

MENTAL HEALTH OF PRIMARY CARE PROFESSIONALS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CAUCAIA - CE

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Abstract: Primary care professionals face a series of daily challenges that directly affect their emotional well-being. The Unified Health System (SUS) depends on its ability to provide accessible and continuous care to the population, making it essential to ensure that these workers maintain their mental health. However, various stressors, such as excessive workload, scarcity of resources, and high societal expectations, often contribute to the psychological distress of these professionals. These stressors can result in conditions such as chronic stress, burnout syndrome, anxiety, and depression, affecting both the individual and the work team as a whole. Furthermore, the quality of care provided to the community is directly related to the emotional health of these workers, as exhausted or emotionally compromised professionals tend to provide less empathetic and effective care. A cross-sectional study using the Maslach Burnout Inventory revealed that 10.6% of professionals were at high risk of burnout. The subscales showed that 29.8% had high emotional exhaustion, 52.1% had reduced professional fulfillment, and 22.3% had depersonalization. (Silva et al, 2023) This article therefore seeks not only to identify the factors that contribute to mental illness among primary care professionals but also to explore solutions that can be implemented to mitigate these impacts. The literature review and empirical data obtained through interviews with professionals working in the field highlight the urgent need for interventions that promote comprehensive care for these workers, considering their emotional and psychological needs.

Keywords: mental health, primary care professionals, stress, burnout, support strategies, public health.

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Introduction

Primary Care is the gateway to the Unified Health System (SUS) and plays a fundamental role in health promotion and disease prevention. However, the workload, infrastructure conditions, and emotional demands faced by professionals in this area often have significant impacts on the mental health of these workers. Chronic stress, burnout, and anxiety are some of the most common problems, and their inadequate management can harm not only the health of the professional, but also the quality of care offered to patients.

The objective of this article is to analyze the mental health of Primary Care professionals in the Municipality of Caucaia, Ceará, considering the main risk factors and the consequences of psychological illness, in addition to discussing effective support and prevention strategies.

Literature Review

The Context of Primary Care in Brazil

Primary Care, through the Family Health Strategy (FHS), has as its main function the promotion of health, disease prevention and continuous and comprehensive care for the population. Professionals such as doctors, nurses, community health agents and others are responsible for a large number of consultations and for playing a crucial role in public health.

Stressors in the Primary Care Work Environment

Work overload, scarcity of resources, and lack of institutional support are factors that generate stress in professionals. The pressure for immediate results and the constant contact with conditions of social and health vulnerability of the populations served are sources of tension and anxiety. A study showed that 75% of Primary Care professionals show signs of emotional exhaustion due to excessive



tasks and lack of adequate support. (Lima et al, 2021)

Burnout and Its Consequences

Burnout is one of the main conditions of psychological illness among health professionals. It is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal fulfillment. The literature indicates that Primary Care workers are particularly vulnerable to this disorder, due to the intense workload and continuous interactions with patients in vulnerable situations.

Protective Factors and Support Strategies

Despite the numerous difficulties faced by Primary Care professionals, several approaches and interventions can be implemented to reduce the negative effects on their mental health. Continuous psychological support, for example, is one of the most effective tools to help these workers cope with the stress and pressure of work. The availability of therapy services and emotional support groups allows professionals to share their experiences, relieving the emotional burden and strengthening mental health.

According to Souza and Carvalho (2019), strengthening bonds between members of health teams and promoting spaces for active listening are essential to prevent psychological suffering among Primary Care professionals. These authors highlight that strategies such as conversation circles, institutional psychological support, and self-care practices help mitigate the effects of chronic occupational stress.

In addition, offering specific training on stress management, self-care, and burnout prevention techniques is essential. Training on relaxation practices, mindfulness, and other methods of emotional regulation have been shown to be effective in helping professionals better cope with daily stresses. Such training not only improves the well-being of workers, but also contributes to a healthier and



more productive environment. (Silva et al, 2020)

Another important factor is the creation of a work environment that favors collaboration, mutual respect, and support among team members. When professionals feel welcomed and recognized, stress decreases and job satisfaction increases. In addition, promoting a space where exchanges of experiences and coping strategies are encouraged can help reduce collective psychological suffering.

These practices, when implemented in a structured and continuous manner, can prevent psychological illness among Primary Care professionals and contribute to the general improvement of the quality of care provided to the population.

Methodology

This study was based on a literature review of scientific articles published in the last five years on the mental health of Primary Care professionals. In addition, data were collected through interviews with professionals who work in Primary Care in the municipality.

Findings

Key Challenges Identified

The main obstacles faced by Primary Care professionals in relation to mental health are related to the stress caused by the overload of tasks, the lack of adequate human and material resources, the absence of psychological support and the high emotional demand involved in the care of patients in situations of vulnerability. These factors create a challenging work environment, where constant pressure and adverse conditions have a direct impact on the mental health of professionals, in addition to affecting the quality of care offered to the population.



Observed Psychological Impacts

Primary Care professionals often indicate that they are dealing with high levels of stress, emotional fatigue, irritability, and anxiety. The lack of time for rest, added to the pressure to perform various tasks with few resources, intensifies these problems. Burnout syndrome was observed in a significant proportion of the research participants, especially among nurses and community health workers, who face a heavy and constant workload. This emotional exhaustion not only affects the mental health of professionals, but also negatively impacts the quality of care offered to the population.

Support Strategies

Some strategies adopted include holding conversation circles, psychological support groups, and training programs for stress management. The implementation of active listening spaces within teams has been shown to be effective in alleviating emotional distress. However, many professionals still report the need for more resources and institutional support to deal with daily challenges.

Discussion

The mental health of Primary Care professionals is a complex and multifaceted issue. Continuous stress, pressure for quick results, and adverse working conditions are factors that contribute significantly to psychological illness. The literature highlights that institutional support, such as the provision of mental health programs, and the encouragement of the creation of more collaborative work environments, are effective strategies to mitigate these problems.

However, there is still a gap in terms of public policies that effectively promote the mental health of these professionals, and a more comprehensive approach involving both prevention and treatment actions is needed.



Conclusion

The mental health of Primary Care professionals is an extremely important issue, as it affects not only the well-being of the workers themselves, but also the quality of health services provided to the population. Healthcare professionals working at this level of care often deal with challenging working conditions, such as high workload, scarcity of resources, poor infrastructure conditions, and the constant pressure to meet a large patient demand. These factors can lead to emotional and psychological exhaustion, affecting both your ability to perform work effectively and your physical and mental health.

The impact of this wear and tear is twofold: on the one hand, it compromises the health of the professionals themselves, and, on the other, it harms the quality of care offered to the population. Overworked, stressed, and emotionally exhausted professionals have more difficulties in offering humanized, empathetic, and quality care, which is essential in Primary Care. This creates a vicious cycle, where overload and stress generate a decrease in the quality of care, which, in turn, further increases the stress and dissatisfaction of professionals.

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