

PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS AND ANXIETY SYMPTOMS RELATED TO GRADUATION AMONG NURSING STUDENTS

ASPECTOS PSICOSSOCIAIS E SINTOMAS DE ANSIEDADE RELACIONADOS À GRADUAÇÃO ENTRE ESTUDANTES DE ENFERMAGEM

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Abstract: Introduction: Entry into Higher Education is marked by a transition phase for the subject and requires adaptations to new experiences, being one of the most stressful environments and potentiating signs and symptoms associated with anxiety and there are situations inherent to nursing training that can negatively impact the mental health. **Objective:** The work sought to analyze the psychosocial aspects, undergraduate experiences and signs and symptoms of anxiety among Nursing students at a university. **Methods:** This is a cross-sectional, descriptive study with a quantitative approach. An online form containing guiding questions on the topic was applied. The data were arranged and analyzed using the Physical Self-Perception Profile (PSPP) program. **Results:** It was evident that the majority of students were female, between 21 and 24 years old, mixed race/color, without children and single. They performed well on the course and had a good relationship with teachers/colleagues and 62.8% of participants have/have already had the desire to change courses. Taking tests, presenting seminars, hearings, relationships with colleagues and/or teachers, transportation, housing and/or food on campus, being part of a research/extension center, were more evident as possible associations with the development of the anxious process. Impaired sleep, sweating, agitation, tachycardia, lack of concentration, headache/muscle pain and involuntary fine tremors were the most prevalent signs and symptoms of anxiety. **Conclusion:** With this research, it was possible to identify the factors inherent to

graduation and specific situations of the nursing course that may be related to the perception of signs and symptoms of anxiety and difficulty in adapting to the training process. Thus, the importance of new studies with the aim of analyzing factors associated with the mental health condition of these students is evident.

Keywords: Anxiety; Nursing students; Mental health.

INTRODUCTION

This is a period that requires adaptations to the extensive workload of studies and activities with a view to professional training. Thus, being in front of this new cycle can change the student's future perspective and in the circumstance of not adapting, the student can develop an adaptive crisis, which generates a process of self-charging, experiences of emotional and psychic instabilities, such as: tension, stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, insomnia, among others⁽¹⁰⁾.

The demands of the training process insert the student in the challenging scenario, where there is often the distancing of his city of origin, family and social cycle, to live in a different environment, with another educational reality, being necessary to interact with new social groups⁽¹²⁾.

Each student experiences different circumstances, where expectations, cognitive skills, motivation, academic performance and autonomy, make up the new panorama that can be accompanied by vulnerability and exposure to the unknown. These factors are considered important influencers in the emergence of psychopathological conditions, with interference in personal, interpersonal and professional development, since psychological well-being will be affected⁽³⁾.

From this adaptive process, many psychic disorders can emerge, thus, in a more prevalent way, it is observed that anxiety, as a natural emotion and inherent in the human experience can become pathological when it presents itself more intensely and frequently, interfering with the daily practices of the individual, causing great suffering and difficulty in solving problems, bringing losses such as school evasion, job abandonment and substance abuse⁽⁹⁾.

In the meantime, the university is configured as one of the most stressful environments that potentiate anxiety, since the application of tests, presentation of works and relationships, can cause greater psychic vulnerability that triggers malaise. This frequent feeling impairs the performance of academic tasks, reaching the individuality of the student, even shaking the educational institution, requiring psychological attention for these students⁽¹⁾.

During the undergraduate degree in Nursing, the student is faced with particular stressful situations of the course. The double journey between studies and work, weekly workload of

theoretical classes, hospital practices, fulfillment of activity outside the context of the curriculum, to improve the curriculum, updating in specialization courses, participation in monitoring and scientific events are clear examples of an exhaustive routine and enhances anxiety, interfering with the quality of life of the student⁽⁶⁾.

Thus, the objective of this research is to analyze the psychosocial aspects, experiences of graduation and signs and symptoms of anxiety among students of the Nursing course at a University in the interior of Bahia.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive study with a quantitative approach, carried out at the State University of Feira de Santana (UEFS), located at BR 116 Norte, Km 03, s/n, city of Feira de Santana - Bahia, a municipality with approximately 619,609 inhabitants and about 416.03 in/Km² ⁽⁸⁾.

