

## PROFILE OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS DURING THE NEW CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN A SOUTHWEST PARÁ MUNICIPALITY<sup>1</sup>

### *PERFIL DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE ENFERMAGEM DURANTE A PANDEMIA DO NOVO CORONAVÍRUS EM MUNICÍPIO DO SUDOESTE DO PARÁ*

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#### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of healthcare professionals, who are now known as “frontline professionals”, who provide direct or indirect support to suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 patients. Therefore, this research aimed to identify the nursing professionals profile who work in Basic Health Units and in the Municipal Hospital during the pandemic in the municipality of Itaituba/Pará. This descriptive and exploratory study used a quantitative approach and included 109 professionals, comprising 49 nurses and 60 nursing technicians. The age ranged from 20 to 62 years old, with an average of 36.92 years old. The majority of participants were female (82.6%), identified as mixed-race (85.3%), and were single (44%). The most common level of education was specialization (39.4%), followed by complete high school (26.7%). Regarding monthly income, 33.9% earn up to two minimum wages, while 24.9% earn up to one minimum wage. Approximately 42.2% had a history of illness, with rhinitis being the most prevalent, followed by obesity and hypertension. Anxiety treatment was mentioned by 10.1%, and depression by 3.7% of professionals. Most part do not engage in physical activity (55%), are non-smokers (98.2%), and none are drug users. As for religion, most participants reported having a religious affiliation (88.1%), with Catholicism being the most common, followed by Evangelism. Understanding the profile of healthcare professionals working in the fight against the pandemic is essential to develop health promotion interventions to support them.

**Keywords:** Nurses, COVID-19, Pandemic.

#### RESUMO

*A pandemia de COVID-19 trouxe uma nova conotação para os profissionais de saúde, denominando-os de “profissionais da linha de frente”, ou seja, trabalhadores que prestam a assistência direta ou indireta aos pacientes suspeitos ou confirmados pela SARS-CoV-2. Assim, o objetivo desta pesquisa foi identificar o perfil de profissionais da enfermagem, que atuam nas Unidades Básicas de Saúde e no Hospital Municipal durante a pandemia no município de Itaituba/Pará. Pesquisa descritiva e exploratória com abordagem quantitativa realizada com 109 profissionais, 49 enfermeiros e 60 técnicos em enfermagem. A idade apresentou uma variação de 20 a 62 anos com média de 36,92 anos. A maioria pertencia ao sexo feminino (82,6%), se declararam pardos (85,3%) e eram solteiros (44%). O nível de escolaridade mais frequente foi a especialização (39,4%), seguido do ensino médio completo (26,7%). Com relação à renda mensal, 33,9% recebem até dois salários-mínimos, enquanto 24,9% recebem até um salário-mínimo. Sobre a ocorrência de enfermidades,*

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42,2% apresentaram histórico, sendo rinite a mais prevalente, seguida pela obesidade e hipertensão. O tratamento de ansiedade foi citado por 10,1% e para depressão por 3,7% dos profissionais. A maioria não pratica atividade física (55%), é não fumante (98,2%) e nenhum é usuário de drogas. Quanto à religião, a maioria afirmou possuir uma (88,1%), sendo a católica a mais frequente, seguida da evangélica. Conhecer o perfil dos profissionais da área da saúde que estão atuando no combate da pandemia é importante para que se possam desenvolver ações de promoção da saúde para esses profissionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Enfermeiros, COVID-19, Pandemias.

## INTRODUCTION

Nursing professionals encounter a range of diverse and complex situations in their work environment, which can impact their ability to provide quality care. It's essential for them to be mindful of this environment. Unfortunately, while carrying out their work responsibilities, they often experience occupational stress, which can be originate from various sources and can have a direct impact on their well-being (VASCONCELOS; DE MARTINO, 2017).

