

**COMMON MENTAL DISORDER AMONG NURSING GRADUATION ACADEMICS  
AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS****TRANSTORNO MENTAL COMUM ENTRE ACADÊMICAS DE GRADUAÇÃO EM  
ENFERMAGEM E FATORES ASSOCIADOS****TRASTORNO MENTAL COMÚN ENTRE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE  
ENFERMERÍA Y FACTORES ASOCIADOS**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** Identify the presence of symptoms indicative of Common Mental Disorder among undergraduate students of a Federal University undergraduate nursing course and its association with sociodemographic, economic and behavioral variables. **Method:** This is an observational and cross-sectional study with 163 academics. The Self-Reporting Questionnaire instrument was used to identify Common Mental Disorder. **Results:** Among participants, the prevalence of Common Mental Disorder was 44.7%, associated with drinking and chronic disease. **Conclusion:** The results of the study showed that it is essential to know the mental health conditions of university students and the factors that may be related to the planning of specific actions and better use in the academic field and in their quality of life. **Descriptors:** Mental Health; Women's Health; Nursing; Students, Nursing.

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## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Identificar a presença de sintomas indicativos de Transtorno Mental Comum, entre acadêmicas do curso de um curso de Graduação em Enfermagem de uma universidade federal e a sua associação com variáveis sociodemográficas, econômicas e comportamentais.

**Métodos:** Trata-se de um estudo observacional e transversal com 163 acadêmicas. Foi utilizado o instrumento *Self-Reporting Questionnaire* para identificação do Transtorno Mental Comum. **Resultados:** Entre as participantes a prevalência de Transtorno Mental Comum foi de 44,7%, associado ao hábito de beber e possuir doença crônica. **Conclusão:** Os resultados do estudo evidenciaram que é fundamental conhecer as condições de saúde mental de universitários e os fatores que podem estar relacionados para o planejamento de ações específicas e melhor aproveitamento no âmbito acadêmico e na sua qualidade de vida.

**Descritores:** Saúde mental; Saúde da mulher; Enfermagem; Estudantes de enfermagem.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Identificar la presencia de síntomas indicativos de trastorno mental común entre estudiantes de pregrado de un curso de pregrado de enfermería de la Universidad Federal y su asociación con variables sociodemográficas, económicas y de comportamiento. **Método:** Este es un estudio observacional y transversal con 163 académicos. El instrumento del cuestionario de autoinforme se utilizó para identificar el trastorno mental común. **Resultados:** Entre los participantes, la prevalencia del trastorno mental común fue del 44,7%, asociada con el consumo de alcohol y las enfermedades crónicas. **Conclusión:** Los resultados del estudio mostraron que es esencial conocer las condiciones de salud mental de los estudiantes universitarios y los factores que pueden estar relacionados con la planificación de acciones específicas y un mejor uso en el campo académico y en su calidad de vida.

**Descriptor:** Salud Mental; Salud de la Mujer; Enfermería; Estudiantes de Enfermería.

## INTRODUCTION

Common Mental Disorder (CMD) defined by Goldberg and Huxley, through a biosocial model, refers to a non-psychotic mental disorder characterized by a set of depressive symptoms, anxiety states, irritability, fatigue, insomnia, drowsiness, difficulty of memory and concentration and somatic complaints such as tremors, headache and poor digestion.<sup>1</sup> CMDs are highly prevalent in the population and impact the mood, feelings and quality of life of individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Literature has revealed an increase in these disorders in recent years,

especially in women, which is in line with results in Brazilian studies with a female population, in which the prevalence of this disorder presented rates of 30,67%<sup>3</sup>, 33,8<sup>4</sup>, and 35.7%.<sup>5</sup>