The simple random sample was calculated from the EpiInfo program. As the proportion of the characteristic of the studied population was unknown, the maximum proportion of 0.05 with a confidence limit of 95% was assumed, being selected 172 students from the 3^o to the 10^o semester of Nursing of the UEFS, for experiencing the initial and final phase of the course.

As a collection instrument, an online form composed of guiding questions on the topic under study was applied, in order to identify sociodemographic data, psychosocial factors and signs and symptoms of anxiety.

Data collection took place from the sending of the online form to the students' e-mail and social networks, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which made face-to-face contact unfeasible. Thus, the students received the form, along with the sending of the Free and Informed Consent Term-TCLE. The emails were captured from previous contact with the Collegiate of Nursing, which made available the contact of the nursing classes. 172 responses were collected on the form.

After collection, the data were arranged in a database, being analyzed by the Physical Self-Perception Profile (PSPP) program. The analyses were developed from descriptive statistics of the characteristics of the research participants. Subsequently calculated the measures of central tendency, such as simple frequency and relative frequency of signs and symptoms of anxiety analyzed: Sociodemographic variables with questions that will guide the knowledge of the sample in research, characterizing it; Variables related to Graduation that contemplates important information about the insertion of this individual in the Higher Education Institution (HEI), defining characteristics about the experiences during the graduation process, as well as the environments of participation and Psychosocial Factors that contemplate situations that relate to graduation in the development of signs

and symptoms of anxiety.

The research period took place at the end of the semester of 2021, after the approval of the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), approximately between December (2021) and April (2022), respecting the eligibility criteria and was submitted to the CEP of UEFS, respecting Circular Letter nº 1/2021-CONEP/SECNS/MS approved and released for data collection, according to the Consubstantiated Opinion of the CEP, of nº 5,073,927, also respecting the Resolutions of nº 466/2012 and 510/2016.

RESULTS

From the data presented in Table 1, it is possible to observe the higher prevalence of females in the course, with approximately 88.4% of the sample. Most students are aged between 21 and 24 years old, of brown race/color, do not have children and are single and study between the 6^o and 8^o semester.

Table 1 – Sociodemographic data of nursing course students, from a University in the interior of Bahia – 2022.

| SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES | N | % |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|
| SEX (N=172) | | |
| Female | 152 | 88,4 |
| Male | 20 | 11,6 |
| AGE GROUP (N=172) | | |
| Between 18-20 years old | 28 | 16,3 |
| Between 21-24 years old | 102 | 59,3 |
| Over 24 years old | 42 | 24,4 |
| RACE/COLOR (N=172) | | |
| Yellow | 2 | 1,2 |
| White | 34 | 19,8 |
| Indigenous | 2 | 1,2 |
| Brown | 80 | 46,5 |
| Black | 54 | 31,4 |
| HAS CHILDREN (N=172) | | |
| No | 163 | 94,8 |
| Yes | 9 | 5,2 |
| MARITAL STATUS (N=172) | | |
| Married | 16 | 9,3 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|
| Divorced | 1 | 0,6 |
| Single | 155 | 90,1 |
| FAMILY CAREGIVER (N=172) | | |
| No | 153 | 89,0 |
| Yes | 19 | 11,0 |
| CURRENT YEAR (N=172) | | |
| 2nd year | 28 | 16,2 |
| 3rd year | 50 | 29,0 |
| 4th year | 51 | 29,6 |
| 5th year | 37 | 21,5 |

As for the factors related to the course (Table 2) it was possible to observe that the students have good performance in the course (52.3%), good relationship with teachers (51.7%) and good relationship with colleagues in the course (51.7%). Most students are part of an extension group or research center at UEFS (57%), while 171 students take only one undergraduate course (99.4%). Regarding the frequency of participation in events/congresses related to the course, 39.5% of students participate three times or more.

level of satisfaction with the course of choice presented a predominant satisfaction data (66.3%). With regard to mental health, 40.1% of the participants evaluated it as "good" before starting the course (40.1%), however 47.1% of the students reported that mental health is currently regular with the statement that 97.7% suffered interference from the academic period. Thus, it is noticeable the important change in the context and perception of mental health of this group analyzed.

