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The Consequences of Burnout in Healthcare Workers During and After the Pandemic

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Summary

Burnout is a syndrome characterized by a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from chronic stress, especially in the workplace. It has three main pillars: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low professional accomplishment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this condition intensified, particularly among healthcare professionals working on the front lines. These workers faced work overload, prolonged hours, resource scarcity, a high risk of infection, and intense emotional pressure. The fear of exposure to the virus, social distancing, and uncertainty in the face of a critical scenario significantly contributed to the worsening of psychological suffering. As a consequence, burnout began to impact not only the mental and physical health of these workers, but also their professional performance and quality of life. Even after the most critical period of the pandemic, the syndrome remains prevalent in the healthcare field. Given the limited number of recent studies on the subject, this work proposes to further investigate the consequences of burnout in healthcare professionals, with an emphasis on its impact during and after the pandemic, in order to discuss effective strategies for mitigating its effects. Thus, using the bibliographic review research methodology, data will be collected from scientific articles and case reports available in SciELO, PubMed, and CAPES journals related to the topic.

Keywords: Burnout syndrome; Healthcare workers; COVID-19.

Abstract

Burnout is a syndrome characterized by a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from chronic stress, especially in the workplace. It has three main pillars: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low professional accomplishment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this condition intensified, particularly among healthcare professionals working on the front lines. These workers faced work overload, prolonged hours, resource scarcity, a high risk of infection, and intense emotional pressure. The fear of exposure to the virus, social distancing, and uncertainty in the face of a critical scenario significantly contributed to the worsening of psychological suffering.

As a consequence, burnout began to impact not only the mental and physical health of these workers, but also their professional performance and quality of life. Even after the most critical period of the pandemic, the syndrome remains prevalent in the healthcare field. Given the limited number of recent studies on the subject, this work proposes to further investigate the consequences of burnout in healthcare professionals, with an emphasis on its impact during and after the pandemic, in order to discuss effective strategies for mitigating its effects. Thus, using a bibliographic review research methodology, data will be collected from scientific articles and case reports available in SciELO, PubMed, and CAPES journals related to the topic.

Keywords: Burnout syndrome; healthcare workers; COVID-19.

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, a viral outbreak was identified in the city of Wuhan, China, that It caused a previously unknown respiratory illness. This virus was initially named The "new coronavirus," after all, belonged to a family of viruses already identified; however, it was a...



Year VI, v.1 2026 | Submission: 05/02/2026 | Accepted: 07/02/2026 | Publication: 09/02/2026

A new variant with unique characteristics, different from previously known strains. Covid-19, The disease caused by this virus, which was later officially named SARS-CoV-2, was rapidly spreading throughout the world, and on March 11, 2020, it was declared by World Health Organization (WHO) classifies it as a pandemic.

This period left an irreversible mark on world history, being a phase extremely turbulent, in which people's lives changed abruptly and unexpectedly. The Social distancing was intensified, remote work was adopted on a large scale, and the use of Masks became mandatory. Furthermore, hospitals became increasingly overwhelmed, with... Significant increase in hospitalizations and critical numbers of deaths.

In this context, in addition to the physical consequences of the disease, there was also an impact. It has a profound impact on the mental health of the population in general. However, a portion of it was... Those directly affected in this aspect were healthcare professionals, especially those in front line. Those who were exposed to the constant risk of infection faced not only not only physical exhaustion, but also emotional stress resulting from work overload and pressure. continuous.

Many frontline Covid-19 professionals developed burnout syndrome. a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by chronic stress, often associated with the work environment. This multifaceted disorder has 3 pillars: emotional exhaustion, Depersonalization (or cynicism) and decreased professional accomplishment. During the pandemic, this... The pathology was exacerbated due to the circumstances imposed on the workers, such as long working hours. prolonged work hours, lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), lack of infrastructure. to cope with the high number of patients and the constant pressure to save lives. Therefore, This syndrome has generated numerous consequences for the lives of these professionals, and even after their... During the pandemic, its boom continued, but it is still present in this environment.

