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REPERCUSSIONS OF THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF NURSING STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

REPERCUSSÕES DA VIVÊNCIA ACADÊMICA NA SAÚDE MENTAL DOS ESTUDANTES DE ENFERMAGEM EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA

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Abstract: Objective: this study aims to examine the impact of the academic journey on the mental well-being of nursing students enrolled in a public university. **Methods:** the research adopts a descriptive approach with a qualitative framework, involving nursing students who took part in semi-structured interviews utilizing Bardin's Content Analysis Technique. **Results and discussion:** a total of eight nursing students, comprising six females and two males in their 3rd to 8th semesters, with ages ranging from 20 to 37, participated. Findings suggest a direct correlation between mental health issues, societal shifts, and biopsychosocial welfare policies. **Final Considerations:** The study delves into students' perspectives on university experiences, their comprehension of mental health, and the transformative impacts post-enrollment.

Keywords: Mental Health; University Students, Psychological Illness and Nursing.

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INTRODUCTION

Entry into higher education is part of the desire of many subjects, whether motivated by personal fulfillment, vocation or qualification, in order to increase their chances and opportunities for insertion in the universe of work, which is increasingly competitive and requires professionals with multi-qualifications. At the university, students face a moment of transition that entails the need to adapt to a new form of teaching, new social ties and, consequently, new responsibilities [1].

This new environment can significantly affect the quality of life of students because it is stressful and permeated with activities and commitments, where it directly influences daily life, that is, eating habits, sleep quality, and physical and psychic well-being [2].

All these changes can generate a compromise in the mental health of individuals, often affecting mental disorders; which are characterized by different emotional and behavioral manifestations, which encompass difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, insomnia, fatigue and irritability. Research conducted with university students, especially those in the health area, point to a high prevalence of mental disorder in the daily lives of students, influencing their academic activities [3].

Mental Health has been a topic widely addressed in recent years, due to numerous diseases that are associated with mental disorders and is related to the state of general well-being, which is associated with the way the individual reacts to daily stress[4], demands and challenges and how he manages to adjust his ideas and emotions to realize his skills, be productive and contribute socially[5]. While mental disorder is defined as a set of abnormal thought changes that can affect interpersonal relationships [6].

According to the report prepared by the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Community and Student Affairs (FONAPRACE), a representative and collegiate body composed of pro-rectors, sub-rectors and teachers of Brazilian public Higher Education Institutions, gathered in defense of public higher education, access and permanence of students, the socioeconomic and cultural profile of undergraduates of federal institutions of higher education in Brazil have pointed to a picture of illness of students. In the 2018 measurement, for example, among the results found, psychic suffering is evidenced in 83.5% of students who reported having experienced some episode of emotional crisis. Anxiety being the most mentioned by students 63.6%, followed by 45.6% of discouragement/demotivation. Among the students who reported mental suffering, 11.1% were in psychological treatment and 67.7% had never sought assistance [7].

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Among university students, those who study in the health area tend to be more affected by mental illness due to the complexity of care, requiring the student emotional resistance to deal with the illness, suffering and death of patients. In nursing, emotional skills are required throughout the course to deal with responsibility during the care of critical patients, with the stressful environment that intensifies feelings, high workload, feelings of disability in the face of some diseases and death, in addition to the attempt to reconcile theoretical-practical activities that require the student's critical and scientific knowledge, the ability to deal with suffering and minimize the risks of damage during care [8].

Given the above, this research is justified by the deficit of studies on the subject. After searching the databases: Virtual Health Library (BVS, Scientific ElectronicLibrary online (SciELO) and Google Scholar, between the months of April and May 2022, using the following descriptors: mental health; nursing student, mental disorder and behavior. Thus, this study aimed to describe the repercussions of academic experience on the mental health of nursing students from a public university in the interior of Bahia.

METHODS

This study is characterized as a research of a descriptive nature and qualitative approach, as student participants of the nursing course of that university. The inclusion criteria adopted were: to be regularly enrolled in essential components of the course, 1º to 10º semester during the semester of 2022.2 and to be older than or equal to 18 years. And as an exclusion criterion: students of the 9th semester who were attending in the same period as the author, as well as students who, although enrolled, were not attending the course or with a lock-up of it.

