LUMEN ET VIRTUS
ISSN: 2177-2789

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKLOAD AND USE OF ANXIOLYTICS AND ANTIDEPRESSANTS IN NURSING: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

https://doi.org/10.56238/levv15n41-099

Submitted on: 09/25/2024 **Publication date:** 10/25/2024

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nursing professionals face high levels of stress and overload at work, which can affect their mental health and lead to the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants. However, the relationship between workload and the use of these drugs is still not completely clear. Objective: This study aims to explore the relationship between nurses' workload and the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants, in addition to identifying the main factors that influence this use. Methodology: An integrative literature review was carried out, with a search in the PubMed and CINAHL databases, using specific descriptors. The studies were selected based on the relationship between workload and medication use, and analyzed for quality and relevance. Conclusion: The data suggest a significant association between high workload and the use of psychotropic drugs, highlighting factors such as long working hours and high demand in the health environment. The review suggests that work overload is linked to the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants by nurses, reinforcing the

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need for interventions to improve working conditions and support the mental health of these professionals.

Keywords: Workload. Mental health. Nursing. Psychotropic. Burnout. Occupational Stress.

INTRODUCTION

Work is an activity inherent to the human being and is primarily associated with the objective and subjective demands of the worker. It is one of the forms of social, personal and professional evolution, which also contributes to the creation of bonds, experience of pleasure and well-being, in addition to being related to quality of life and health. Thus, damage to workers' health can have a multicausal origin (Ribeiro, *et al*., 2020).

In the context of nursing, characterized by a collective environment mediated by rules and routines, with complex organizations and work processes, often accompanied by suffering, fears, conflicts, tensions, power disputes, anxiety and stress, professionals are always dealing with the life and death of patients, facing exhausting working hours and other day-to-day issues (Ribeiro, *et al*., 2020).

The illness of workers and the way in which it occurs influence the work of health professionals. Studies have shown in the research area and corroborate a broader perception of the occurrences and the course of health problems, in addition to their consequences (direct or indirect) for individuals, families and society. Work is not neutral (impartial/fair) when it comes to health (MS, 2023).

According to Santiago *et al*. (2023), the World Health Organization (WHO) declares that anxiety and depression disorders are public health issues. In this scenario, depression is defined not only by the form of sadness, but also by irritability, loss of interest or pleasure in performing daily activities, especially those that require concentration or memory, reducing self-esteem and altering sleep and appetite. Depression is often confused with a normal emotional state, such as sadness, but one must distinguish physiological sadness from depressive aspects.

In this context, the mental health of nursing professionals is a growing concern in the health area, given the challenging and often stressful nature of the environment in which they work. These professionals play an essential role in providing care to patients, but they often face working conditions that can negatively affect their emotional and psychological well-being (Xavier *et al*., 2021).

The excessive workload, characterized by long hours, lack of staff, high demand for health services and emergencies, can significantly contribute to the development of mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression, among nursing professionals. This is also one of the main sources of stress in the profession, and its repercussions on nurses' mental health are a cause for growing concern (Santos Porto *et al*., 2020).

The mental health of nurses is essential for the quality of care provided, influencing the safety and effectiveness of patient care. In addition, mental health problems among

nurses result in high costs for the health system due to absenteeism, lower productivity, and higher staff turnover (Xavier *et al*., 2021).

Additionally, chronic stress associated with intense workload can increase the risk of physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and musculoskeletal disorders (Quemel *et al*., 2021). In view of this scenario, it is essential to better understand the relationship between the workload of nursing professionals and the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants (PAS). These medications are often prescribed to treat symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders related to work stress. However, the extent to which workload influences nurses' use of these medications has not yet been fully elucidated (Ribeiro *et al*., 2020).

Research on the relationship between workload and the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants in nursing is essential due to several factors, such as the high prevalence of mental disorders, the impact of workload on mental health, and the quality of health care, among others (Santos Porto et al., 2020). Research can inform the development of effective policies and interventions to reduce workload and support nurses' mental health, as there is a lack of studies specifically exploring the relationship between workload and psychotropic medication use in nursing, which this integrative review aims to fill.

