

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND SILENT RESIGNATION IN NURSES DURING PANDEMIC: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Introduction: With COVID-19 pandemic, the labor market suffered a big change worldwide, with the nurse's area being one of the most affected, especially in what refers to the great resignation. The aim of this study is to make visible the need to take measures in the area of psychosocial risks suffered by nurses through an analysis of the harm they entail and possible prevention actions. **Method:** They have been identified in a narrative review different official reports of surveys from several medical centers around the world, as well as scientific articles on topics related to psychosocial risks of nurses during the pandemic, using PUBMED, Web of Science and Scopus. **Results:** Results show the rising dissatisfaction and the high levels of psychosocial risks to which nurses have been exposed. 90% of the nurses surveyed considered leaving the profession and 40% assure that they are experiencing serious health problems such as anxiety or depression. Studies indicate that efforts should be made at an organizational level to ensure the emotional care of nurses. There are recommended support initiatives for nurses such as accessibility of mental health resources or facilitate greater personal connections. **Conclusion:** Lack of assessment with valid and reliable tools condition effective preventive measures and organizational resources. Planification must be imposed to replace surveys and perceptions with protocols to objectify the dangers present at a psychosocial level in the socio-sanitary environment.

Keywords: Occupational Hazards, Healthcare Sector, Silent Resignation, Work Rotation

Introduction

Social problems have an impact on the work sphere and as a result of COVID-19 the whole of society has changed. The pandemic of COVID-19 produced a general deterioration in mental health, specifically anxiety and depression increased by 25% globally, as discussed in the joint statement of the calling for measures and allocating resources to mental health problems in the work sphere (OMS & OIT, 2022). In this context, there was a change in the mentality of the population, which began to value their personal life and well-being to a greater extent. After the economic and social experiences that occurred, they were generated worldwide numerous changes and repercussions in the whole of society (Guerrero-Sánchez & Guerrero-Grajeda, 2023), causing two phenomena to spread in the labor market: the Great Resignation and the Silent Resignation (Lee, Park, & Shin, 2021), both movements at different scales depending on the labor market conditions of each country.

On the one hand, with the Great Resignation workers began in 2021 to resign due to dissatisfaction with their jobs, getting out of the workforce like this or finding new jobs with conditions better suited to their needs. On the other hand, in 2022 with the Silent Resignation people did not leave their jobs, but they became disenchanted and gave more importance to their life outside of them (Lee, Park, & Shin, 2021). The latter can be seen positively thanks to setting limits so as not to exceed it, but it is also worrying due to the possible depersonalization and demotivation that can spread and contribute to general malaise in the organization.

From the first line of action against COVID-19, nurses faced extreme working conditions that affected their physical and mental health and caused these phenomena to affect them more. Prior to the pandemic, nursing professionals were already at high risk of burnout, post-traumatic stress disorders and even suicide. After the pressure they suffered during it, this anguish increased and, at the end, the wear that they suffered continues to affect them, so it must be valued and assessed (Maben et al, 2022). Above all, they are related to the fatigue of nurses, excessive workloads, poor management culture, inefficient processes, lack of

collaboration with doctors, conflicts making compatible work with home and the loss of control, autonomy and meaning at work (Weston, 2022). The lack of preventive measures exposed them in several aspects which leads to develop stress and anxiety, psychosocial risks which tend to be underestimated, poorly analyzed or not taken into account, but which are becoming increasingly important in a changing world where the pandemic left the need to act effectively through strategies that make it possible to minimize damage of the emotional health of nurses.

For all of the above, in this study it will be emphasized the importance that labor well-being has gained in the nursing profession, which should be supported by companies and organizations with greater prevention of psychosocial risks. Therefore, the aim of this study is to make visible the need to take measures in the area of psychosocial risks suffered by nurses through an analysis of the harm they entail and possible prevention actions.

Material and Methods

This article is based on a narrative revision. A literature search using PUBMED, Web of Science and Scopus was carried out, using the keywords “great resignation”, “psychosocial risks” and “pandemic COVID-19”, including a systematic review investigating the psychosocial risks in the nursing workforce as well as the COVID-19 impact on their will to resignation from various perspectives, in relation to the most recent studies published in the last three years. Eligibility criteria were based in studies directly related to the perception of professionals as well as in reference to official statistics from different countries.