Eight (08) Nursing students participated in this study, chosen randomly, identified with the abbreviation of students (Est) followed by the numeral, corresponding to the order of the interview, and according to the desire to participate in the research; emphasizing that, because it is a qualitative research, the number of participants was carried out through theoretical saturation, which consists in the suspension of the inclusion of new participants, after the evaluation of the researcher, after not obtaining any new element, presenting a certain redundancy that does not add relevant information to the research [9].

For data collection, a semi-structured and open interview was conducted that consisted of an identification script that the following variables were addressed for sociodemographic characterization of the participants: age, gender, race/color, own income, family income, with who lives, receives some financial aid, works, does internships, semester, religion, marital status, origin; and open questions regarding the mental health of the graduate.

The respondents were invited to participate in the research through an approach in classrooms, through the social network WhatsApp® individually, or in existing groups. Those who agreed to participate, the objective of the study was clarified and the interview was scheduled in a room already previously booked at UEFS, at the time of their preference or in a place that felt more comfortable to ensure the participant's privacy; the interview was recorded through the cell phone and transcribed in full.

The data were analyzed through the Bardin content analysis technique (2016), in which it is carried out through three steps, namely pre-analysis, exploration of the material, treatment of the results obtained and interpretation. Because it is a research involving human beings, resolutions nº 466/12 and nº 510/2016 of the National Health Council (CNS) regarding the principles of bioethics were respected. The research project of this study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Feira de Santana (CEP-UEFS), and approved with no. 5,880,868.

RESULTS

The study had the participation of eight Nursing students, between the 3rd and 8th semester, six female and two male, the age ranged from 20 to 37 years. Of these, four participants reported being of the white race/color, three brown, one of black race and black color, five of them are from the city of Feira de Santana, Bahia. As for marital status, everyone is single and most says they are Catholic (Table 1).

As for the delimitation of the participants, in the qualitative study the numerical criterion is not valued to ensure its representativeness, because it does not pretend to generalize its results, nor that they are representative of a broader reality; therefore, the delimitation of the number of participants with quality is one that makes it possible to cover the totality of the problem addressed in its multiple dimensions [10].

Table 1 – Characterization of participants

Name	Age	Sex	Religion	Semester	Race/Color	Marital status	Procedence
Est 01	21	F	Evangelical	3º	White	Single	Feira de Santana
Est 02	20	F	Evangelical	3º	Branca	Single	Feira de Santana
Est 03	25	F	Others	8º	Brown	Single	Mairi
Est 04	37	F	Others	8º	Black	Single	Taperoá
Est 05	22	F	Catholic	8º	White	Single	Feira de Santana

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Est 06	25	F	Catholic	3º	Brown	Single	Feira de Santana	
Est 07	21	M	Catholic	7º	Brown	Single	Feira de Santana	
Est 08	22	M	Catholic	5º	White	Single	Mairi	

Source: Own Authorship, 2023.

In relation to economic conditions, it was observed that most have some kind of own income, and family income ranged between one and four minimum wages, and 4 did not know how to report values, most live with family members (mother, father, brothers and grandfather), and 7 receive financial aid and only 1 does not receive it. And unanimously, they don't work and don't do any kind of paid internship. This reveals that students have difficulties in reconciling other activities with their studies (Table 2).

Table 2 – Economic conditions of participants.

Name	Own Income Family	Family Income	Who do you live with	Financial aid	Works	Internship
Est 01	No	Did not know how to inform	Mother	Yes	No	No
Est 02	No	Did not know how to inform	Father, mother and 2 brothers	No	No	No
Est 03	Yes	Did not know how to inform	Friend	Yes	No	No
Est 04	Yes	4 and a half salaries	Boyfriend and mother	Yes	No	No
Est 05	Yes	2 and Half sarlaries	Father, mother and brother	Yes	No	No
Est 06	Yes	1 salary	Mother and grandpa	Yes	No	No
Est 07	Yes	Did not know how to inform	Mother	Yes	No	No
Est 08	Yes	Did not know how to inform	Colleagues from the educational institution	Yes	No	No

Source: Own Authorship, 2023.