Table 2 – Variables related to the nursing course, at a University in the interior of Bahia – 2022.

| VARIABLES RELATED TO THE COURSE | N | % |
|--|----------|----------|
| PERFORMANCE ON THE COURSE (N=172) | | |
| Good | 90 | 52,3 |
| Very Good | 7 | 4,1 |
| Regular | 67 | 39,0 |
| Bad | 8 | 4,7 |
| RELATIONSHIP WITH COURSE TEACHERS (N=172) | | |
| Good | 89 | 51,7 |
| Very Good | 17 | 9,9 |
| Regular | 62 | 36,0 |

| | | |
|--|-----|------|
| Bad | 4 | 2,3 |
| RELATIONSHIP WITH COURSE COLLEAGUES (N=172) | | |
| Good | 89 | 51,7 |
| Very Good | 29 | 16,9 |
| Very Bad | 2 | 1,2 |
| Regular | 49 | 28,5 |
| Bad | 3 | 1,7 |
| PARTICIPATES IN A UEFS EXTENSION GROUP OR RESEARCH CENTER (N=172) | | |
| No | 74 | 43,0 |
| Yes | 98 | 57,0 |
| TAKES MORE THAN ONE UNDERGRADUATE COURSE (N=172) | | |
| No | 171 | 99,4 |
| Yes | 1 | 0,6 |
| FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS/CONGRESS RELATED TO THE COURSE (N=172) | | |
| Twice a year | 40 | 23,3 |
| Never | 18 | 10,5 |
| Three times or more | 68 | 39,5 |
| Once a year | 46 | 26,7 |
| LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH THE COURSE OF CHOICE (N=172) | | |
| Dissatisfied | 1 | 0,6 |
| Very satisfied | 33 | 19,2 |
| Not very satisfied | 24 | 14,0 |
| Satisfied | 114 | 66,3 |
| MENTAL HEALTH BEFORE STARTING THE COURSE (N=172) | | |
| Good | 69 | 40,1 |
| Very Good | 45 | 26,2 |
| Very Bad | 3 | 1,7 |
| Regular | 39 | 22,7 |
| Bad | 16 | 9,3 |
| MENTAL HEALTH CURRENTLY (N=172) | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|------|
| Good | 22 | 12,8 |
| Very Good | 2 | 1,2 |
| Very Bad | 20 | 11,6 |
| Regular | 81 | 47,1 |
| Bad | 47 | 27,3 |
| DOES THE ACADEMIC PERIOD INTERFERE WITH MENTAL HEALTH? (N=172) | | |
| No | 4 | 2,3 |
| Yes | 168 | 97,7 |
| WAS THIS INTERFERENCE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE (N=172) | | |
| Both | 91 | 52,9 |
| Negative | 68 | 39,5 |
| Positive | 13 | 7,6 |

When analyzing the psychosocial factors of students (Table 3), it was possible to observe that most have a support network (84.3%), counting on parents (46.5%) and friends (37.8%). It was possible to see that 62.8% of the participants expressed that they have/had the desire to leave the course, while most also feel the need to welcome mental health (94.8%).

With regard to mental health care, 98.3% of the participants stated that the nursing students of the UEFS do not have the proper attention to mental health, although 51.2% of the participants are aware of the existence of the psychology service available at the university and most did not use this service (93.6%).

Table 3 – Psychosocial data of students of the nursing course, from a University in the interior of Bahia - 2022.

| PSYCHOSOCIAL VARIABLES | N | % |
|--|-----|------|
| DO YOU HAVE ANY SUPPORT NETWORKS? (N=172) | | |
| No | 27 | 15,7 |
| Yes | 145 | 84,3 |
| IF YES, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO YOU USUALLY COUNT PRIORITY (N=148) | | |
| Friends | 65 | 37,8 |
| Children | 1 | 0,6 |
| Parents | 80 | 46,5 |
| Cousins | 2 | 1,2 |

DO YOU HAVE/HAVE A DESIRE TO ABANDON THE COURSE OF CHOICE? (N=172)

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| No | 64 | 37,2 |
| Yes | 108 | 62,8 |

DO YOU FEEL THE NEED FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE? (N=172)

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| No | 9 | 5,2 |
| Yes | 163 | 94,8 |

DOES THE MENTAL HEALTH OF NURSING STUDENTS AT UEFS GET DUE ATTENTION? (N=172)

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| No | 169 | 98,3 |
| Yes | 3 | 1,7 |

DO YOU HAVE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS WITHIN THE INSTITUTION? (N=172)

| | | |
|-----|----|------|
| No | 84 | 48,8 |
| Yes | 88 | 51,2 |

HAVE YOU EVER USED THIS SERVICE? (N=172)

| | | |
|-----|-----|------|
| No | 161 | 93,6 |
| Yes | 11 | 6,4 |

In table 4, it is possible to observe that among the people who had a good performance in the course, 80.4% had poor mental health. While those who presented the performance in the bad course, 93.3% considered the mental health to be poor. Thus, it can be perceived that even with the perception of impaired mental health, academic performance was considered good.

