

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND EPIDEMIOLOGICAL PROFILE OF COMMON MENTAL DISORDERS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE HEALTH FIELD

*Perfil sociodemográfico e epidemiológico dos transtornos mentais
comuns em estudantes universitários da área da saúde*

*Perfil sociodemográfico y epidemiológico de los trastornos mentales
comunes en estudiantes universitarios del área de la salud*

Renato Galvão Gonçalves Vilela¹

Nicoli Aparecida Lourenço²

Julia Ernandes Cardoso²

Carla Eloísa Kulik²

Alan Kevin dos Santos Cardoso³

Cristina Terumy Okamoto⁴

Maria Cecília Da Lozzo Garbelini⁵

ABSTRACT

Common mental disorders (CMDs) are conditions that can compromise academic and work performance, as well as social and family relationships. This study aimed to analyze the epidemiology of CMDs in health science students, in association with sociodemographic and academic characteristics. This study aimed to identify relevant psychological symptoms that may be determinants of these outcomes. It is a cross-sectional epidemiological study with a quantitative approach, conducted with 570 nursing, medical, and psychology students using the SRQ-20 instrument. A predominance of females (76.8%) was observed, with a high frequency of previous diagnosis of depression/anxiety (52.8%) and a family history of these conditions (75.2%). The prevalence of mental health disorders was 70.5%, indicating a high occurrence among the participants. The screening revealed frequent signs of psychological distress, reinforcing the importance of institutional strategies aimed at promoting mental health, focusing on welcoming, strengthening bonds, and supporting students.

Keywords: Education. University Students. Mental Disorders.

¹Physician. Master's degree in Health Sciences Education. Faculdades Pequeno Príncipe.

²Undergraduate student in Medicine. Faculdades Pequeno Príncipe.

³Accountant. Master's degree in Health Sciences Education. Faculdades Pequeno Príncipe.

⁴Doctor of Health Sciences at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná. Professor at Universidade Positivo e da Faculdade Evangélica Mackenzie do Paraná.

⁵Doctor of Science at Universidade São Paulo. Professor in the Stricto Sensu Postgraduate Program - Teaching in Health Sciences. Faculdades Pequeno Príncipe.

Contact:

*Maria Cecília Da Lozzo Garbelini. E-mail: maria.garbelini@fpp.edu.br

RESUMO

Os transtornos mentais comuns (TMC) são condições que podem comprometer o rendimento acadêmico, laboral e as relações sociais e familiares. Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar a epidemiologia dos TMC em estudantes da área da saúde, em associação com as características sociodemográficas e acadêmicas, incluindo a identificação de sintomas psíquicos relevantes que podem ser determinantes para esses desfechos. Trata-se de um estudo epidemiológico transversal, de abordagem quantitativa, realizado com 570 estudantes de enfermagem, medicina e psicologia, por meio do instrumento SRQ-20. Observou-se predominância do sexo feminino (76,8%), com alta frequência de diagnóstico prévio de depressão/ansiedade (52,8%) e histórico familiar dessas condições (75,2%). A prevalência de TMC foi de 70,5%, indicando elevada ocorrência entre os participantes. O rastreamento evidenciou sinais frequentes de sofrimento psíquico, reforçando a importância de estratégias institucionais voltadas à promoção da saúde mental, com foco no acolhimento, fortalecimento de vínculos e suporte aos estudantes.

Palavras-chave: Ensino. Estudantes Universitários. Transtornos Mentais.

RESUMEN

Los trastornos mentales comunes (TMC) son afecciones que pueden comprometer el rendimiento académico y laboral, así como las relaciones sociales y familiares. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la epidemiología de los TMC en estudiantes de ciencias de la salud, considerando características sociodemográficas y académicas, e identificar síntomas psicológicos asociados que puedan ser determinantes de dichos eventos. Se trata de un estudio epidemiológico transversal con un enfoque cuantitativo, realizado con 570 estudiantes de enfermería, medicina y psicología utilizando el instrumento SRQ-20. Se observó un predominio de mujeres (76,8%), con una alta frecuencia de diagnóstico previo de depresión/ansiedad (52,8%) y antecedentes familiares de estas afecciones (75,2%). La prevalencia de TMC fue del 70,5%, lo que indica una alta incidencia entre los participantes. El cribado reveló signos frecuentes de malestar psicológico, lo que refuerza la importancia de las estrategias institucionales dirigidas a promover la salud mental, centrándose en la acogida, el fortalecimiento de los vínculos y el apoyo a los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Educación. Estudiantes Universitarios. Trastornos Mentales.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Common Mental Disorders (CMD) developed in the 1970s through research on mental illness within the context of Primary Health Care (PHC). The term CMD, coined by Goldberg and Huxley¹, refers to psychiatric illnesses that encompass depressive disorders (excluding psychotic symptoms), anxiety disorders, and somatoform disorders, such as pain, nausea, and dizziness². Considering this panorama, university life, marked by the development of academic and social skills that signal the beginning of a professional choice, can constitute a context of vulnerability, since it is full of changes and social, family, and individual demands, favoring the emergence or aggravation of CMD among students³.