Results and Discussion

The phenomenon of the Great Resignation is a well known factor to the professional environment of nurses, as shown by the statistics of recent years. Although the global nursing shortage was already a crucial pre-pandemic problem, there is no doubt that this has been a decisive factor in its increase, in addition to propelling associated problems influencing the decision to leave current position, such as high turnover, lack of control, absenteeism, sick leave and the increase in psychosocial risks in the profession, as shown in Figure 1 (Bilali, Fragkou, Galanis, & Kaitelidou, 2021).

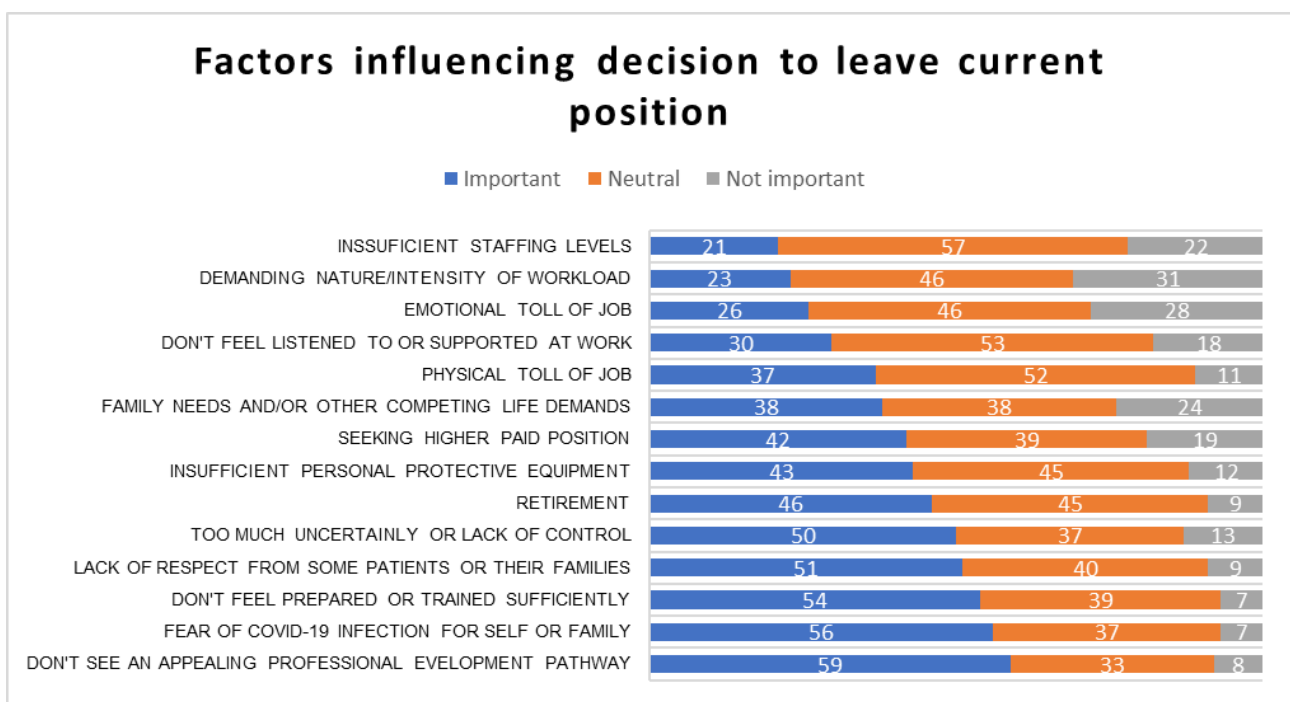


Figure 1. Source: own elaboration based on Berlin, Lapointe, Murphy, & Viscardi (2021).

Among the studies selected in the bibliographic review, it stands out the Hospital IQ survey of U.S. hospital nurses, carried out in November 2021, where more than 200 working registered nurses in the U.S. were surveyed. The results (Figure 2) indicated that 90% of the nurses considered leaving the profession in the next year and 71% were thinking of doing so as soon as possible (Hospital IQ, 2021). There is no doubt that one of the most negative effects that the pandemic has had on this group of workers has been the increase in psychosocial risks, an area that already lacks adequate regulation and prevention measures. According to the previous survey, almost half of the nurses have indicated that, due to the shortage of personnel, they are overloaded with even more functions than the daily ones, and almost 40% assure that they are experiencing serious health problems associated with psychosocial risks such as anxiety or depression (Hospital IQ, 2021).