In 2020, the world faced significant challenges in science, economy, and society due to the emergence of the Sars-Cov-2 virus. This virus resulted in the death of over one million people worldwide in just a few months. The first cases of this highly infectious virus were discovered in China in December 2019, and its symptoms include cough, fever, loss of smell, and taste, which can lead to severe respiratory infections (SOUZA *et al.*, 2021). As the number of COVID-19 cases continued to rise globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a state of pandemic on March 11, 2020. This news was widely reported by the media, becoming a concern for the entire population. Within three months, the virus had spread to 114 countries, including Brazil, due to its highly contagious nature (BRASIL, 2020).

Due to the limited understanding of the scientific community about the virus transmission and treatment, WHO announced that no effective treatment or vaccine was available for the disease. As a result, they recommended the adoption of social control measures to slow its spread in society (NETTO *et al.*, 2020). The pandemic had significant initial impacts, which included the need for people to stay at home and practice social distancing, leading to social isolation (STURZA; TORNEL, 2020).

As the pandemic progressed and the restrictions and social distancing measures imposed by COVID-19 became more widespread, all segments of society were directly impacted, especially nursing professionals. They often had to isolate themselves from their friends and family to avoid becoming infected, thus contributing to an increase in social distancing (SOARES *et al.*, 2020).

Considering that context, this research problem can be defined as follows: What is the profile of nursing professionals working in the Basic Health Units and in the Municipal Hospital of Itaituba in Western Pará during the COVID-19 pandemic? To answer this question, the objective of this study is to identify the profile of nursing professionals working in the Basic Health Units (UBS) and in the public hospital of Itaituba, Pará, and their roles during the pandemic.

## **METHOD**

This is a descriptive and exploratory study with a quantitative approach. One of the advantages of this type of research is that it utilizes naturally occurring data to identify patterns and display the meanings of participants, thereby establishing the nature of a particular phenomenon (GERHARDT; SILVEIRA, 2009).

The study was carried out in the municipality of Itaituba, located in the Southwest Paraense Mesoregion of Brazil northern region. As per the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2020), the estimated population of the area is 101,395. The region has a public municipal hospital that provides healthcare services to the general population. It has five sectors: emergency and urgency, hospitalization, surgical center, obstetrics, and an intermediate care unit (UCI). Additionally, there are 15 UBS spread across the neighborhoods of the studied city.

In the city, there are a total of 152 health professionals, including 53 nurses and 99 nursing technicians, who are employed in both UBS and Municipal Hospital. Of these professionals, 109 participated in this research, including 49 nurses and 60 nursing technicians. The remaining professionals were: 25 on medical leave, six on vacation, and 12 declined to participate, so they were excluded from the study.

Individual contacts were made with the nursing professionals based on a list with their names, and they were explained the purpose of the study and invited to participate. Those who had less than six months of experience, were on vacation, or on maternity leave were excluded from the study. The research utilized an instrument comprising 31 questions related to the participants' sociodemographic, health, and work-related data. The questionnaire was applied at their respective workplaces in April 2021.

The data collected from the study were entered and organized in a Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet. Its analysis was performed in line with the research objectives, and statistical treatments were applied. Frequency analysis was used to present nominal variables results, while measures of position (mean and median) were used to represent continuous variables, and measures of dispersion (maximum value, minimum value, and standard deviation) were also used.

The research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and regulatory standards for research involving human subjects, as established by Resolution n. 466/2012 of the National Health Council. Prior to the study, the approval of the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Lutheran University of Brazil (ULBRA) (CAAE: 44542821.4.0000.5349) was obtained.

## **RESULTS**

Based on the results obtained, it was able to describe the participants sociodemographic profile (Table 1), with the majority being female (82.6%). The age range was between 20 and 62 years old (mean of  $36.92 \pm 8.70$ ), the predominant ethnicity was mixed-race (85.3%), and the

most common marital status was single (44%). With regards to education, specialization was the most frequent (39.4%), followed by complete high school (26.7%), and complete higher education (18.3%). Regarding income, most part earned up to two minimum wages (58.8%) and lived with their spouse/partner (41.3%).