In Brazil, the prevalence of mental health disorders ranges from 19.7% to 43.7%, highlighting a significant portion of the population potentially in need of specialized care⁴. Among the various social groups, university students stand out as being more vulnerable to the development of mental disorders, especially anxiety and depression. Evidence suggests that the prevalence of these conditions among students in the health field is higher than that observed in the general population, which may be related to intense academic demands, high workloads, and early exposure to situations of suffering and professional responsibility⁵.

University education is a period marked by intense and often significant transformations in students' lives. Among the risk factors associated with academic experiences that can contribute to mental illness, the following stand out: the stage of the course the student is in, the difficulty in reconciling graduation with other activities, discomfort with assessments, dissatisfaction or lack of interest in the course, as well as low expectations regarding the professional future⁶.

Authors report other institutional demands that may pose a risk of illness in this population, such as excessive study hours, demands related to the training process, adaptation to a new context, new sleep routines, new demands for time management and study strategies, among others³. There is also an understanding that the various courses, and also areas of knowledge, offer different stressors that may cause more or less illness among students, with health-related courses registering high rates of illness⁷. In health-related courses, this may occur due to the excessive study load and frequent contact with situations of disability, care of critically ill patients or risk of death, presenting greater vulnerability to the onset of these disorders⁸.

For the reasons mentioned, this study is justified, as a better understanding of the challenges these students face and the development of effective interventions are ways to contribute to ensuring that these future healthcare professionals are prepared to offer quality care in their profession. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following guiding question: what stressors related to sociodemographic and academic variables are associated with the occurrence of mental health disorders (MHDs) among university students in the health-related fields? To address this question, the objective is to analyze the epidemiology of CMDs among health students, in association with sociodemographic and academic characteristics, including the identification of relevant psychological symptoms that may be determining factors in these outcomes. It is understood that mapping the psychological symptoms will allow for the creation of results-focused campaigns that can improve the quality of life of students.

METHOD

This is an epidemiological, cross-sectional, descriptive study with a quantitative approach, developed in a private Higher Education Institution (HEI) located in the capital of Paraná state. The target population of the study, selected through convenience, consisted of university students of both sexes from Medicine, Nursing, and Psychology courses, totaling 1100 students. Based on the sample size calculation, considering 95% confidence and a 5% margin of error, it was determined that 285 responses to the research instruments were needed. Inclusion criteria were: being a regularly enrolled student in the aforementioned courses and being over 18 years of age. There were no exclusion criteria.

Initially, a questionnaire developed by the authors was used to collect sociodemographic and academic data. Subsequently, the *Self-Reporting Questionnaire* (SRQ-20), developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), widely used for screening indicators of mental health disorders, especially in primary care settings and epidemiological studies, was applied. A descriptive analysis of the specific items of the SRQ-20 was chosen due to their clinical relevance, including the item related to suicidal ideation. This analysis was exploratory and complementary to the main outcomes of the study.

The SRQ-20 instrument, validated by Mari and Williams⁹ (1986), consists of 20 questions with binary responses, covering the dimensions of anxious and depressive mood, somatic symptoms, decreased energy, and depressive thoughts. Each affirmative response corresponds to one point, totaling scores from 0 to 20. A cutoff point of ≥ 7 positive responses was adopted to indicate probable mental health disorder (MTD). The instrument presents adequate validity and reliability, being widely used in mental health studies. Scores equal to or greater than 7 suggest psychological distress, while 20 affirmative responses indicate a high probability of MHD.

For data analysis, the free software R.Cran version 4.3.3, with specific packages, was used. Descriptive analysis was then performed, based on the absolute and relative frequencies of the investigated variables. Possible associations between the SRQ-20 results and demographic variables were verified using *Student's t-test* (for dichotomous variables), ANOVA test (for polytonic qualitative variables), and Pearson's r correlation (for continuous variables), and internal reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Inferential analysis was performed with... The association between low CMD indication and CMD indication and the sociodemographic variables of the participants was assessed using Pearson's Chi-square or Fisher's Exact tests, depending on the adequacy of the data. The significance level adopted was 5% ($p < 0.05$).