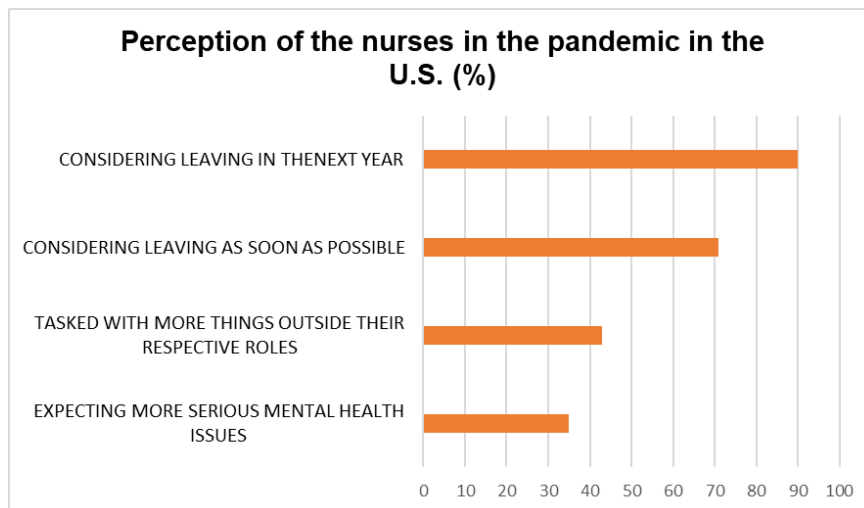


Figure 2. Source: own elaboration based on Hospital IQ (2021).

This trend is not limited to just this small report since, among many others that support these results, 16 studies with 18935 nurses as participants highlight emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of fulfillment, among other factors, as indicated by the percentages in the Figure 3. The entry of COVID-19 with all that this entailed (longer work time, insufficiency and inefficiency of resources, lower level of training related to the situation, work in a risky environment...) led to the psychosocial risk factors climb in the nursing profession (Bilali, Fragkou, Galanis, & Kaitelidou, 2021).

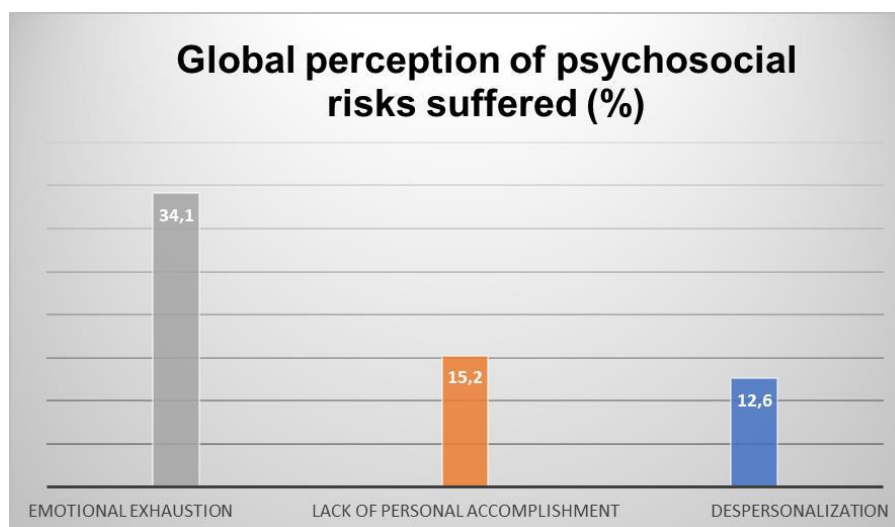


Figure 3. Source: own elaboration based on Bilali, Fragkou, Galanis, & Kaitelidou (2021).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, it has been observed that it was very common for nurses to suffer effects such as depression and burnout, due to the stressful and demanding environment in which they work (Chen & Meier, 2021), which tend to derive or aggravate illnesses and physical problems such as musculoskeletal and heart diseases and even eating disorders (INSST, 2018).

It is also necessary to mention the violence to which the nursing staff is subjected, both inside and outside the workplace. Rates of aggressive patients skyrocketed among those who had been affected by COVID-19, adding physical and verbal aggression to the big accumulation of problems that the nursing staff carried (Salah Ramzi, Warzer Fatah, & Dalvandi, 2022). Not only that, but nurses have also suffered attacks on the way to or back work due to, among other things, fear, panic, anger and misinformation regarding the methods of contagion of the disease (McKay, Heisler, Catton, & Otmar, 2020).