The review aims to investigate the relationship between the workload of nursing professionals and the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants (APS), to identify patterns, trends and discrepancies in the evidence on the influence of workload on nurses' mental health, to evaluate the determinants of workload that contribute to the use of psychotropic medications and to provide new perspectives for the development of health interventions and policies that promote the use of psychotropic medications. well-being of nursing professionals. In general, the purpose of this integrative review is to fill gaps in the perception of this relationship between workload and use of PAS and, specifically, to understand how much the environment and work overload corroborate its use and impact the health of the professional.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in the elaboration of this work was the integrative review, as this method is widely used in the analysis of concepts, review of theories or evidence, making it possible to synthesize previous research and obtain conclusions from a topic of interest, it also makes it possible to detect gaps that need to be filled with new studies. This method contains six phases, as shown in the Flowchart below:

Flow chart 1. Description of the six phases carried out for the elaboration of the integrative review.

1ST PHASE: ELABORATION OF THE GUIDING QUESTION
In search of a subject that was relevant to the current reality, the theme was defined: The relationship between workload and the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants in nursing. The guiding question is: What is the relationship between workload and the use of antidepressants and anxiolytics (SPA) in nursing?
2ND PHASE: LITERATURE SEARCH
Search platform: PubMed/ BVS/ MEDLINE/ SCIELO/ CINAHL Keywords: Workload, Mental health, Substance-Related Disorders, Psychotropics.
3RD PHASE: DATA COLLECTION
Inclusion and exclusion criteria Decs:Workload AND nursing AND anxiolytics AND antidepressant AND mental health. The information to be extracted from the selected studies will be defined, using an instrument to gather and synthesize the key information. In order to organize and summarize the information in a concise way, forming a database of easy access and management.
4TH PHASE: ANALYSIS OF THE INCLUDED STUDIES
Content Analysis, with a spreadsheet identifying the selected articles.
5TH PHASE: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS
The following axes were identified as relevant to the study: 1- Promotion of healthier work environments, observing the reduction of workload, improvement of physical and safety conditions, and encouragement of participation in decisions 2- Strengthening of social and psychological support systems, offering psychological support programs, support groups and listening lines 3- Development of prevention programs with the implementation of burnout prevention and mental health promotion programs. 4- Access to appropriate treatments, which facilitate access to mental health services and drug treatment when needed
6TH PHASE: PRESENTATION OF THE INTEGRATIVE REVIEW
The present research highlights the urgent need for interventions to improve the mental health of nursing professionals in Brazil. The high workload, adverse conditions, and chronic stress to which they are subjected are directly related to the increased use of psychotropic medications and the development of mental disorders such as Burnout

The search was carried out in the following databases: Virtual Health Library (VHL), CINAHL, Medline, PubMed Central (PMC) and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO). The descriptors used, indexed to the Health Science Descriptors (DeCS), were made in Portuguese and English, namely: workload, psychotropic mental health, substance use disorders and nursing, which were combined or not with the Boolean operator "AND".

The articles were initially selected based on the titles, abstracts and period in which they were published. After consulting the databases, a screening will be carried out according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria The search aims to capture as many relevant studies on the subject as possible. The extracted data will be analyzed to quantify the association between workload and use of anxiolytics and antidepressants, as well as to identify the work factors that contribute to this use.