Given the findings found in this study, the categorization of them was carried out, which will be worked on below, with the following subtopics: mental health conception for nursing students; perspectives of nursing students on the university and their well-being; and finally, behavioral changes in the lives of nursing students during university admission.

DISCUSSION

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MENTAL HEALTH CONCEPTIONS FOR NURSING STUDENTS

Mental health has been increasingly discussed due to its relevance to society, thus, it characterizes mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual perceives his own abilities, can deal with the tensions arising from everyday life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his community[4].

Given the above, it is observed that students have a clear perception about the term "mental health" bringing similar definitions in each speech. Most define it as something intrinsic and related to the control of their own emotions, experiencing good and bad moments and knowing how to deal with each of them, as in the lines:

[...] I think that having mental health for me would be to keep a calm mind during the day and throughout the day, [...] make decisions in a lighter way [...] have a calm mind (Est 2).

[...] be able to control your feelings, control your actions, prioritize it above all. Because if your mental health is not well, nothing goes well in life, [...] take care of it above all to have that balance in the other areas of your life (Est 5).

Having mental health for me is being able to perform daily activities, right? From day to day, it's being well with yourself and with your own choices (Est 6).

One of the studies found(11) affirms the findings in the study in question, where it says that mental health problems are directly related to social change and biopsychosocial well-being policies, in addition, individual experiences of an emotional and affective nature can be explained differently depending on the social group targeted. Therefore, an association between quality of life and mental health is observed in the interviewee's speech Est 4.

[...] mental health for me is being well, it's you being present there in the now, understand? Happy, smiling, [...] it's the will to live, it's being really alive and not just surviving, [...] it's being fine with yourself, it's having health, in the sense of your physical body. It's doing physical activity, it's you lying down and sleeping not having insomnia, understand? I think health is that, having your leisure time that can even be alone, right? But that you find pleasure in this in life, understood? (Est 4).

Quality of life has been attributed in the context of mental health as a holistic concept of

health, ceasing to be just the absence of disease. Thus, the concept of quality of life has a subjective meaning[12]. Confirming the speeches brought by the participants, another study portrays that there is an association between quality of life and mental health, and that when directed to university students it is possible to observe a shortage of publications[13].

The influence of affective experiences of friendships and family bond for mental health was only explained in the speech of participant Est 8, as reported in the following transcripts:

[...] is to be able to live well with yourself in a psychological environment. Like being happy having a relationship with friends, family, so that's maintaining mental health (Est 8).

Corroborating with the previous speech, the bond can be decisive in a person's mental health, because it enables the exchange of knowledge and affections, which help both as prevention and in the process of caring for those who are somehow mentally ill, through subtleties of each collective and each individual[14]. However, some studies bring the affective relationship as a risk factor for several factors, especially mental health, especially when this relationship is composed of conflicts and/or disagreements and/or violence [15-17].

NURSING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS WELL-BEING

Entry into the university is a complex stage for the lives of students, as it requires more responsibility, from the choice of the course to the adaptation in a new environment with different demands and people, who play an important role in academic adaptation. [18]

Given this context, the results of this study showed that the choice of the course is related to own achievements and objectives. In addition, it was observed that for some students an expectation about the course was created that was not achieved, due to a very succinct view of it, thus generating feelings of frustration or even surprise.

[...]I had no idea what university was. So I was surprised. I was a little disappointed with the course issue, right? (Est 3).

[...] When I got here I got a shock, understand? Because I wasn't used to this kind of charging, I wasn't used to deepening the subjects so much in this way (Est 6).

[...] being here is the realization of several dreams, [...] a higher education course, of working with health and getting what I wanted in high school. In the first semesters I even freaked out, the question of me dealing with the new, but today things are calmer. So I think my 107

perception was very catastrophic and today looking is calmer (Est 7).

Only one participant reported that her perspective on the university was the same as reality, since she already imagined how difficult it would be.

[...] although I have developed anxiety, having all this weight, right? This load of me, was as I really expected, I already knew that I was entering a course that was not easy (Est 1).