Table 4 – Relationship between mental health and performance in the course among nursing students of a University in the interior of Bahia - 2022.

| Mental Health | Performance on the course | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| | Good | | Bad | |
| | n | % | n | % |
| Good | 19 | 19,6 | 5 | 6,7 |
| Bad | 78 | 80,4 | 70 | 93,3 |
| Total | 97 | 100,0 | 75 | 100,0 |

Analyzing the level of anxiety among nursing students (Table 5) in different situations inherent

Table 5 – Situations inherent in graduation according to the level of anxiety perceived among nursing students of a University in the interior of Bahia - 2022.

to graduation, it was possible to observe that among the participants who feel very anxious, the most prevalent situations were the performance of sabbatinas (17.3%), tests (16.4%) and presentation of seminars (16.0%). While for students who felt unanxious, the most prevalent situations were laboratory practice (22.5%) and clinical case study (20.0%) and for those who considered not to be anxious, it kept only laboratory practice (38.6%).

| SITUATIONS INHERENT TO GRADUATION | ANXIETY LEVEL | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | Very anxious | | Little anxious | | I don't get anxious | |
| | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| School Tests | 126 | 16,4 | 42 | 11,5 | 4 | 5,7 |
| Seminar Presentation | 123 | 16,0 | 45 | 12,3 | 4 | 5,7 |
| Laboratory Practice | 63 | 8,2 | 82 | 22,5 | 27 | 38,6 |
| Practice in a Health Unit | 121 | 15,7 | 46 | 12,6 | 5 | 7,1 |
| Performing Procedures on Patients | 117 | 15,2 | 49 | 13,4 | 6 | 8,6 |
| Saturdays | 133 | 17,3 | 28 | 7,7 | 11 | 15,7 |
| Clinical Case Study | 86 | 11,2 | 73 | 20,0 | 13 | 18,6 |
| Total | 769 | 100,0 | 365 | 100,0 | 70 | 100,0 |

Considering the factors related to experiences at the university (Table 6), it is possible to analyze which contextual experiences generate more perceived anxiety among Nursing students, where the highest prevalence is related to locomotion, housing and/or food (27.8%), followed by relationship with colleagues and/or teachers (24.4%) and being part of a research and/or extension center (19.6%) is also one of the factors that make the student anxious.

Table 6 – Prevalence of experiences at the university that generate greater anxiety among nursing students of a University in the interior of Bahia - 2022.

| IN GENERAL, WHAT FACTORS RELATED TO YOUR EXPERIENCES AT UNIVERSITY MAKE YOU MORE ANXIOUS? | N | % |
|---|-----|------|
| Transportation, housing and/or food on campus | 115 | 27,8 |
| Relationship with colleagues and/or teachers | 101 | 24,4 |
| Class schedules | 73 | 17,6 |
| Participation in events | 44 | 10,6 |
| Be part of a research and/or extension nucleus | 81 | 19,6 |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Total | 414 | 100,0 |
|--------------|------------|--------------|

From the data present in Table 7, it is possible to see the relationship between signs and symptoms of anxiety present since the beginning of graduation, in nursing students, and among those who considered good mental health, the most prevalent signs and symptoms were sleep impairment (24.2%), sweating/agitation/tachycardia (23.2%) and lack of concentration (21.2%). For those participants who considered poor mental health, the following data were maintained: sleep impairment (23.3%), sweating/agitation/tachycardia (25.1%) and there was the addition of a new item, where muscle pain and/or headache and/or involuntary fine tremors (21.5%) configured the picture of signs and symptoms present.

Evidencing that the mental health of the vast majority of this public is currently impaired.