Psychosocial problems in nursing staff, especially burnout, have been a big problem during the pandemic, being one of the key points to focus on when finding measures to improve the situation. Regarding these high levels of burnout, it should be noted that the Joint Commission published a safety report before the pandemic in 2019 on how to combat its effects in nursing, warning that the cost, clinical results and patient satisfaction could be negatively affected by this factor; in addition, it noted that nurses were most at risk of experiencing this particular psychosocial risk.

Although the issue to be discussed affects the entire collective to a greater or lesser extent, it must be taken into account that the working conditions of the different countries are far from each other. Figure 4 shows a generic context in the U.S. to the specific field in which this study focuses:

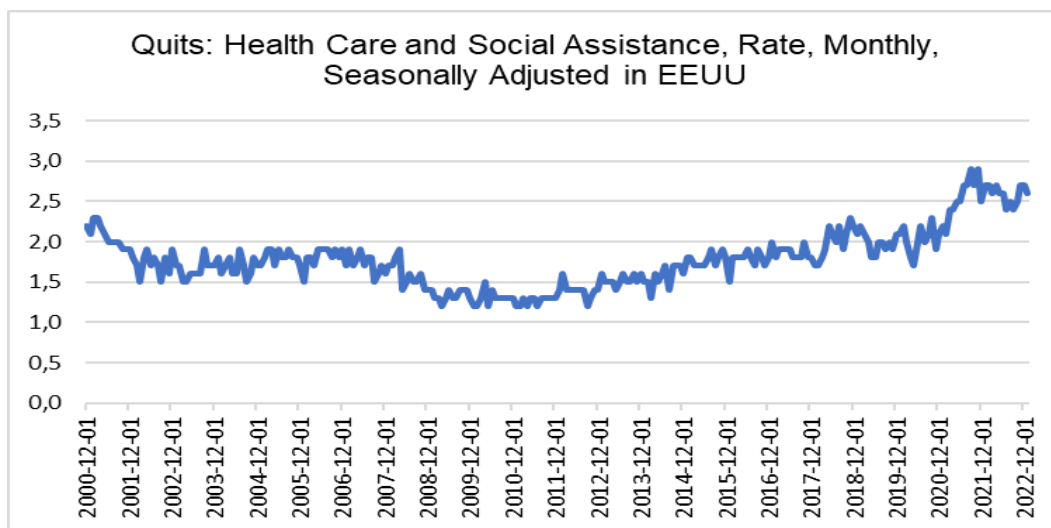


Figure 4. Source: own elaboration based on Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2023).

In one of the studies selected in the bibliographic review, it becomes clear that there is a severe shortage of nurses in the United States, and an even greater shortage is expected, so emphasis should be placed on organizational efforts to ensure the emotional care of their workforce through specific measures (Celano, Harris, Sawyer, & Hamilton, 2022) in the prevention of occupational hazards. Factors external to the workplace are "fundamental to understanding the social psychological behavior that is reflected in economic dynamics" (Guerrero-Sánchez & Guerrero-Grajeda, 2023) and the stigma that still hangs over health must also be taken into account, being increasingly necessary to know how to correctly recognize, support and treat those risks, so as to increase psychological resilience, especially in times of crisis (Akinnusotsu, Bhatti, Doubeni, & Williams, 2023).

Medical centers have the task of achieving, through preventive measures, an increase in safety, self-care, commitment, efficiency, and staff retention, thus helping organizations to be more competitive thanks to their workforce (Celano, Harris, Sawyer, & Hamilton, 2022). It is not effective to focus the strategy to

retain talent solely on salary increases, since "it encourages high rotation as a general phenomenon" (Guerrero-Sánchez & Guerrero-Grajeda, 2023). This leaves latent the importance of the rise in psychosocial risks and that a good treatment of nurses is decisive in the permanence of talent in companies, being a key area in business strategy.

Although the origins of the current problem of nurse rotation predate the appearance of COVID-19, the pandemic has undoubtedly been a turning factor in this event. The worker rotation rate reached an all-time high in 2019, stabilizing in 2020 but returning to record levels in both 2021 and 2022 (Laskowski-Jones & Castner, 2022). High levels of staff rotation break with the development of the activity, and that affected the morale and experience of nurses and patients, also being a high economic cost (Berlin, Lapointe, Murphy, & Viscardi, 2021). In that sense, about the perception of the effectiveness of support initiatives for nurses to solve the problem, it stands out the increased availability and accessibility of mental health resources, as well as facilitate greater personal connections between nurses in order to minimize the psychosocial risks, as it can be seen in Figure 5.

