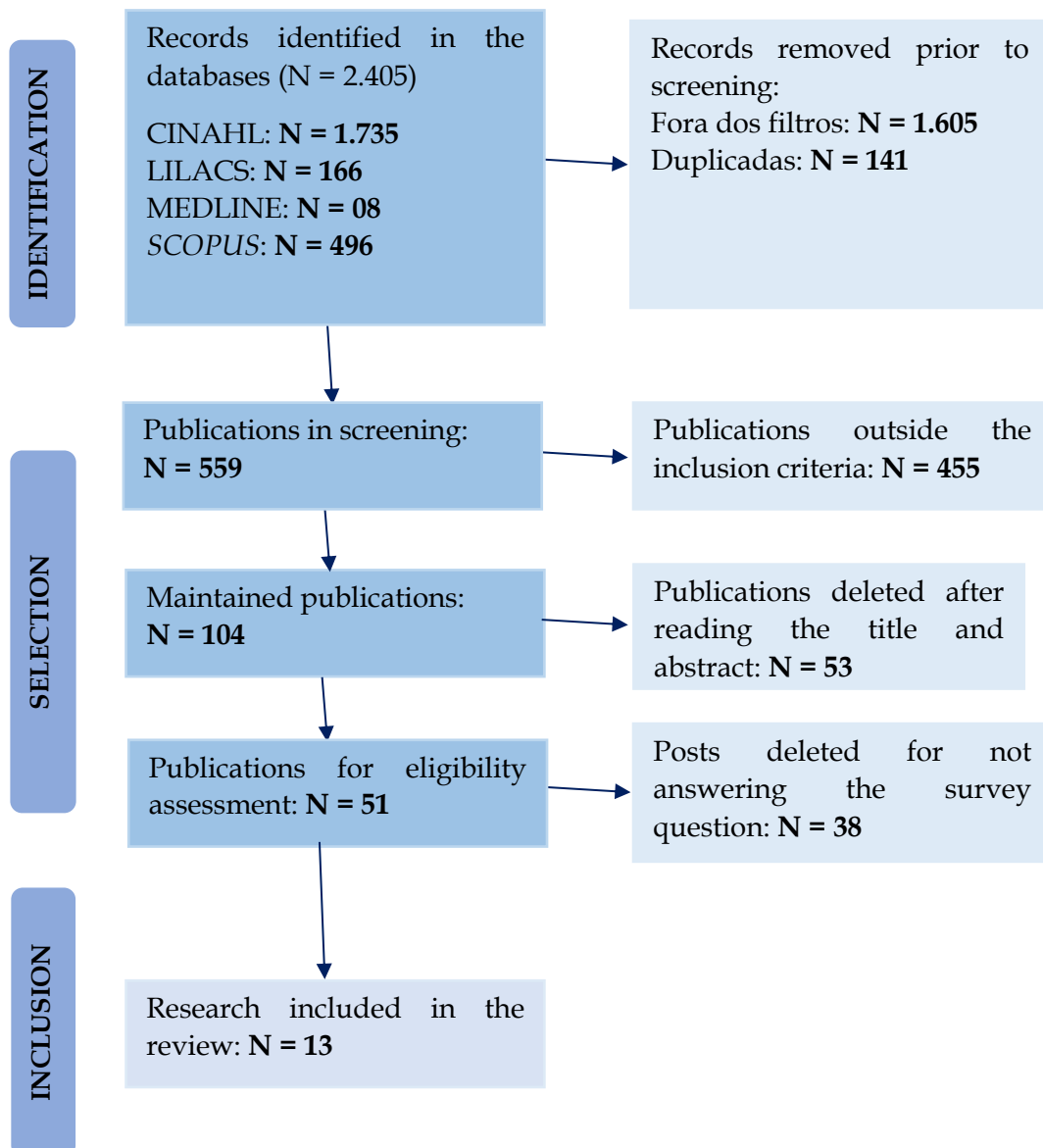
Subsequently, the organization and systematization in the matrix were analyzed and synthesized from the qualitative evidence and the correlations between the studies considering the research question, the discussion was carried out according to thematic categories. For the construction of the review,

the recommendations of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) were used.<sup>(9)</sup>

## Results

In the initial search in all selected databases, 2,405 records were identified, 1,735 in CINAHL, followed by 496 in SCOPUS, 166 in LILACS and 08 publications in MEDLINE. A total of 13 (100.0%) studies were selected to compose the integrative review. The search and selection process of articles are set out in the flowchart adapted from PRISMA 2020, in figure 1.