The study was based on the ethical precepts of NHC (national health council) Resolution 466/12 and Circular Letter No. 2 /2021/CONEP/SECNS/MS and was approved by the FPP (Faculdades Pequeno Príncipe) Research Ethics Committee under Substantiated Opinion No. 7,094,640.

RESULTS

In total, 570 students responded to the research instrument, with 232 (40.7%) from the medicine course, 118 (20.7%) from nursing, and 220 (38.6%) from psychology. Regarding age, the average age of the respondents was 22.93 years (SD - 6), ranging from 18 to 53 years. The average age per course did not show significant differences, with medicine having an average of 22.62 years (SD – 4.1), nursing 22.99 (SD - 6.76), and psychology 23.23 (SD - 7.16).

In the study, the majority of students are female, corresponding to 437 (76.8%) participants. Regarding academic and sociodemographic characteristics, 337 (59.1%) attend classes in only one shift; 415 (72.8%) are in the initial semesters; 512 (89.8%) are single; and 361 (63.3%) follow some religion.

Regarding lifestyle habits, 262 (46.1%) reported having two hours of leisure time daily and 369 (64.7%) engage in physical activity. It was also observed that 457 (80.7%) do not use Integrative and Complementary Practices (ICP).

Regarding mental health conditions, 300 (52.8%) reported a previous diagnosis of depression and/or anxiety, while 427 (75.2%) reported a family history of these conditions. Furthermore, 336 (59.3%) do not have paid employment and 405 (71.2%) are neither scholarship recipients nor have academic funding.

A relevant finding of the study indicates that 402 (70.5%) of respondents showed an indication for CMD. Among these, 142 (61.2%) are medical students, 84 (71.2%) are nursing students, and 176 (80.0%) are psychology students.

Responses to the SRQ-20 research instrument indicated that 307 (54.0%) of participants reported frequent headaches; 309 (54.2%) reported poor sleep; 486 (85.3%) stated they felt nervous, tense, or worried; and 293 (51.4%) reported feeling sad recently. In addition, 331 (58.4%) reported difficulty performing their daily activities with satisfaction; 294 (51.8%) reported difficulty making decisions; 405 (71.3%) stated they felt tired all the time; and 404 (70.9%) stated they tired easily.

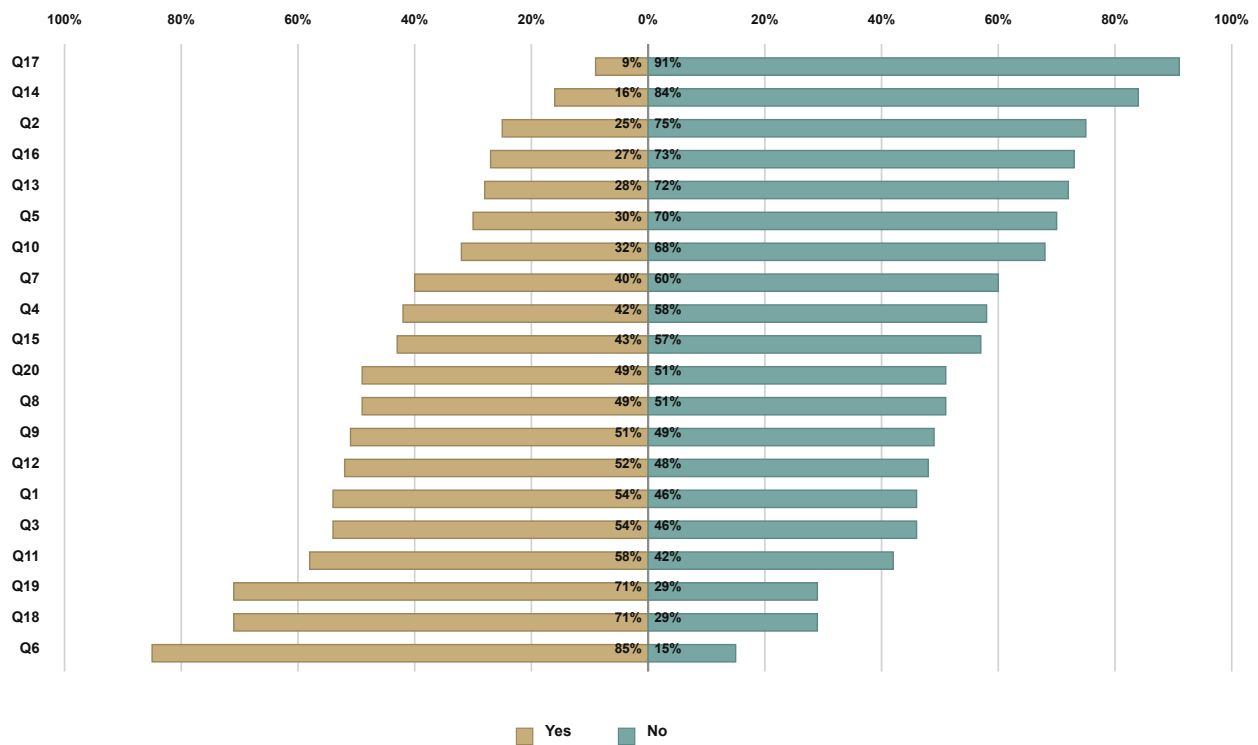
A significant finding, relating to Question 17, indicates that 51 students (9.0%) of the total respondents reported suicidal ideation, with 14 (6.1%) from the medical course, 13 (11.0%) from nursing, and 24 (10.9%) from psychology.