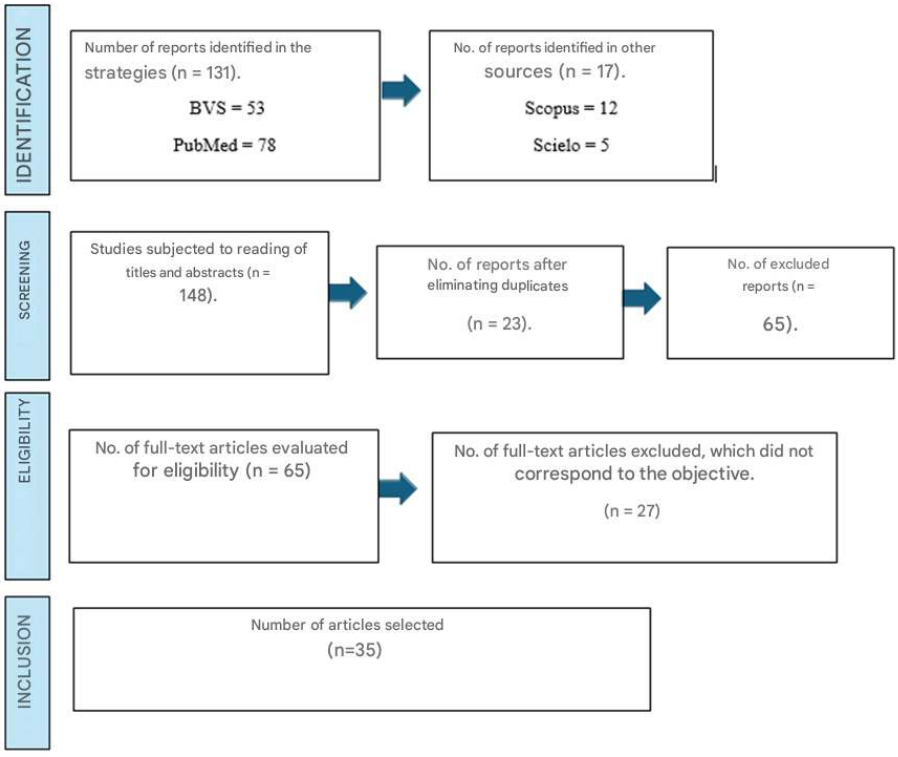
Literature was selected considering the following inclusion criteria: complete literatures available electronically, in Portuguese and English, published in the period 2014 to present. Duplicate literature, articles not available in full, opinion articles, and those with

restricted access to payment were excluded. Subsequently, the selected literature was submitted to content analysis and data extraction was formulated independently.

RESULTS

This study was conducted with the objective of synthesizing and analyzing the main recent studies on topics related to the consumption of psychoactive substances, the Burnout syndrome in the mental health of nursing professionals and students in areas, on workload in nursing, and is based on a variety of academic sources, including articles, integrative and systematic reviews that investigate the intersections between these phenomena.

The bibliographic data collected were organized in a table, separating the authors, years of publication, titles of the works and the main contributions of each study. This structure allows for a clear and organized view of the information, facilitating the understanding of the different aspects addressed by the surveys.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024)

Each study contributes significantly to the understanding of these complex problems, allowing contributions to the development of intervention and prevention strategies, below are the main authors and their contributions to this research

Author and Year	Work	Major Contributions
(6)	Scientific methodology: Principles and fundamentals	It presents the principles and fundamentals of scientific methodology, highlighting research methods and techniques.
(7)	The challenge of knowledge: qualitative research in health	It offers a comprehensive overview of qualitative health research, methodologies and challenges.
(3)	Integrative review of the literature on the increase in psychotropic consumption in mental disorders	It explores the increase in the consumption of psychotropic drugs in mental disorders, especially depression.
(4)	Psychoactive substance consumption by nursing workers: an integrative review	It analyzes the consumption of psychoactive substances among nursing workers, identifying factors and consequences.
(2)	Factors associated with self-medication in nursing students and nurses: an integrative review	It investigates factors that lead to self-medication among nursing students and nurses.
(1)	Self-medication and health risk: a literature review	It discusses the risks of self-medication, focusing on health implications.
(8)	Burnout syndrome in pediatric and neonatal nursing: a literature review	It reviews the incidence and consequences of Burnout syndrome in pediatric and neonatal nursing.
(9)	The consequences of Burnout Syndrome during the Covid-19 pandemic on nursing professionals	It examines the effects of Burnout Syndrome on nursing professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic.
(10)	Use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory as a diagnostic method for burnout syndrome	It evaluates the efficacy of the Maslach Burnout Inventory as a diagnostic method for Burnout Syndrome in nursing.
(11)	Increase in the use of benzodiazepines among health professionals during the pandemic: a systematic review	It analyzes the increase in the use of benzodiazepines among health professionals during the pandemic.
(12)	Anxiety disorder	Discussion of anxiety disorders, with a focus on diagnosis and treatment.
(13)	Abusive and indiscriminate use of benzodiazepines by health workers: a narrative review	Narrative review on the abusive use of benzodiazepines among health professionals.
(14)	The use of antidepressants and their long-term consequences in young people: An updated literature review	Updated review on antidepressant use and its long-term consequences in young people.
(15)	The prevalence of antidepressant use in medical students: a literature review	It investigates the prevalence of antidepressant use among medical students.
(16)	Medication-related problems in elderly psychotropic drug users: an integrative literature review	It examines problems related to the use of medications in elderly psychotropic users
(17)	Women, drugs and gender issues: a literature review	It analyzes the relationship between women, drug use and gender issues.
(18)	Incidence of Burnout Syndrome in nursing professionals: an integrative review	Study on the incidence of Burnout Syndrome among nursing professionals.