CMD in females occurs for several causes, not showing a pattern. Thus, a study observed an increase in the occurrence of disorders associated with schooling and the relationship with the partner.<sup>5</sup> Another, in those in a stable relationship, with zero to four years of schooling, who used controlled medication, and who reported a previous

diagnosis/confirmed personally or in the family.<sup>3</sup>

Another predisposing factor is related to biopsychosocial pressures, such as entering the academic environment. Studies have shown that the students' demand to achieve a good school performance is a predisposing factor to the development of pressures, depression, and may lead to the abandonment of the course, since these students do not feel qualified enough to be good professionals.<sup>6-7</sup>

In a study with nursing students, stress was related to the female gender.<sup>8</sup> CMD can also be associated with other causes such as poor sleep quality, probably related to the overload of academic activities and anxiety with tests and assignments.<sup>9</sup>

Undergraduate academics have specificities that must be considered, in addition to the gender issue - the cultural context, socioeconomic factors, besides the distance from the family. Alone, they can find obstacles that are difficult to face, even with regard to health, including mental health. Therefore, it is essential to value the mental health of undergraduate students, considering the different life conditions, study and work in which they are inserted.

In this way, it is believed that the mental health of academics, specifically of the undergraduate Nursing course, is essential for their quality of life and,

consequently, for the quality of their studies and completion of their course. However, national research is needed to identify CMD, as well as its association with different factors. Based on this identification, an action plan can be elaborated and put into practice by higher education institutions, aiming at better academic performance and quality of life for university students.

This study aimed to identify the presence of symptoms indicative of a common mental disorder among Nursing undergraduate students at a federal university and their association with sociodemographic, economic and behavioral variables.

## **METHOD**

This is an observational, exploratory, cross-sectional study, carried out in September 2017, with 163 academics, over 18, from the first to the tenth term of the Undergraduate Nursing Course at a federal university, in the interior of the state of Minas Gerais.

The study inclusion criteria were participants over 18 years and those who agreed to participate in the study.

Data collection was performed using a self-administered instrument, in the classroom, during the beginning or end of didactic activities, with the consent and authorization of the teacher responsible for

the class. The academics of the Undergraduate Nursing course were invited to participate in the study and informed about the nature and objectives of the research. After the acceptance and formalization of the consent through the Free and Informed Consent Term, in two copies, the instrument distribution was carried out.

Two instruments were used: sociodemographic, economic and behavioral characterization and the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20), to assess the prevalence of CMD. All instruments were self-administered.

For the sociodemographic, economic and behavioral characterization, a questionnaire was prepared, with structured questions, based on previous experiences of the researchers and on the scientific literature. The variables were: age, origin, color, marital status, paid work, income, number of people living in the household, performing physical activities, performing leisure activities, chronic disease, use of alcohol, smoking, drug use and living children.

The SRQ-20 was used to identify the CMD; it consists of 20 questions, with two possible answers, yes or no. The cutoff point used was equal to or greater than eight positive responses.<sup>10</sup>

Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social

Science (SPSS) version 20.0 software. The univariate data analysis was presented in the form of distribution of absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies for the qualitative variables; and mean and median values (measures of central tendency), standard deviations and maximum and minimum values (measures of variation) for the quantitative variables. In the bivariate analysis, the existence of association was verified through contingency tables and their respective Association measures: Pearson's Chi-Square Test (X), Prevalence Ratios (PR) and Crude Prevalence Odds Ratios (CPR). For all tests, a confidence interval (CI) of 95.0% and a level of  $\alpha$  significance of five % were considered.

The project was forwarded to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), being approved with CAAE 65820717.5.0000.5154 and opinion No. 2,140,136 (June 27, 2017).

## RESULTS

A total of 163 students aged 18 to 39 participated in the study, with a mean age of 22.14 years (sd=3.68), 102 (63.4%) lived in Uberaba and 59 (36.6%) were from other cities. As for color, 96 (59.6%) were considered white, 44 (27.3%) were brown, 18 (11.2%) were black and three (1.9%) were yellow. Regarding marital status, 81 (50.3%) had no partner/boyfriend, 73 (45.3%) had a partner, but did not live

together, and seven (4.3%) lived with a partner regardless of the gender. Considering paid work, 143 (88.8%) had no paid work, seven (4.3%) worked in the formal market and 11 (6.8%) in the informal market. With regard to individual income, a minimum of zero and a maximum of 4000 reais were obtained, with an average of 367.40 reais (sd=558.64).