It is noteworthy that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the applied instrument was 0.84, indicating good internal consistency. This result demonstrates that the instrument's items exhibit adequate homogeneity and reliability for evaluating the construct investigated in the studied sample.

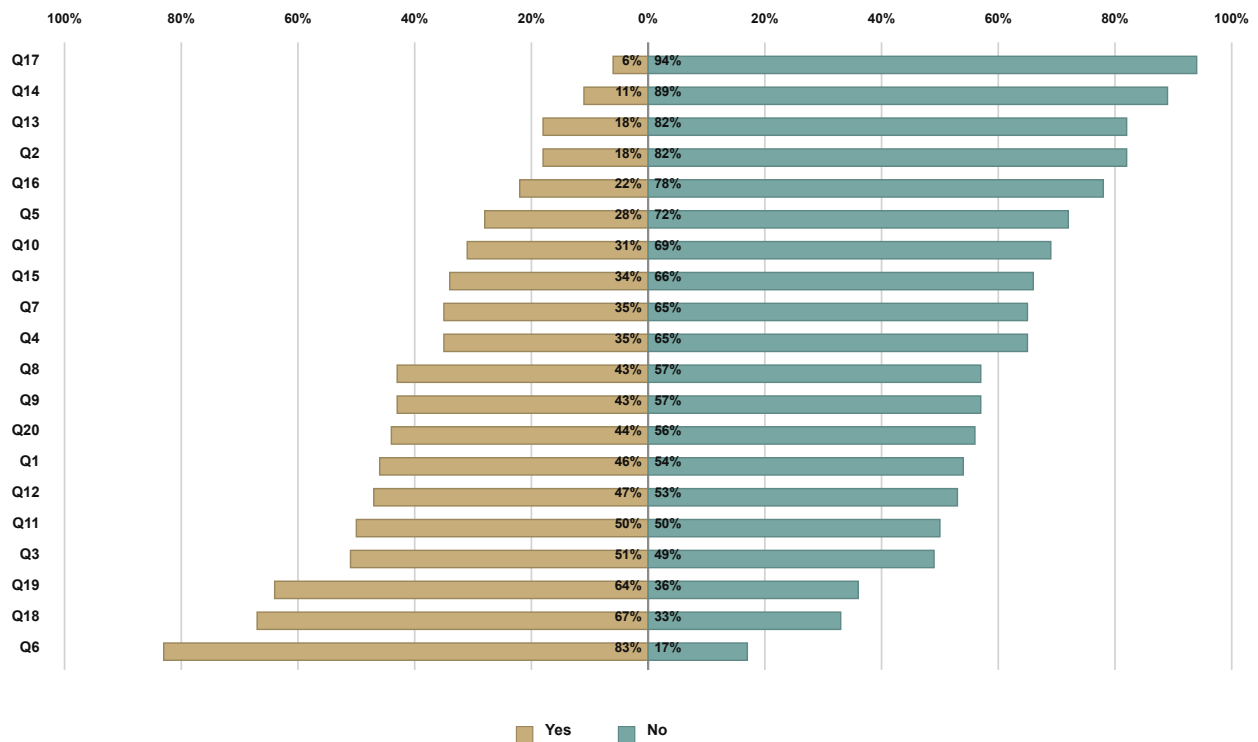
Graph 1 presents the distribution of responses categorized into two groups: (1) "Yes" and (2) "No". The questions are organized in ascending order, from the lowest to the highest percentage of positive responses. Overall, question Q17: "Have you had thoughts of ending your life?" showed 9% affirmative responses. In contrast, question Q6: "Do you feel nervous, tense, or worried?" registered 85% positive responses, placing it at the bottom of the graph in the general information. It is observed that, for the three courses, the percentage distribution coincides regarding the question with the lowest index (Q17) and the one with the highest index (Q6); however, the intermediate sequence of questions shows variations between the courses.