**Figure 1** - Flowchart of the selection of articles for review. Niterói, RJ, Brazil, 2024.



Regarding the characterization of the selected research, it is noteworthy that 02 (15.4%) studies were in Portuguese and 11 (84.6%) in English. Regarding the study design, 11 (84.6%) were cross-sectional.

**Table 1** - Characterization of the publications according to title, language, country, study design and objectives. Niterói, RJ, Brazil, 2024.

Publications	Title	Language/ Country	Study Design	Objectives
<b>P1</b>	Influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the emergence of burnout in physiotherapists in intensive care units <sup>(10)</sup>	Portuguese/ Brazil	Cross-sectional study	To analyze the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work and emotional performance of physiotherapists who worked in intensive care units.
<b>P2</b>	Impacto da COVID-19 na saúde emocional e na rotina de trabalho de fisioterapeutas oncológicos no Brasil <sup>(11)</sup>	Portuguese/ Brazil	Cross-sectional study	To evaluate the effect of COVID-19 on the emotional health and work routine of oncology physiotherapists in Brazil.
<b>P3</b>	Psychosocial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers in India & their perceptions on the way forward - A qualitative study <sup>(12)</sup>	English/Indian	Cross-sectional study	Help promote needs-based intervention strategies for health professionals to improve their mental well-being, which in turn, would help improve the health care system for quality patient-centered care.
<b>P4</b>	Beyond the physical risk: Psychosocial impact and coping in healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic <sup>(13)</sup>	English/Cyprus	Cross-sectional study	To examine the psychosocial impact and identify risk factors for poor psychosocial outcomes in health care workers during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in Cyprus.
<b>P5</b>	Psychosocial Impact and Role of Resilience on Healthcare Workers during COVID-19 Pandemic <sup>(14)</sup>	English/Italy	Cross-sectional study	Investigating whether and how resilience and personality profile can influence the response to stress and anxiety in a sample of Italians health workers, during the COVID-19 outbreak
<b>P6</b>	Immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work and personal lives of Australian hospital clinical staff <sup>(15)</sup>	English/ Australia	Cross-sectional study	To investigate the short-term psychosocial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospitals clinical staff, specifically their self-reported concerns and perceived impact on their work and personal life.
<b>P7</b>	Analysis of Psychosocial Impact on Health Care Workers and General population of India during COVID 19 Pandemic using HAM-A scale <sup>(16)</sup>	English/Indian	Cross-sectional study	To determine the unanticipated psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental state of health workers and the general population.

<b>P8</b>	Psychosocial influence of COVID-19 on healthcare workers <sup>(17)</sup>	English/Sarajevo Canton	Cross-sectional study	Avaliar o impacto psicossocial da doença do Coronavírus 2019 (COVID-19) em profissionais de saúde e quantificar o tamanho dos sintomas de depressão, ansiedade e níveis de estresse.
<b>P9</b>	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on psychosocial work factors and emotional exhaustion among workers in the healthcare sector: a longitudinal study among 1915 Dutch workers <sup>(18)</sup>	English/Netherlands	Cohort study	Investigar subgrupos de profissionais de saúde (1) as mudanças nas condições psicossociais de trabalho e emocionais exaustão durante a pandemia em comparação com o situação anterior e (2) o impacto de diferentes estágios da pandemia de COVID-19 em termos de pressão hospitalar sobre condições psicossociais de trabalho e problemas emocionais exaustão.
<b>P10</b>	Analysis of the Psychosocial Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Nursing Staff of the Intensive Care Units (ICU) in Spain <sup>(19)</sup>	English/Spain	Cross-sectional study	Describe the psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nurses working in intensive care units (ICU) and identify related risk factors.
<b>P11</b>	The psychosocial impact of quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 among healthcare workers in Israel <sup>(20)</sup>	English/Israel	Cross-sectional study	To assess the psychosocial effects of quarantine on ERs from tertiary hospitals that were exposed to the coronavirus.
<b>P12</b>	Psychosocial impact of COVID-19 pandemic on front-line healthcare workers in Sierra Leone: an explorative qualitative study <sup>(21)</sup>	English/Sierra Leone	Exploratory /qualitative study	Explore the psychosocial experiences of frontline, health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sierra Leone
<b>P13</b>	COVID-19 and Psychosocial Well-Being: Did COVID-19 Worsen U.S. Frontline Healthcare Workers' Burnout, Anxiety, and Depression? <sup>(22)</sup>	English/United States	Cross-sectional study	Assessing the psychosocial COVID-19 impact on the U.S. Health Frontlines