Table 7 – Signs and symptoms of anxiety present since the beginning of graduation according to the perception of the current mental health of nursing students of a University in the interior of Bahia - 2022.

| SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY | MENTAL HEALTH TODAY | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | Boa | | Ruim | |
| | n | % | n | % |
| Damage to sleep | 24 | 24,2 | 196 | 23,3 |
| Muscle pain and/or headache and/or involuntary fine tremors | 18 | 18,2 | 181 | 21,5 |
| Sweating/Agitation/Tachycardia | 23 | 23,2 | 211 | 25,1 |
| Lack of Concentration | 21 | 21,2 | 114 | 13,5 |
| Shortness of breathe | 4 | 4,0 | 40 | 4,8 |
| Change of appetite | 9 | 9,1 | 100 | 11,9 |
| Total | 99 | 100,0 | 842 | 100,0 |

DISCUSSION

In the academic course, there are several situations that require adequate responses to the training process that can cause stress and anxiety in the student. In this way, the non-identification and necessary attention focused on the mental health of this public can generate negative consequences, harming personal, academic and/or professional development in the future (PEREIRA et al., 2019).

Although they are presented in an interconnected way, where one tends to generate the other, stress and anxiety should be understood in different ways, because they present different emotional states, where anxiety is related to psychic suffering, due to the future threat, whether it is real or imaginary. While stress is a non-specific reaction to some situation⁽¹⁷⁾.

The study by Silva et al.⁽¹⁵⁾ (2021), shows that the adaptation of the student in the Higher Education Institution (HEI) is linked to the individual and social factors that surround him, which requires potential for adaptation.

It was found in the present survey, that 62.8% of the participants expressed that they have or have already had a desire to change courses. This factor can be associated with the difficulty in managing time and reconciling extracurricular activities, due to the demand inherent in the course, making it possible to present low self-efficacy and self-esteem, being interconnected to the anxious process⁽⁷⁾.

It was observed in this research that situations inherent to graduation such as workload, extracurricular demands, adaptation to study methods and relationships with colleagues/teachers, can favor the development of anxiety disorder. Corroborating these findings, the study by Lima et al.⁽¹¹⁾ (2017) states that anxiety influences academic performance, and can impair cognition, learning and change the perception about failure or success at the end of graduation.

The experiences of the student can generate suffering, to the detriment of the environment in which he is inserted, either by the mode of evaluation, teaching, lack of resources and infrastructure of the IES and overload, and may have a negative impact on the health of the students⁽⁵⁾.

In this study, the most anxiety-generating situations inherent to graduation were those of an evaluative nature. Other findings in the literature show similar results, where the performance of evaluative activities can generate momentary tension, difficulty in remembering subjects already studied and concern in waiting for the result of their performance⁽¹⁴⁾.

The study by Silva et al. (2019), corroborates the findings of this article, where signs and symptoms of anxiety were described among nursing students, being cited the difficulty in decision-making and adaptation, damage to memory, sleep and concentration, irritability, fatigue, somatic complaints, such as headache, change in appetite, tremors, sweating, muscle stiffness, low personal achievement and depersonalization, which involve the perspective on the professional future, are frequent characteristics among these students.

In the present research, it was found that class time is a factor that generates anxiety and such conditions can be explained by the quality of sleep, where students with classes in the morning shift have insufficient quality and duration, generating greater wear and daytime sleepiness⁽²⁾.

According to Silva⁽¹⁶⁾(2019), anxiety in the participation of events can be triggered by the need

to perform many extracurricular tasks, teacher charges and also the competitiveness of the labor market.

Linked to this condition, the interpersonal relationship can generate anxiety between students, so that problems with intimidating teachers, very demanding and inflexible, end up causing greater tension in the student, as well as the relationship between colleagues, which can generate a conflicting environment and potentiating stress^(4,13).

CONCLUSIONS

It was evidenced that most students were female, between 21 and 24 years old, brown race/color, without children and single. They presented good performance in the course and good relationship with teachers/colleagues and 62.8% of the participants have/have already had the desire to change courses. The realization of tests, presentation of seminars, sabbatines, relationship with colleagues and/or teachers, locomotion, housing and/or food on campus, being part of a research/extension center, were more evident as possible associations with the development of the anxious process.

Sleep losses, sweating, agitation, tachycardia, lack of concentration, headache/muscular pain and involuntary fine tremors were the most prevalent signs and symptoms of anxiety.

It is important to emphasize that welcoming measures such as conversation circle, campus setting and review of the workload, more dynamic methodologies that facilitate learning, are strategies that can be implemented within the IES in order to preserve the mental health of students and consequently improve performance in academic training.

Thus, although the present study brings important contributions to Public Health and Collective Health, in addition to characterizing and describing the university public that suffers from anxiety and what factors/experiences within the academic context, it is necessary that new studies can be carried out in an attempt to deepen the associated factors, so that it is feasible to sustain practices of promotion in mental health for the public of university students.

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