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**Psychological distress among healthcare professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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**Introduction:** There is a growing but not extensive body of literature suggesting that exposure to life-threatening situations like pandemics is a significant risk factor for psychological distress and especially among healthcare workers. Healthcare workers were psychologically affected regardless of the workload and the specific exposure to patients who tested positive for COVID-19 or high-risk work areas. Besides a combination of social isolation, fear of the infection itself, fear of being contagious, the lack of protective measures, fatigue, and poor quality of sleep might have triggered an intense psychobiological stress reaction leading to psychological distress.

**Objective:** This study aims to:

Assess the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on healthcare workers in the university hospital of Monastir (Tunisia).

Assess job strain and identify depression and anxiety symptoms among healthcare workers.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among health professionals from various disciplines in the university hospital of Monastir (Tunisia) from June to November 2020. The data collected were about age, gender, marital status, medical history, self-reported mental illness, diagnosed mental illness, prior psychiatric treatment, and professional characteristics (occupations, service seniority, department, and work schedule).

Participants with working seniority of less than one month were excluded from the study.

Psychological distress was assessed by the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21).

Psychosocial characteristics of the job were measured using the Karasek questionnaire (job content questionnaire).

The questionnaire contained detailed instructions about the research, the main purposes, and a statement indicating that the completion of the questionnaire acknowledges informed consent.

Multivariate linear regression analyses were used to identify the variables independently associated with the DASS-21 total score.

If otherwise, in all analyses, p-values of less than 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

**Results:** Three hundred and five healthcare professionals were recruited. The mean age was 29 and ranged from 22 to 62 years old. The sex ratio was 0.66. According to DASS-21 scores, 51.5 % of participants were not depressed and 32.1% of them were not anxious. 48.5% of the subjects had signs of stress. 18.6% of participants were in a situation of Job strain. Several factors were significantly associated with psychological distress like the fear of being contagious, the female gender and having a medical history of a mental disorder. No significant relationship was identified between psychological distress and poor work condition. The prevalence of job strain was significantly associated with poor working conditions ( $p=0.001$ ), and the absence of protective measures.

**Conclusion:** The risk of psychological distress among healthcare workers should not be neglected and should be considered and treated.

Certainly, it is very difficult to predict the psychological impact of this pandemic. However, the psychological distress faced by healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic will also occur during future healthcare crises. Therefore, it is crucial to develop strategies to promote resilience and counter the psychological distress in this population.

Conflict of interest

**Disclosure statement:**

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**Impact of the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak on mental health and psychiatric drug use among portuguese pharmacy professionals**

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**Introduction:** The COVID-19 outbreak was considered a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 [1]. This outbreak has raised public health problems, bringing with it several implications both on physical and psychological level, in particular for health professionals on the front line of the pandemic, for the greater risk of infection [2,3]. In this sense, it is pertinent to evaluate how the COVID-19 outbreak had implications on the mental health and in the consumption of psychotropic drugs in Portugal, and among pharmacy professionals.

**Objective:** To evaluate the magnitude of the impact of mental health outcomes, associated factors and consumption of psychotropic drugs among professionals in Community Pharmacy, Hospital Pharmacy, and on Drugstores during the 1st wave of the Covid-19 outbreak in Portugal, as well as conducting a comparative analysis of the consumption of psychotropic drugs.

**Methods:** An observational, descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted, applying an online questionnaire made available between May 15 and May 31, 2020, aimed to pharmacy professionals working in Community Pharmacy, Hospital Pharmacy or on Drugstores in Portugal, where 420 valid answers were collected. The perception of depressive symptoms, anxiety, insomnia and Event Impact were evaluated using the 9-item Patient Health Questionnaire, 7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder, 7-item Insomnia Severity Index, Impact of Event Scale-Revised, respectively. All scales were applied in the validated Portuguese version. Information regarding the consumption of psychiatric drugs was also collected before and during the 1st wave of the COVID-19 outbreak in pharmacy professionals. The study was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Health of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, prior to its implementation. In addition, a comparative analysis of the consumption of psychiatric drugs from 2019 to October 2020 was carried out nationwide, using data collected by Center of Medicine and Health Products.

**Results:** Of the 420 professionals included in the study, 63 (15%) presented severe symptoms on the depression scale, 135 (31,2%) presented severe symptoms on the anxiety scale, 88(20,9%) presented severe symptoms on the insomnia scale and 167 (39,8%) presented severe symptoms on the scale that evaluates the impact of the event. Still 41 (9,76%) professionals started taking a psychiatric drug during the 1st wave of the COVID-19 outbreak. In Portugal, 1.18% more packages of psychiatric drugs were dispensed until October 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.

**Conclusion:** COVID-19 outbreak seems to have presented a negative impact on pharmacy professionals by the manifestation of symptoms of depression, anxiety and insomnia as well as increased consumption of psychiatric drugs during the 1st wave of COVID-19 outbreak. Additionally, at the national level, there was an increase in the consumption of psychiatric drugs in 2020 compared to 2019. As future prospects, it would be relevant to understand the long-term impact of the outbreak.

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