Regarding the qualis of the journals, 06 (46.1%) have Qualis A stratification. 05 (38.5%) studies were published in 2023, followed by 04 (30.7%) publications in 2021, 03 (23.1%) in 2022, and 01 (7.7%) in 2020. The majority, 11 (84.6%), are classified at level V of evidence, 01 (7.7%) was classified at level IV and another publication 01 (7.7%) at level VI of evidence.

**Table 2** - Characterization of publications according to journal, webqualis, year of publication and level of evidence. Niterói, RJ, Brazil, 2024.

Publications	Journal	Webqualis	Publication Year	Evidence Level
P1	Fisioterapia Brasil	Qualis B2	2023	V
P2	Fisioterapia Brasil	Qualis B2	2023	V
P3	Indian Journal of Medical Research	Qualis B1	2021	V
P4	Journal of Clinical Nursing	Qualis A1	2021	V
P5	Sustainability	Qualis A1	2021	V
P6	Australian Health Review	X*	2020	V
P7	Journal of the Association of Physicians of India	X*	2021	V
P8	Medicinski Glasnik	X*	2022	V
P9	Occupational and Environmental Medicine	Qualis A1	2023	IV
P10	Healthcare	Qualis C	2022	V
P11	Health Promotion International	Qualis A2	2022	V
P12	BMJ Open	Qualis A1	2023	VI
P13	International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	Qualis A2	2023	V

**Legend:** X\* = No Qualis stratifications were found for the journals, only the impact factor.

Regarding the participants of the researches, they were described as doctors, paramedics, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists and midwives. In only 02 (15.4%) articles, other audiences participated in part of the studies, such as cleaning staff, security staff and the general population.

The studies used interviews, questionnaires and evaluation scales as research techniques. Most of the interviews took place in the online format, due to the pandemic context at the time, where social distancing recommendations were reinforced and online surveys were intensified. As a result, the research was done through questionnaires and some studies used scales to assess depression, anxiety, stress and resilience.

The scenario of health professionals' work was in large hospitals, in public and private institutions, in addition to COVID-19 treatment centers where they worked on the front line. The high prevalence of psychological disorders was the most prominent impact among the studies.

## Discussion

To extract the results, the period from 2020 to 2024 was used to find data related to the pandemic. The population participating in the study were health professionals who worked on the front line. The articles included in the study evidenced the presence of the term "exhaustion" and "emotional problems" in the work process analyzed in their research.

To identify the psychosocial impacts, the researchers used validated scales to assess anxiety (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale, DASS-21; General Anxiety Disorder-7, GAD-7; State Anxiety Inventory, STAI; Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale, HAM-A); stress (Perceived Stress Scale, PSS-10); depression (Patient Health Questionnaire-8; PHQ-8); and burnout (Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, CBI; Maslach Summative Burnout Scale).<sup>(11,13,14,16,17,22)</sup>

In addition, other measures that address self-efficacy and coping with problems (New Self-Efficacy Scale-8; Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced, Brief COPE); resilience (The Resilience Scale for Adults, RSA; Big Five Inventory-10, BFI-10) and quality of life (Brief World Health Organization Quality of Life; WHOQOL-Bref).<sup>(22,13,14)</sup>

Other studies evaluated the impacts through elaborate questionnaires that addressed issues with dimensions associated with psychosocial factors, and by providing space for free comments from participants. This made it possible for the analysis of the impacts to be more comprehensive and for there to be broader results on the subject.