Concerning the number of people who lived in the household with the participant, the study showed a minimum of no people and a maximum of 20, with an average of 3.81 (sd= 2.15).

Regarding physical and leisure activities, 73 (45.3%) of the academics reported performing physical activities and 120 (74.5%) some leisure activity.

Related to the participants, 142 (88.2%) did not have chronic diseases; among those who said they had, 10 (52.6%) reported other diseases, five (26.4%) had depression, two (10.5%) had high blood pressure and two (10.5%) Diabetes Mellitus.

With regard to smoking, 24 (14.9%) were smokers and 92 (57.1%) used

alcoholic beverages, 33 (35.9%) drank it once or twice a week, 26 (28.3%) one to three times/month, 30 (32.6%) less than once/month and three (3.2%) every day.

Regarding the use of illicit drugs, 12 (7.5%) claimed to use these, six (50.0%) used them less than once/month, two (16.7%) used them every day or almost every day, two (16.7%) once or twice/week and two (16.7%) once or three times/month.

Considering the number of living children, 14 (8.7%) had children and 11 (6.8%) said that the answer did not apply, as they had never had sexual intercourse.

Regarding the answers of nursing students to the SRQ-20 scale, in the present study, the prevalence of CMD was 44.7%.

In the bivariate analysis, the following variables were associated with CMD: drinking habit ( $p=0.03$ ) and have a chronic disease ( $p=0.01$ ), Table 1.

Table 1 presents the bivariate analysis of sociodemographic, economic and behavioral variables related to CMD, among academics.

**Table 1**– Distribution of academics of the Undergraduate Nursing Course, according to sociodemographic, economic, behavioral and CMD variables. Uberaba, MG, Brazil, 2017.

VARIABLES	CMD				PR	CPR	p †
	YES		NO				
	N	%	N	%			
<b>Live with partner</b>							
Yes	two	28.6	5	71.4	0.48	0.63	0.37
No	70	45.5	84	54.5	(0.90-2.55)	(0.19-2.05)	
<b>Have paid work</b>							0.14
Yes	11	61.1	7	38.9	2.11	1.43	
No	61	42.7	82	57.3	(0.77-5.76)	(0.94-2.16)	
<b>Perform physical activity</b>							0.60
Yes	31	42.5	42	57.5	0.85	0.91	
No	41	46.6	47	53.4	(0.45-1.58)	(0.64-1.29)	
<b>Perform leisure activity</b>							0.18
Yes	50	41.7	70	58.3	0.61	0.77	
No	22	53.7	19	46.3	(0.30-1.26)	(0.54-1.11)	
<b>Smoking habit</b>							0.31
Yes	13	54.2	11	45.8	0.64	0.80	
No	59	43.1	78	56.9	(0.27-1.53)	(0.53-1.20)	
<b>Drinking habit</b>							<b>0.03</b>
Yes	48	52.2	44	47.8	0.49	0.67	
No	24	34.8	45	65.2	(0.26-0.93)	(0.460-0.97)	
<b>Use of drugs</b>							0.11
Yes	8	66.7	4	33.3	0.38	0.64	
No	64	43.0	85	57.0	(0.11-1.31)	(0.42-1.00)	
<b>Have children</b>							0.06
Yes	3	21.4	11	78.6	0.30	0.45	
No	65	47.8	71	52.2	(0.80-1.11)	(0.16-1.24)	
<b>Chronic disease</b>							<b>0.01</b>
Yes	57	42.2	78	57.8	0.26	0.57	
No	14	73.7	5	26.3	(0.09-0.77)	(0.41-0.80)	

†p-value for the Chi-Square Test.