**Table 1-** Nursing professionals profile in the municipality of Itaituba/Pará. (2021).

<b>Variables</b>	<b>n=109 (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	90 (82,6)
Male	19 (17,4)
Age	36,9 ± 8,70
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Mixed-race	93 (85,3)
White	9 (8,3)
Black	6 (5,5)
Quilombola	1 (0,9)
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	48 (44)
Married	31 (28,4)
Common-law marriage	23 (21,1)
Divorced	4 (3,7)
Separated	3 (2,8)
Widowed	0 (0)
<b>Profession</b>	
Nursing Technician	60 (55)
Nurse	49 (45)
<b>What is your individual monthly income</b>	
Up to 1 MW (R\$1,100)	27 (24,9)
Up to 2 MW (R\$2,200)	37 (33,9)
Up to 3 MW (R\$3,300)	19 (17,4)
From 3 to 5 MW (R\$3,300 to R\$5,500)	19 (17,4)
Above 5 MW (R\$5,500)	7 (6,4)
<b>Education level</b>	
High school	29 (26,7)
Incomplete college	15 (13,8)
Complete college	20 (18,3)
Specialization	43 (39,4)
Master's degree	2 (1,8)
PhD	0 (0)
<b>Who do you live with</b>	
Spouse/partner	45 (41,3)
Partner and children	19 (17,4)
Alone	16 (14,7)
Children	13 (11,9)
Father and/or mother	10 (9,2)
Others	4 (3,7)
Brother/sister	2 (1,8)

Results are expressed through Frequency analysis.

Source: Survey data.

Table 2 presents the data on professional illnesses. Rhinitis had the highest prevalence rate at 19.3%, followed by obesity at 12.8%, and hypertension at 11.9%. A large majority of individuals did not receive treatment for anxiety (89.9%) and depression (96.3%).

**Table 2** - Data on nursing professional illnesses in the municipality of Itaituba/Pará. (2021).

Variables	n = 109 (%)
<b>Illness</b>	
No	63 (57,8)
Yes	46 (42,2)
<b>Type of illness**</b>	
Does not have	63 (57,8)
Rhinitis	21 (19,3)
Obesity	14 (12,8)
Hypertension	13 (11,9)
Asthma	7 (6,4)
Diabetes	3 (2,8)
Heart problems	3 (2,8)
Migraine	1 (0,9)
Scoliosis	1 (0,9)
Hypothyroidism	1 (0,9)
<b>Have you ever undergone treatment for anxiety</b>	
No	98 (89,9)
Yes	11 (10,1)
<b>If yes, which</b>	
Did not undergo	98 (89,9)
Medication	8 (7,4)
Medication and therapy	1 (0,9)
Therapy	2 (1,8)
<b>Have you ever undergone treatment for depression</b>	
No	105 (96,3)
Yes	4 (3,7)
<b>If yes, which</b>	
Did not undergo	105 (96,3)
Medication	1 (0,9)
Medication and therapy	1 (0,9)
Therapy	2 (1,8)

\*\* For this question, the participants were able to choose more than one alternative.

Results were expressed through Frequency analysis.

Source: Survey data.

When asked about their health habits, most nursing professionals were engaged in some physical activity (55%), with walking (15.6%) and going to the gym (14.7%) being the most frequent, three times a week (21.1%). None of the participants reported drug use, but 50.5% informed consuming alcoholic beverages, with beer being the most one (42.2%). Regarding smoking, there were only two cases (1.8%) (Table 3). Religion was also investigated, and the bulk of participants reported having one, with 56.9% being Catholic and 31.2% evangelical.