Figure 1 - Distribution of responses categorized into 2 groups: “Yes” (1) and “No” (2).

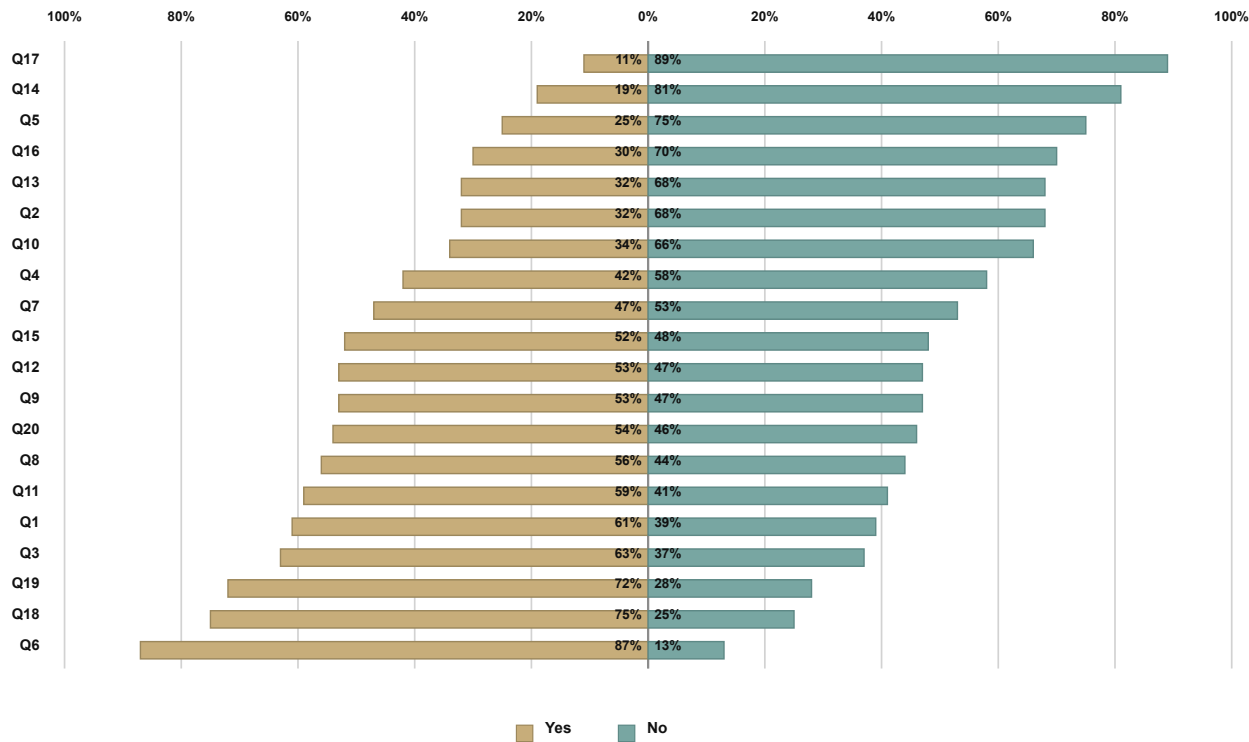
GENERAL GRAPH OF RESPONSES



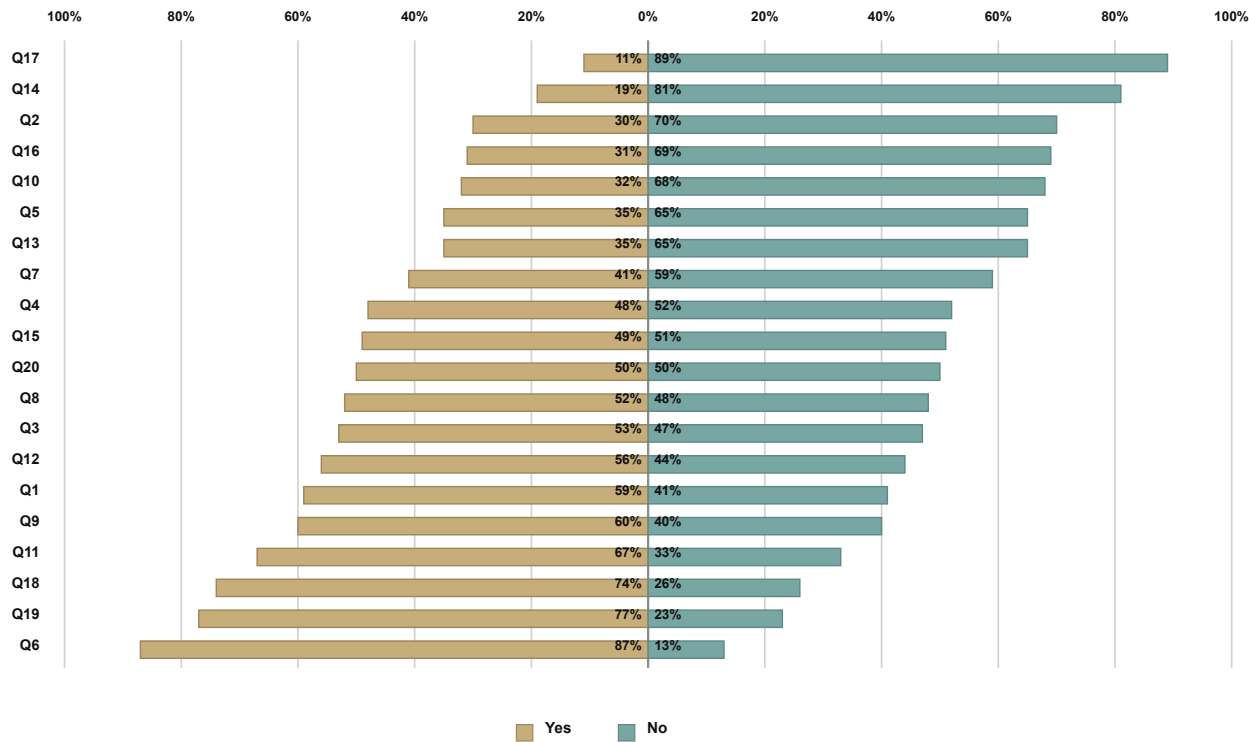
MEDICAL GRAPH



NURSING GRAPH



PSYCHOLOGY GRAPH



Source: Research data.

The following is an analysis of the responses to the SRQ-20 instrument, grouped into symptom categories (dimensions), as follows: Factor I: anxious and depressive mood questions; Factor II: somatic symptoms questions; Factor III: decreased energy questions; Factor IV: depressive thinking questions.

The distribution of questions, grouped into the four dimensions (Table 1), shows the overall and specific results for each course. It is noteworthy that respondents from psychology and nursing presented the highest percentages in relation to the symptoms evaluated.

Table 1 - Symptom groups from the Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20): distribution of positive respondents' answers, by course.

Dimension	N	% General	N Med	% Med	N Nurse	% Nurse	N Psycho	% Psycho
Depressive anxious mood	300	52.54	111	47.95	64	54.03	124	56.59
Somatic Symptoms	239	41.93	86	36.93	55	46.89	98	44.55
Decrease in vital energy	312	54.71	111	47.99	68	57.77	132	60.15
Depressive Thoughts	135	23.73	42	18.1	33	27.97	60	27.39

Source: Survey data. Anxious and depressive mood questions: Q4, Q6, Q9 and Q10; somatic symptoms questions: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q5, Q7 and Q20; decreased energy questions: Q8, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q18 and Q19; depressive thinking questions: Q14, Q15, Q16 and Q17

Regarding Factor I (anxious and depressive mood), question 6, “Do you feel nervous, tense, or worried?”, had 486 (85.3%) affirmative responses, predominantly among nursing students, who totaled 103 (87.3%) “yes” answers. Concerning Factor II (somatic symptoms), question 1, “Do you sleep poorly?”, registered the highest number of positive responses, with 309 (54.2%) affirmative answers, the highest prevalence observed in the psychology course, with 117 (53.2%) affirmative responses. As for Factor III (decreased energy), question 18, “Do you feel tired all the time?”, had 405 (71.0%) positive responses, with nursing students standing out, accounting for 89 (75.4%) “yes” responses. Finally, in Factor IV (depressive thinking), question 15 “Have you lost interest in things?” received 246 (43.2%) affirmative responses, again more frequently among nursing students, who recorded 61 (51.7%) positive responses.

