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BURNOUT AND ENGAGEMENT IN PORTUGUESE NURSES WORKING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

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Introduction: In their activities nurses deal with pain, suffering people and deficient work conditions related with physical aspects, emotional relationships within the team or difficulty to adapt to new rules. Working with mental ill individuals increase the demands and some professionals became emotional exhausted, stressed and feel in burnout, whereas others became motivated and engaged. According to recent literature, engagement can protect from burnout, helping professionals to efficiently cope with stressful situations (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Aims: Identify the levels of burnout and engagement of nurses working with mental illness.

Methods: Data were collected using a translation from Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1997) and Utrecht Work Enthusiasm Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), applied to 110 portuguese nurses working with mental illness. The sample was composed by 21% male and 79% female; mean age 37.7 years.

Results: Our nurses don't feel burnout, showing low emotional exhaustion (M=2.3 in a Likert scale 0-6 points), lowest cynism (M=0.97) and higher professional efficacy (M=4.5). They feel engaged with work, showing higher dedication (M=4.3), vigor (M=3.99) and absorption (M=3.7). Some differences were found, with males showing higher cynism than females. Burnout was negatively correlated with engagement.

Conclusions: Despite lower results of burnout in our sample, nursing is a professional activity that elicits stress, making professionals vulnerable to burnout, especially when they work with patients with special demands such as mentally ill people. However, engagement appear as a protective factor to feel burnout, allowing professionals to be dedicated and absorbed by their activity.