## DISCUSSION

The prevalence of CMD in the present study was similar to the results of other studies, with results being higher in some researches. It was found in a study carried out in the city of Araçatuba-SP, with undergraduate nursing students from a private university, where the prevalence of

CMD was 55%.<sup>11</sup>

In a research developed at the same university of this study, with 92 nursing students, the CMR was 43.5% among students, being male (45.8%) and among women (43.2%). Considering the female population, the results were similar; however, it is noteworthy that it was in

different research periods.<sup>12</sup>

Another survey carried out with 220 students at a public university in northeastern Brazil, with students of medicine, dentistry and nursing, showed a lower prevalence for CMD. It highlights the higher prevalence in students of the nursing course (39.0%), followed by the dentistry course (36.8%) and finally the medical course (30.1%).<sup>13</sup> As in the study with Psychology and Nursing university students, the CMR was 35.71% among them.<sup>14</sup>

The prevalence of CMD identified, as in the literature, is worrying, given the impact that CMD can have on the quality of life, academic performance and professional training of these students.

In a survey carried out with medical students from the south of Brazil, the female gender variable was correlated with the CMD among academics at the end of the term.<sup>9</sup>

A study with students from four health professions in Saudi Arabia found an association between female gender and the presence and severity of depression.<sup>15</sup>

In the present study, although the data were obtained only with women, a high prevalence of CMD was identified, as shown in comparative studies between the genders.

Therefore, with regard to women's health, there is a need for more research and

actions, since specific issues related to the gender context can involve and be related to mental health and its relationship with quality of life and professional future.

In the bivariate analysis, the habit of drinking and the presence of chronic disease, among academics, were associated with CMD.

In contrast, the use of alcoholic beverages was not associated with CMD in a research carried out with students of the Undergraduate Nursing Course at the Federal University of Acre, even though 93.4% claimed to consume alcohol at low risk and 6.6% risk use for alcohol consumption.<sup>16</sup>

In relation to having chronic diseases, a household survey with 848 women carried out in the city of Campinas-SP, similarly to this study, identified that those who reported various diseases or health problems were more predisposed to having CMD.<sup>17</sup>

Behavioral factors, such as the use of alcoholic beverages, should be discussed and analyzed at university level. The presence of chronic diseases also deserves specific attention in terms of monitoring and evaluation. The identification and support in relation to these factors can contribute to a work focused on the mental health of academics, as evidenced in the results of this study and research presented above.

There are few studies in the national literature on psychological care services for university students. This leads us to reflect on the need, on the part of universities, for discussion and measures of attention and management aimed at the well-being of students in the university environment.<sup>18</sup>

This can be done through outreach methods, such as educational workshops, mental health talks, and interventions focusing on anxiety symptoms, such as relaxation workshops and stress-relieving exercises. The relevance of group interventions that favor socialization is highlighted, particularly useful among female students.<sup>19</sup>

Given the risks and negative impact that CMD can cause on the quality of life and learning of nursing students, as well as its direct impact on academic performance, studies are needed to investigate the prevalence and predictive factors and academic vulnerabilities, with a view to implementing strategic actions for CMD prevention/assistance.

Nursing students are future professionals, working with patients. Their mental health should be of concern. It is essential that nurses have psychological well-being for competent and safe care for patients. Therefore, safeguarding the psychological well-being of nursing students provides the guarantee of safe, efficient and high-quality patient care.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The present research showed a high prevalence of CMD among undergraduate nursing students (44.7%). It also revealed the association of alcohol use and the presence of chronic disease with CMD.

From this information, it was possible to identify factors related to the mental health of academics, which can support the planning of specific actions, contributing to the quality of their academic, professional and personal performance, as well as scientific application, such as the formulation of a study of intervention with the same target audience.

Study limitations: impossibility of causality inference, due to the cross-sectional design; the research was carried out in a single university and the non-use of the multivariate statistical method (binomial logistic regression) to confirm the bivariate analysis.

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