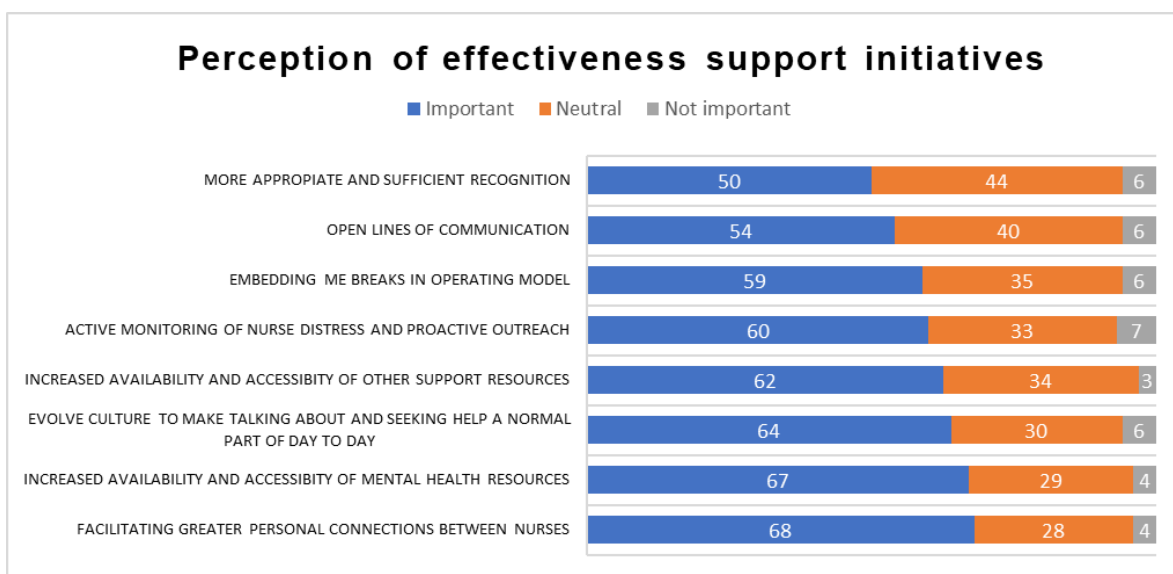


Figure 5. Source: own elaboration from (Berlin, Lapointe, Murphy, & Viscardi, 2021).

Also, when it comes to preventing its adverse effects, first of all, greater attention should be paid to identifying and addressing the problem in those profiles that show communication difficulties, in nurses who do not reach two years of experience and in those who feel anxious or who present fear of going to work (Nakai, Kitamura, & Teranishi, 2022).

To prevent this malaise, it will be important for employer organizations to support their nurses through good communication, acknowledging a job well done, making means available such as those for mental health, increasing flexibility in schedules and shifts and that there is a efficient use of digital tools. Training to build skills and strengthen the workforce will also be crucial, as nurses want opportunities for professional growth and development (Berlin, Lapointe, Murphy, & Viscardi, 2021).

Conclusions

Lack of assessment with valid and reliable tools condition effective preventive measures and organizational resources focusing on the collective of nurses, a professional collective which suffered a sometimes traumatic experience in hospitals with COVID-19. Although the effectiveness of support initiatives is based to date on surveys and perceptions, it is no less true that an action plan must be imposed to objectify, based on action protocols, the dangers present at the psychosocial level in the socio-sanitary environment to prevent silent resignation among nurses.

We must acknowledge however that in this narrative review certain limitations were found, such as the relative proximity of the pandemic, which is why a sufficient volume of scientific studies addressing the subject has not been developed yet (and also some studies had restricted access); also, most of the results are available only on specific countries, regions or hospitals, so post- pandemic data was lacking worldwide.

Therefore, it is expected a line of work open for future research when more reports and statistics are available in the next future, in order to analyze by country the relevant aspects in determining the specific needs of nurses according to their environment and working conditions, as well as future measures that begin to be taken into account to alleviate the effects that the pandemic left in this profession.

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