**Table 3** - Health habits of nursing professionals in the municipality of Itaituba/Pará. (2021).

Variables	n = 109 (%)
<b>Engages in physical activity</b>	
No	60 (55)
Yes	49 (45)
<b>What physical activity**</b>	
Walking	17 (15,6)
Gym	16 (14,7)
Weightlifting	4 (3,7)
Cycling	3 (2,8)
Football/Soccer	3 (2,8)
Crossfit	2 (1,8)
Other	6 (5,5)
<b>How many times per week:</b>	
None	59 (54,1)
One	2 (1,8)
Two	14 (12,9)
Three	23 (21,1)
Four	3 (2,8)
Five	7 (6,4)
<b>Have you ever used drugs</b>	
No	109 (100)
<b>Consumes alcohol</b>	
No	54 (49,5)
Yes	55 (50,5)
<b>If yes, which</b>	
Beer	46 (42,2)
Ice	1 (0,9)
Wine	8 (7,3)
<b>Smoke</b>	
No	107 (98,2)
Yes	2 (1,8)

\*\* For this question, the participants were able to choose more than one alternative.

Results were expressed through Frequency analysis.

Source: Survey data.

When asked about their health habits, the most part of nursing professionals reported engaging in some form of physical activity (55%). Walking (15.6%) and going to the gym (14.7%) were the most frequent activities, with a frequency of three times a week being reported by 21.1% of the participants. None of them reported drug use, but 50.5% informed consuming alcoholic beverages, with beer being the most commonly consumed type (42.2%). Smoking was disclosed by only two participants (1.8%) (Table 3). The respondents were also asked about their religious affiliation, and the bulk answered having one, with 56.9% being Catholic and 31.2% being Evangelical.

**Table 4** - Data on the work of nursing professionals in the municipality of Itaituba/Pará. (2021).

Variables	n = 109 (%)
<b>Do you have another paying activity</b>	
No	78 (71,6)
Yes	31 (28,4)
<b>How long have you worked at the hospital or UBS</b>	
Between 6 months and 1 year	14 (12,8)
Between 1 and 2 years	19 (17,4)
Between 2 and 4 years	10 (9,2)
Between 4 and 6 years	27 (24,8)
Between 6 and 8 years	6 (5,5)
More than 8 years	33 (30,3)
<b>What environment do you work in</b>	
UBS	49 (45)
Emergency	21 (19,3)
Inpatient	18 (16,5)
Operating room	13 (11,9)
Neonatal ICU	5(4,6)
Obstetrics	3 (2,8)
Other	54 (49,5)
<b>How long have you worked as a nurse or nursing technician</b>	
Between 6 months and 1 year	9 (8,3)
Between 1 and 2 years	16 (14,7)
Between 2 and 4 years	17 (15,6)
Between 4 and 6 years	19 (17,4)
Between 6 and 8 years	10 (9,2)
More than 8 years	38 (34,9)
<b>Considering all work activities, what is your weekly work schedule<sup>(a)</sup></b>	
	37,5 ± 9,81
<b>How do you feel about your work</b>	
Very Satisfied	14 (12,8)
Satisfied	50 (45,9)
Little satisfied	33 (30,3)
Unsatisfied	9 (8,3)
Very Unsatisfied	3 (2,8)
<b>How long you do not take vacation</b>	
Less than one year	19 (17,4)
One year	6 (5,5)
More than one year	84 (77,1)

<sup>(a)</sup> Results expressed through mean ± standard deviation.

Other results expressed by Frequency analysis.

Source: Survey data.

Table 5 illustrates the absence from work among nursing professionals. In 2020, 69.7% of professionals reported being absent from work, with COVID-19 being the most frequently cited reason (45.9%).

**Table 5** - Data on sick leave and violence at work in nursing professionals in the municipality of Itaituba/Pará. (2021).

Variables	n = 109 (%)
<b>In 2020, were you absent for 2 or more days from work</b>	
No	33 (30,3)
Yes	76 (69,7)
<b>Describe in one word why you were absent</b>	
Not absent	33 (30,4)
COVID-19	50 (45,9)
Illness	14 (12,9)
Miscarriage	2 (1,8)
Maternity leave	2 (1,8)
Day off	2 (1,8)
Arrhythmia	1 (0,9)
Surgery	1 (0,9)
Physical exhaustion	1 (0,9)
Vacation	1 (0,9)
Fracture	1 (0,9)
Bonus leave	1 (0,9)

Results are expressed through Frequency analysis.