The term "burnout," despite being coined in 1974 by the German psychologist Herbert J. Freudenberger was only recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a Chronic stress-related disorder in the workplace was included in the 11th Revision in 2019. from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), which came into effect in January 2022. In this context, there is a growing need for an updated study on this topic, based on... Based on recent data from a clinical and epidemiological analysis of this syndrome, what will be... beneficial to both academia and society. With the aim of disseminating information about a syndrome that was recognized relatively recently. Therefore, Based on the factors presented, the question arises: what are the consequences of burnout for workers? What about the role of healthcare during and after the pandemic? To answer this question, the objective was defined as follows: To investigate how pandemic-related burnout impacted personal and professional life.



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of these workers, highlighting the importance of mental health care as a measure preventive measures to mitigate this syndrome.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Burnout

Burnout Syndrome is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by... Chronic stress, often associated with a hostile work environment. It consists of the triad Clinical treatment for emotional exhaustion, detachment from personal relationships, and reduced feelings of personal fulfillment. (BUFFON et al, 2023). Thus, technological advances, intense competition in the job market and lack of adequate infrastructure in the workplace promote a A hostile environment, leading to emotional and physical exhaustion among professionals, characterizes this disorder. (PEÑA, et al, 2023).

The most widely used instrument for measuring burnout is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which... It seeks to detect the syndrome or its risk by identifying its consequences. Tool of The research consists of 15 questions that are subdivided into 3 subgroups: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and professional effectiveness. Responses range from "never" to "every day," and Thus, the frequency is quantified. In this way, it is a sign of burnout syndrome with results. significant for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and reduced for professional effectiveness. (JARRUCHE et al, 2021).

2.2 Historical Context of Burnout

The term burnout was coined in 1974 by psychologist Freudenberger to describe the... typical burnout in caregiving professions. In 1976, Christina Maslach first defined it. Formally, burnout is a syndrome that has three pillars: exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased capacity. Professional achievement. Domains described in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach and Jackson). (1981), a research tool used to assess burnout. Maslach helped transform the Burnout is a widely recognized phenomenon in various professional fields. (BAYES et al, (2021). Over the years, new research has been done in this field, but it was only in 2019 recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a disorder related to Chronic stress in the workplace, included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases. Diseases (ICD-11), which came into effect in January 2022.



2.3 Relationship between burnout, healthcare professionals, and the pandemic

Burnout is a common mental state among doctors and other healthcare workers. health, due to high occupational stress, intense pressure, long working hours and lack of support. at work. Primary care professionals are especially prone to this burnout. Other factors that contribute to burnout include job dissatisfaction, younger age, and... Family conflicts. An international study on COVID-19 identified a connection with... jobs that impact home life, decisions about life changes, and exposure to patients. Infections were a contributing factor to the exhaustion of doctors, in addition to taking on new roles. functions without proper preparation. (FISCHER et al, 2025).

Thus, during the pandemic, the professionals on the "front line" in the fight against COVID-19, were directly affected by negative psychological implications, such as burnout. After all, They faced precarious working conditions, including a lack of beds and protective equipment. Individual (PPE), in addition to long working hours with consecutive shifts and low pay. Furthermore Furthermore, the mental suffering was exacerbated by constant exposure to large-scale deaths and by fear. of committing medical errors and due to the increase in threats and aggression from the population, which feared infection or the loss of loved ones. (NOVAIS et al, 2023). All these factors, added together Intense pressure in the work environment contributed to raising stress levels and promoting The development of burnout syndrome.

2.4 Main consequences, treatment and prevention of burnout

The consequences of Burnout Syndrome can be serious, depending on its intensity. At an individual level, a person may develop disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Depression, alcohol and drug abuse, as well as psychosomatic symptoms. In that aspect Behavioral burnout can lead to job dissatisfaction and lack of commitment. organizational changes and even the desire to leave the profession. In the workplace, the effects These can be perceived through errors in practice, reduced work quality, and increased... Absenteeism. Furthermore, institutions also suffer significant impacts, such as high... Employee turnover and increased organizational costs.