For the inferential analysis of the participants, the total score of the SRQ-20 questionnaire was calculated by summing the number of YES responses. Based on this score, the participants were categorized into two groups: those with a low indication for CMD (with a score ≤ 7), and those with an indication for CMD (with a score ≥ 7) in association with sociodemographic variables.

A statistically significant association was observed with the indication for TMC (Therapeutic Medical Care) for the following variables: gender ($p < 0.001$), shift ($p < 0.001$), following a religion ($p < 0.001$), hours of leisure per day ($p < 0.02$), physical activity ($p < 0.004$), previous diagnosis of depression/anxiety ($p < 0.001$), family history of depression/anxiety ($p < 0.001$), and being a scholarship recipient or having funding ($p < 0.021$). For the other variables analyzed in this study, no statistically significant differences were observed between the groups.

When performing the stratified analysis by course, it was observed that, among medical students, there was a statistically significant difference in the indication of CMD for the following variables: gender ($p < 0.002$), previous diagnosis of depression ($p < 0.001$), family history of depression/anxiety ($p < 0.001$), and being a scholarship recipient or having funding ($p < 0.016$). Among nursing students, a significant difference was found for gender ($p < 0.009$) and previous diagnosis of depression/anxiety ($p < 0.04$). In the psychology course, a statistically significant difference was observed only for the variable previous diagnosis of depression/anxiety ($p < 0.004$) in relation to the indication of CMD.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, a prevalence of females was observed, corresponding to 437 (76.8%) students in the three courses investigated. This finding is similar to the study carried out at the Federal University of Campina Grande, which analyzed depressive symptoms in the pandemic context and also showed greater participation and involvement of women (64.74%)¹⁰.

When analyzing the courses separately, also in relation to gender, a statistically significant difference was observed for the medicine course ($p < 0.002$) and for the nursing course ($p < 0.009$). On the other hand, in the psychology course, the association did not show statistical significance ($p = 0.091$). These findings are consistent with other findings in the literature, carried out in different contexts, which point to a positive association of CMD in female individuals in nursing students¹¹, and medical students¹²⁻¹³.

The higher prevalence of anxiety in women can be understood from the interaction of biological and hormonal factors that influence both the development and manifestation of these symptoms. From a biological point of view, hormonal differences play a relevant role, since fluctuations in estrogen and progesterone levels can impact mood regulation and stress response. In addition, testosterone has been associated with possible protective effects against symptoms of anxiety and depression, contributing to the differences observed between the sexes¹⁴.

The data obtained in the study show that, in the overall count of the three courses surveyed, 402 (70.5%) of the students have an indication of mental health issues, that is, they had a score of 7 or higher on positive responses. The screening revealed signs of mental illness, with prevalent symptoms common to all courses, such as sleep disorders, feelings of nervousness, tension and worry, difficulty in performing daily activities with satisfaction, and frequent fatigue.

Corroborating these findings, Oliveira¹¹, when investigating students, especially in the health field, identified that 72.6% of participants presented scores indicative of CMD, with a higher prevalence in females (74.8%) and in association with worse self-assessment of health status. Similarly, Abreu and Macedo¹⁵, when researching psychology students, also showed a high prevalence of TMC (60.2%), being more frequent among women (77.7%) and single people (68.2%).

According to the literature, these findings can be partially explained by the fact that entering and remaining in higher education corresponds to a period of intense personal, cognitive, affective, and social transformations. This is a phase marked by multiple academic experiences and challenges arising from adapting to university life, factors that can significantly contribute to psychological distress in this population¹⁶.

In this context, university students in the health field are even more prone to developing mental health disorders, since they need to learn to deal with pain, suffering, and professional responsibility on a daily basis, with the recurrence of these disorders being associated with the advancement in years of training. According to the authors, the main psychological disorders triggered in the university environment are depression and anxiety, with higher levels of these symptoms among women studying medicine¹⁷.

Regarding the variable of physical activity practice, the present study identified a significant association with the indication of CMD ($p < 0.004$). Similar results have been described, in which participation in leisure physical activities was related to the promotion of well-being^{13,18}. Furthermore, involvement in physical practices is associated with the preservation of a healthy lifestyle, constituting an important strategy for health promotion and improvement of quality of life¹⁹.