Source: Survey data.

## DISCUSSION

This study found that the majority of healthcare professionals who participated in the investigation are female, which corroborates Vasconcelos and Martino (2017) who stated that most part of nursing professionals are female because of their affinity for caregiving activities.

The mean age of the participants was 36.92 years, which suggests that the nursing workforce is relatively young (RODRIGUES *et al.*, 2019). Although Souza, Albuquerque, and Aguiar's (2011) study indicates a balance between the number of married and single individuals in the nursing field, this research found a higher prevalence of single participants. In terms of ethnicity, mixed-race was the predominant group, followed by whites, blacks, and quilombolas. Zimmer's (2018) study, which was conducted in the largest public hospital in Ceará's health network, reported similar data regarding the ethnicity of health professionals.

The participants in this study had an average professional experience of eight years and reported a high level of job satisfaction. According to Gans (2020), longer professional experience is associated with lower likelihood of developing Burnout syndrome, as stability in one's career tends to increase job satisfaction.

Although most participants had specialized training, their level of education did not reflect in their salary, as the majority reported earning up to two minimum wages. This is a common phenomenon where higher education often translates into greater responsibilities and expectations without commensurate compensation (PEREIRA *et al.*, 2021).

The analysis of the informed illnesses showed that most part of the participants did not have any diseases, but rhinitis had the highest incidence among the reported ones. To minimize this incidence, it is necessary to provide regular follow-up for these professionals (NASCIMENTO *et al.*, 2019).

However, concerning the analysis of habits, more than half of the participants did not engage in physical activities, which is concerning since nursing professionals who do not exercise regularly tend to develop more emotional disorders and depersonalization (ALVARES *et al.*, 2020). This lack of physical activity may be due to the exhausting routine of nursing professionals (BRITO; SOUSA; RODRIGUES, 2019).

Of the 109 participants, over half informed consuming alcoholic beverages, with beer being the most commonly consumed. In contrast, the bulk of them did not smoke. The consumption of alcohol and tobacco among healthcare professionals can be attributed to their demanding work schedules and limited opportunities for leisure activities (JUNQUEIRA *et al.*, 2017). Religious beliefs were found to be significant among the research participants, with most of them identifying as Catholic and/or Evangelical. Alvares *et al.* (2020) similarly reported that the religion of healthcare professionals can impact their approach to patient care.

The survey revealed that the main reason for nursing professionals' absence for more than two days during 2020 was COVID-19. The high incidence of COVID-19 among healthcare workers could be attributed, in part, to the incorrect use of personal protective equipment (PPE) (SOARES *et al.*, 2020). The pandemic led to an increase in work overload, shortage of PPE and material resources for assistance, shortage of professionals, and devaluation of the nursing profession, causing anxiety, depression, and stress among these professionals (GALON; NAVARRO; GONÇALVES, 2022).

This research has made significant contributions to the public health system in Itaituba/Pará by addressing the knowledge gap concerning these professionals and COVID-19 in Brazil Amazonian region. Furthermore, this research can guide the creation of policies that ensure and promote the quality of life of nursing professionals.

## CONCLUSION

The profile of nurses and nursing technicians who worked in UBS and in the Municipal Hospital during the pandemic in Itaituba/Pará was predominantly composed of women, with an average age of 36.9 years, and white ethnicity, and most were single. The majority of leave requests for more than two days were due to COVID-19. Furthermore, there was a high consumption of alcoholic beverages and a lack of physical activity among the participants.

Given the worldwide health crisis in 2020, the routine and working hours of nursing professionals have intensified. Thus, understanding the profile of health professionals who are working directly in the fight against the pandemic is crucial for the development of health promotion actions

for them. It is important to look beyond the pandemic context and provide better working conditions, decent wages compatible with the workload, psychological support, and guidance on safe practices to value this professional class.

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