(19)	Factors associated with burnout in nursing professionals: an integrative review	It identifies factors associated with burnout in nursing professionals.
(20)	Burnout among nursing workers before and after COVID-19 vaccination	Comparative study on Burnout in nursing workers before and after COVID-19 vaccination.
(21)	Burnout in the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review	Systematic review on Burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic.
(5)	The incidence of mental disorders in nursing professionals during the pandemic: a literature review	Analyzes the incidence of mental disorders among nursing professionals during the pandemic

DISCUSSION

The results are interpreted based on the existing literature, allowing the identification of patterns, trends and discrepancies. A clear association between workload and medication use is observed, with evidence of a significant correlation between high workload and increased use of anxiolytics and antidepressants (Tito, *et al*, 2013).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increasing prevalence of psychotropic medication use among nurses, particularly due to increased pressure and stress in the workplace. Intense and prolonged work stress has contributed to the use of anxiolytics, such as benzodiazepines, which are often prescribed to treat anxiety disorders manifested by symptoms such as excessive worry, muscle tension, and insomnia. The pandemic has also exacerbated already challenging working conditions, resulting in heightened levels of stress and anxiety, leading many nurses to turn to these medications (Santos, 2022).

In another context, considerable use of antidepressants in response to chronic stress and depression was observed among health professionals. In addition to the challenges faced in the workplace, many also faced economic and social uncertainties during the pandemic, which contributed to the increased use of antidepressants, especially selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), used in the treatment of depression and anxiety disorders (Mota, Lima Junior, 2023).

These studies demonstrate that the use of psychotropic drugs is a common response to intense and prolonged stress at work, although there are notable variations in the prevalence and types of medications used, depending on cultural, social, and economic factors (Silva, 2015).

Attitudes towards mental health and psychotropic medication use vary culturally, with some societies having lower stigma associated with the use of anxiolytics compared to antidepressants, which can influence prescription and consumption rates. Social and

economic factors also play a crucial role, as in countries with strong health systems and effective social support, health workers tend to have better access to mental health care, reducing the need for medication (Araujo, *et al*, 2028).

In addition, specific working conditions, such as the workload, the number of patients, and the support offered, directly impact stress levels and the demand for medical interventions. In this context, research highlights that intense work stress is strongly related to the use of psychotropic medications, being an indication of the mental health of health professionals. The variations between the Turkish and Greek contexts, for example, demonstrate the importance of personalized approaches to dealing with stress, adjusted to the cultural and social particularities of each country (Maciel*, et al*, 2023).

In Brazil, the challenges faced by health professionals, including nurses, reflect a similar scenario. Pressure and stress in the workplace often lead to the use of psychotropic drugs as a coping mechanism, highlighting the need for mental health support policies in the professional environment (Santos Junior, *et al*, 2022).

The consumption of psychoactive substances among health professionals is a complex phenomenon, influenced by socioeconomic and psychological factors. These professionals often face high levels of stress due to the demanding and emotionally challenging nature of their roles. As a result, some individuals may resort to substance use as a way to cope with day-to-day pressures (Fraga Oliveira, *et al*, 2020).