Therefore, given these factors, the adoption of preventive measures becomes essential. support to minimize these effects and promote a healthier work environment and balanced. Therefore, the Ministry of Health recommends psychotherapeutic follow-up, use of medication when necessary and psychosocial interventions as part of the treatment of Burnout Syndrome. Furthermore, in prevention, three types of interventions stand out: individual,



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organizational and combined. Individual interventions include practices that promote self-care, physical activity, meditation, adequate rest, engaging in hobbies, and the pursuit through the balance between work and other social and personal spheres. Organizational interventions, on the other hand, This involves employee training, job restructuring, and improvements in physical conditions. environmental. Among the main changes are flexible hours, greater participation of Collaborators in decision-making, structured career plans, and greater autonomy at work. However, this disorder is multifactorial, meaning it results from a combination of environmental and social factors. and individual. Therefore, the adoption of combined interventions is recommended, which will associate individual and organizational measures. This model seeks to modify, in an integrated way, the working conditions, worker perception, and coping strategies in the face of stressful situations. (PERNICIOTTI, et al 2020).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This project focused on conducting a literature review. The methodology adopted The research is based on consulting cataloged books and scientific articles and published on digital platforms including Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), PubMed and CAPES Journal.

The documents analyzed were subjected to a systematic screening process, with the The goal was to ensure the inclusion of up-to-date evidence. The inclusion criteria covered articles with high scientific relevance to the proposed topic, prioritizing those published in last six years. Furthermore, studies that presented selection biases or information, as well as those that did not meet the previously defined time frame or that They did not prove relevant to the research topic.

In this study, the keywords used for data retrieval were: syndrome of Burnout; healthcare workers; COVID-19 and its English-language equivalents. Therefore, active, critical, and systematic readings were carried out for the extraction and analysis of the data. relevant to scientific initiation. The scientific research project had a total duration of 12 months.

This research was conducted by the Medical School of the University of Ribeirão Preto (UNAERP), Ribeirão Preto campus, an institution that has a library and laboratory of Informatics. These spaces provided the necessary bibliographic and technological resources for the development of the study.



4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained, the findings reveal a significant increase in the levels of Burnout among healthcare professionals, especially among those directly involved in... care of patients with COVID-19. Factors such as work overload, lack of Protective equipment, fear of contamination, and a high-pressure emotional environment were determinants. Frequent reports included symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia, exhaustion, Emotional detachment and a feeling of helplessness.

The most frequently used instrument to measure burnout risk in the studies analyzed was the The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) assesses three main dimensions: emotional exhaustion (feeling emotionally exhausted and lacking the energy to face work), depersonalization (negative, cynical, or distant attitudes towards patients) and reduction of Professional fulfillment (feelings of ineffectiveness or low professional self-esteem). Several studies They identified critical levels in all of these dimensions, especially among nurses and technicians nursing.

The consequences of burnout extend beyond individual suffering. At the level Organizationally, the most notable issues include increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, and higher turnover. Staff shortages and reduced quality of care. Emotional exhaustion directly affects... The relationship with patients and the safety of care, in addition to generating absences that overburden... even more so the teams.

The reviewed literature emphasizes that effective strategies for prevention and coping with Burnout should be integrated. On an individual level, practices such as self-care, physical activity, Leisure activities, emotional support, and psychotherapy are important, but in isolation they have a limited effect. Institutional interventions are indispensable, such as adjusting workloads and valuing employees. professional development, improved working conditions, and implementation of ongoing mental health programs. in the workplace. However, several obstacles hinder the implementation of these actions. lack of specific public policies, scarcity of human and financial resources, and a culture Organizational measures that minimize the psychological suffering of healthcare workers still face obstacles. persistent. Furthermore, underreporting of cases is a recurring problem, exacerbated by fear. of stigmatization or retaliation. Another relevant point is the management model still present in Many healthcare services prioritize productivity over the well-being of professionals. This logic contributes to the normalization of suffering and hinders the creation of spaces for listening. Psychological support and care.



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In summary, burnout syndrome has become established as one of the main consequences. Psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic among healthcare professionals. Even in the post-pandemic period... pandemic-related, the rates of emotional burnout, depersonalization, and professional devaluation. They remain high, requiring urgent and sustained institutional responses. Taking care of mental health. The well-being of healthcare workers is not just a matter of individual well-being, but a factor... crucial for the quality of services provided and for the sustainability of health systems. Investing in burnout prevention strategies that combine personal and structural actions is essential for strengthening teams, reducing harm, and ensuring more humane and safe care. efficient for the population.

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Year VI, v.1 2026 | Submission: 05/02/2026 | Accepted: 07/02/2026 | Publication: 09/02/2026

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