During university life many expectations are modified, some remain and others are undone, the closer to reality these expectations are, with less difficulty the goals are achieved(19). In addition, students with high expectations are more likely to get frustrated, generating negative points that interfere with the progress of the course.

Corroborating the students' speeches, a study (20) reports that when entering the university, students create expectations that often do not match the reality offered by the institution and this incompatibility can lead to disappointment and reduction of academic participation.

Another important point, reported by the students, was how the conflicting interpersonal relationships within the university directly reflect negatively on the coexistence between colleagues and teachers, resulting in an even more difficult path.

[...] when we can't live well with those people, it will change our well-being, change our day, change our whole mood. And then not only this issue, but also the relationship with the teachers, this will also directly influence the studies (Est 1).

[...] Inside the classroom, colleagues, teachers I can't feel good, I can't feel at ease.[...] They are groups that I'm linked to that I can't be me [...]. This makes me feel bad, it's not aggregated in a group (Est 3).

[...] Some friendships also made me very sick here (Est 5).

Many teachers think that you have to know everything at all times and that you have to be an expert, [...] that very fierce charge ends up leading to this there, stress, and even discouragement (Est 8)

Some studies[21] validate the statements brought previously because they argue that the social relations carried out at the university are important for the adaptation, experience and achievement of students, and may interfere in the decision to postpone or persist in the course, especially when it comes to friendships and collaborations between colleagues and teachers.

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It is worth noting that dealing with people of different values and lifestyles can cause conflicts that will interfere with the adaptation to the university and even lead to abandonment. Therefore, the more support students receive, the better they are emotionally prepared to face the challenges arising from entering the university [22].

Finally, through the speeches of many participants, a discourse was perceived in which the university interferes negatively in the well-being of students, causing fatigue, feeling of suffocation by the pressure imposed, emotional instability and even triggers of past experiences, as in the following lines:

I got really sicke, [...] I knew it was daytime, but not that the workload of some discipline was so exaggerated (Est 4).

[...] Not having the well-being, I tie this to the tiredness I feel here (Est 6)

[...] We have suffocating moments, [...] like the anguish of delivering a job (Est 8).

[...] Certain things unfortunately end up triggering triggers (Est 2).

[...] It brings me emotional instability, if I don't pass the subjects, if I go to the final, [...] you are undervalued; if you are not good in practice, good at it, good at that, you are looked at askance by the teachers, by your colleagues, by yourself, understand? (Est 4).

Favoring the results of this study, research (23) was found that reports that the demands of the university are points that reflect on the student's personal life, such as the excess of study time, the level of demand associated with the training process, acclimatization to new environments, new sleep habits, new demands of time management and work strategies, studying and among others. In addition, these points require students to have a set of behavioral norms to organize themselves and be able to face these demands, which can generate stressors in their lives.

CHANGES IN THE LIVES OF NURSING STUDENTS DURING UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE

The university adaptation process involves levels of personal and academic demand that students are usually not used to in high school. This process comes with several changes, such as increased responsibility, anxiety, competition and even the uncertainties associated with the choice of course and, if not treated properly, can cause significant stress(20,22). Thus, according to the findings of this study, there are several changes reported by the interviewees. One of them is self-care, caused by lack of time for yourself, irregular diet, sleep and rest.

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[...] I just want to enjoy a little time I have and sleep (Est 2).

[...] I feel stressed maybe one of the reasons for my stress is food too, right, that I eat very badly (Est 3).

[...] things really focused on myself, like going out, going to a party, something, I think these factors were changed from the moment I entered the university (Est 8).

Self-care is part of an individual activity, understood and focused on a goal to be achieved. It is a behavior developed aiming at oneself and factors that affect its own development, in order to benefit life, health and happiness. Thus, studies corroborate with the data found in this research, where they portray that the high demand of the university, as well as concern, charging, stress and anxiety, directly interferes in self-care such as: unregulated sleep, inadequate diet, fatigue accumulation and among others(24). This deficiency in self-care can generate several problems in the physical and mental health of students(25,26).