The prevalence of this behavior among nurses and other health professionals is significant, often occurring as a coping mechanism to manage chronic stress and the emotional burden of work. This can include everything from the use of caffeine to increase vigilance to sedatives to relax after long journeys (Gontijo, *et al*, 2024).

In addition, the implementation of occupational health policies is essential to mitigate the risks associated with the consumption of psychoactive substances in the workplace. In Brazil, where working conditions are often challenging due to high demand, scarcity of resources, and long working hours, such policies can be key to preventing and promoting the mental health of health workers (Lazarini, *et al*, 2023).

These policies can include substance use prevention programs, mental health awareness campaigns, access to counseling and psychological support services, as well as the creation of work environments that favor the well-being of workers. Regular training on stress management and self-care strategies should also be integrated into occupational health practices, aiming to strengthen the resilience of professionals in the face of the challenges of the work environment (Oliveira, *et al*, 2017).

Burnout Syndrome, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal fulfillment, is a relevant topic, especially among health professionals. Several factors contribute to the development of this condition, such as high workload, adverse conditions in health environments, lack of adequate resources, and insufficient psychological and emotional support. These elements not only increase the risk of Burnout, but also negatively impact the quality of care provided and the mental health of professionals (Camurça, *et al*, 2022).

The absence of effective occupational health policies and specific prevention programs for Burnout are areas that require urgent attention. Preventive measures, such as promoting self-care practices, establishing policies that encourage a healthy work-life balance, and strengthening emotional support in health institutions, can help mitigate the negative impacts of this condition (Silva, *et al*, 2023).

In view of the evidence presented, it is imperative that public policies and organizational strategies be implemented to protect the mental health of health professionals, promoting healthier and more sustainable work environments. These measures not only benefit workers, but also contribute to improving the quality of care and building more effective and humanized health systems (Oliveira, *et al*, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant challenges to healthcare workers around the world, intensifying pre-existing mental health issues. The psychological impacts of the pandemic were particularly evident among those working on the frontline. In the Brazilian context, these effects have been exacerbated by precarious working conditions and prolonged exposure to the virus (Paes, *et al*, 2022).

There has been a significant increase in stress, anxiety, and depression among healthcare workers during the pandemic. The high rates of infection and mortality, coupled with the scarcity of adequate protection resources and psychological support, have contributed to an even more challenging work environment. Social inequalities have also manifested themselves in an intense way, widening disparities in access to health and aggravating already adverse working conditions (Lopes; Santos, 2018).

Given this scenario, it is essential to invest in psychological support strategies and self-care programs aimed at health professionals. Public policies that strengthen health infrastructure, promote safer working conditions, and improve access to mental health resources are key to mitigating the long-term negative impacts of the pandemic. In addition, valuing and recognizing the work of health professionals is essential to sustain a resilient and effective health system, capable of facing future challenges with greater preparation and humanization (Camurça, *et al*, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The present research highlights the urgent need for interventions to improve the mental health of nursing professionals in Brazil. The high workload, adverse conditions, and chronic stress to which they are subjected are directly related to the increased use of psychotropic medications and the development of mental disorders, such as burnout.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly aggravated this situation, exposing the fragility of support systems and the importance of more robust public policies. It is crucial to invest in actions that promote healthier work environments, offer adequate psychological support, and demystify the topic of mental health.

The approach to improving nurses' mental health should be multifaceted, and four main points were identified: the promotion of healthier work environments, with the reduction of the workload, the improvement of physical and safety conditions, and the encouragement of participation in decisions; the strengthening of social and psychological support systems, through psychological support programs, support groups and listening lines; the development of prevention programs, including the implementation of strategies to prevent burnout and promote mental health; and access to appropriate treatment, facilitating access to mental health services and drug treatment when necessary.

Finally, the mental health of nursing professionals is a public health problem that requires immediate attention. The implementation of effective public policies and intersectoral actions is essential to ensure the quality of health care and the well-being of these professionals.

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