The repercussions highlighted that gender, age, and professional category directly influence the impacts due to COVID-19. Regarding resilience, women received greater support compared to men. Younger professionals had higher levels of stress. Nurses and doctors were the most psychologically negatively affected.<sup>(14,11,19,13)</sup> However, one study identified that the medical profession had greater psychological well-being than that of nurses.<sup>(20)</sup>

Organizational factors of work, such as long workloads, scarcity of personnel and material resources, such as the lack of personal protective equipment, amplified professional exhaustion, as well as anxiety and depression, which could favor the triggering of burnout syndrome. Furthermore, these factors directly affect the quality of life of these workers.<sup>(11,10,13)</sup>

Two studies that investigated the influence of COVID-19 on the work field and on the emotional state of physiotherapists took place in Brazil, in one of them, it showed that more than 80% of professionals had some level of



burnout syndrome, in the other, the long working day caused greater symptoms of anxiety in professionals.<sup>(10-11)</sup>

A survey conducted at the end of the first year of the pandemic showed that the perception of psychosocial well-being by health professionals working on the front line in the United States of America worsened when compared to the pre-pandemic period. The results showed a more than 100% increase in anxiety and depression, as well as a decrease in resilience and self-efficacy. Aspects such as the absence of human and material resources, long working hours, and high transmission rates contributed to psychosocial suffering.<sup>(22)</sup>

However, a study carried out in the first wave of COVID-19 pointed out the first concerns regarding the pandemic in an Australian hospital, health professionals reported the risk and fear of exposure to the virus, concern about access to and use of personal protective equipment and its redistribution and to offer adequate care to patients infected with COVID-19. Participants also pointed out the effects on personal and family life, such as financial concerns and fear of the possibility of transmitting the disease. doença.<sup>(15)</sup>

An article from India determined the unanticipated psychosocial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental state of health workers and assessed that more than half of the respondents had moderate to very severe anxiety.<sup>(16)</sup> In the same country, a study showed interest in developing interventions according to the local needs of the study field, believing that this would positively interfere in the work process and patient care.<sup>(12)</sup>

In the study carried out in Italy, it was observed that some authors evaluate resilience and how the personality of each individual can influence how each professional can react to stress and anxiety in a predetermined group.<sup>(14)</sup> In Spain, they were concerned with identifying the related risk factors that could affect the psychosocial part of individuals working in intensive care units. In addition, the latter was the scenario of action of most of the interviewees.<sup>(19)</sup>

Two other studies were also carried out in countries on the European continent, the first investigated subgroups of health professionals who worked with COVID patients, who worked with other patients and professionals who did not work with patients, here, there were changes in the psychosocial conditions of the first subgroup, presenting worse conditions during the pandemic.<sup>(18)</sup> In the second study, the psychosocial impacts caused by COVID were evaluated and quantified through a scale, the dimension of symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress, finding results of high prevalence and worsening of these symptoms.<sup>(17)</sup>

In Sierra Leone, West Africa, the researchers explored the psychosocial experiences of professionals who worked on the front line, where they perceived situations of vulnerability and were able to experience feelings of isolation, stress and anger, however, they showed signs of extreme resilience and coping mechanisms, such as family support.<sup>(21)</sup>

Some studies have suggested that the problems arose from individual, psychosocial and organizational factors that were presented by the professionals, directly affecting the quality of life.<sup>(13,18,12)</sup>

In addition to bringing about the psychosocial impacts that emerged due to the pandemic, the articles addressed coping strategies, including combating fake news, psychological support according to the needs of professionals and their families, strengthening resilience and guiding recommendations for future outbreaks. Family support strategies, professional appreciation and recognition of work were fundamental in this process.<sup>(12, 21, 22)</sup>

## Conclusions

In view of the exposure of the results found in the integrative literature review, it was possible to observe the psychosocial interferences in the face of COVID-19. It is evident that most publications began to be available after the first year of the pandemic.

The need to recognize the discussions on the subject is evident. Observing the studies in Brazil and in the world was important to verify the coping strategies in the face of the demands encountered during the pandemic period.

Although there are numerous publications on the subject, some gaps have been identified for the possibility of future research, such as the investigation of these impacts in extra-hospital scenarios, such as in primary health care and other medium-complexity services, where health professionals worked intensively during this period.

Even though this study highlights the repercussions of COVID-19 globally, the identification of impacts other than mental health, such as socioeconomic and cultural aspects, is important for a broad discussion about the psychosocial conditions that affect health professionals.

The number of daily publications on the pandemic and the importance of studying a recent problem become clear. In this way, this research will contribute to the development of new strategies to cope with its consequences.

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