Other important changes in the participants' lives were reported, such as: anxiety, stress and depression. These are often caused by lack of time to perform internal and external demands, extensive workload, competitiveness in the academic environment, imposed pressure and self-charge.

After I entered the university I developed anxiety, because there is an environment of very great competition among students. The university's workload is also not easy, since it is integral. And also the amount of subjects, the amount of subjects that often, we feel unable to deal with all this (Est 1).

[...] I feel very anxious because there is a pressure, the teachers say a lot that it is not to have a competition between us, but sometimes they end up influencing this kind of thing [...] (Est 2).

[...] With the amount of things we have to do, [...] sometimes the load is very big, so I had some changes mainly in relation to this change of mood (Est 7).

[...] Depressed, quite anxious sometimes, that anxiety of "did I learn everything my teacher will charge tomorrow in practice?", "Will I be able to handle that test that I need to study?", [...] anxiety peaks during the day and ends up leading to stress (Est 8).

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Studies reinforce the data obtained with the statements of the interviewees(23), when they portray that university students are susceptible to some mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and stress, as they are directly exposed to internal and external stressor stimuli. Internal factors are related to the way an individual sees the world and how he responds according to his beliefs and values. External stimuli, on the other hand, refer to events that produce triggers, such as disease, conflict, crisis, group change, among others.

In this way, it is perceived that people need to determine what is most important in their personal and professional areas and, therefore, seek balance. Balance can be achieved in different ways and in the same way there are ways to solve this problem, such as: cooperation in food, relaxation, emotional stability and quality of life(23).

It was also observed that many participants highlighted how the family bond changed negatively after entering the university, generating a distance between them. This distancing was justified by the students by the lack of time and decreased routine together.

So, kind of the routine with them has decreased, [...] nowadays I argue much more with my sisters than in the past, even if it's little (Est 2).

I didn't already have a nice relationship with my family, right? After I came here my time got shorter, my demand got bigger and I spend less time at home and have less time to solve homework issues. The daily conviviality with my family has also decreased, the conviviality of good things too, understand? Because it seems that I live for institution (Est 6)

So the conversations took longer to happen because sometimes I'm studying and there's no way I can chat all the time, and this distancing ends, [...] so, I think these relationships may be a little more fragile (Est 8).

In the context of social integration, the network of friendship or social support that university students weave is an important aspect of adaptation to higher education. Entering university life usually brings important changes in the daily lives of students[15]. For some, it is necessary to leave the family of origin, away from their parents and live alone or with other people, and even those who continue to live with their families can go through a transition, where school friends no longer see each other on a daily basis and socio-affective ties decrease, noting that there is a convergence with the study in question [15].

Therefore, the reduction and/or lack of time to be with family, loved ones or even to do leisure activities, can lead students to an overload of stress and, therefore, to physical and emotional exhaustion, affecting the quality of life of students. On the other hand, only the participant Est

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1, reported that the family bond remained the same, as we can see in the speech below:

My family relationship she didn't change much like that, it remained, thank God I have parents who supported me a lot, who are always talking to me (Est 1).

Some factors may be associated with the adaptation of university students, such as the emotional support of the family or the emotional bond of students with their parents, playing an important role, since reciprocity and the frequent exchange of ideas with parents were factors associated with lower rates of stress and depression among students, confirming the data exposed in the previous speech [15].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

A pesquisa possibilitou perceber a visão dos estudantes sobre a universidade, bem como seu entendimento sobre saúde mental e as mudanças que ocorreram em suas vidas após a entrada na universidade, sejam negativas ou positivas. The research made it possible to perceive students' vision of the university, as well as their understanding of mental health and the changes that occurred in their lives after entering the university, whether negative or positive.

Thus, the objective proposed by the study was achieved. However, there were some limitations, such as the scarcity of scientific articles published on the subject, especially in the current time frame, making more studies focused on the area necessary, where it will assist both in the academic life of students and in their future professional life.

Finally, it is worth noting that it is essential to recognize and accept the limitations of university students for both physical and mental health, even if it is uncomfortable to admit the limit. In addition, it is important to always seek new strategies from your very existence, in order to face difficult situations in a better way.

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