Considering the variable of leisure hours per day, the analyses carried out indicate a significant result in relation to the indication of CMD ($p < 0.02$), in which respondents who have 2 hours or more of leisure time per day have a lower risk of being indicated for CMD. According to the literature, the intense routine results in few or rare free times for students to engage in leisure activities, making them predisposed to CMD. Another

study points out that a proportionally higher frequency of students with CMD was observed among those who reported having less than two hours of leisure time per day, demonstrated dissatisfaction with the time available for leisure activities, and stated that they do not practice physical activity regularly²⁰.

For the variable to have a prior diagnosis of depression/anxiety, the findings found in this study, the results were significant ($p < 0.001$) in relation to the indication of CMD, as well as for the variable family history of depression/anxiety ($p < 0.001$). The data obtained may be associated with predictive factors of CMD, present even before graduation, taking into account both genetic and environmental factors. Another study²¹ also found an association between CMD and family history of mental disorder, reinforcing the multicausal model of mental disorders, which involves the interaction between genetic and environmental factors and can be aggravated by stressful experiences throughout life.

The research identified a significant association between being a scholarship recipient or having student funding and the occurrence of mental health disorders ($p < 0.021$), indicating that socioeconomic vulnerability can negatively impact students' mental health. A study with university students, including medical students from the North region of Brazil²², also points to low family income as one of the main factors associated with a higher prevalence of psychological distress and mental health disorders.

The spiritual dimension also stood out as an important indicator of health. In this study, following a religion proved to be a protective factor against the development of mental health disorders ($p < 0.001$), being reported by 361 (63.3%) of the participants. The study indicates that religiosity and spirituality promote well-being, help in coping with adverse situations, and act as protective factors against anxiety, depression, and suicide. Despite these benefits, this topic still receives little attention in the university environment²³.

This study identified a 70% prevalence of positive screening for CMD, a result similar to that observed in other studies that used the SRQ-20²⁴⁻²⁵. Among the symptoms evaluated, the question "feeling nervous, tense or worried" stood out, presenting the highest frequency of positive responses, evidencing the predominance of manifestations of anxiety and stress in the academic context. A similar finding was reported in a study with nursing students, reinforcing that symptoms of depressive-anxious mood constitute a frequent pattern among university students in the health area²⁶.

Regarding Factor II (somatic symptoms), the question "Do you sleep poorly?" stood out, with a high frequency of positive responses, indicating a significant impairment in sleep quality among students. This result is concerning, as the literature²⁷ points out that sleep is essential for physical and emotional health, and its poor quality is associated with the occurrence of CMD, in addition to increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and impairments in academic performance. These findings reinforce the need for actions aimed at promoting healthy sleep habits in the university environment.

Within Factor III (decrease in vital energy), the most prevalent symptom was "Do you feel tired all the time?", indicating fatigue. A similar finding was described among nursing undergraduates²⁸. According to the authors, these students present high levels of stress, with more frequent psychological and physiological manifestations than students from other health-related courses. This vulnerability is related to multiple university demands, such as deficiencies in the quality of teaching and the educational environment, personal issues, uncertainties regarding career planning, the need for organization in the face of a large volume of information, stress resulting from practical activities, and constant contact with death.

Regarding Factor IV (depressive thoughts), the question with the highest frequency of positive responses was "Have you lost interest in things?". Although no question in this dimension showed a predominance of positive responses, the percentage of suicidal ideation (8.95%) deserves attention. Studies indicate that²⁹ difficulties adapting to the academic environment, weakened interpersonal relationships, and a smaller support network are associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation. Furthermore, higher prevalences were observed among homosexual, black, and mixed-race³⁰ students, and among those without religious

affiliation²⁵. These findings reinforce the importance of institutional strategies that promote social integration, psychosocial support, and extracurricular activities as measures to prevent mental suffering and suicide.

A meta-analysis with medical students identified that factors such as poorer mental health status, female sex, living alone, alcohol consumption, history of parental neglect, physical or sexual abuse, and family history of mental disorders are associated with a higher risk of suicidal ideation³¹. Furthermore, the SRQ-20 has demonstrated clinical validity in differentiating clinical and non-clinical populations and in predicting suicide risk, reinforcing its usefulness as a screening tool for mental health problems and early identification of risk situations³².

When examining the distribution of positive responses from respondents by course, medical students did not present affirmative responses above 50% in any factor. It is noteworthy that psychology and nursing students presented the highest percentages in relation to the evaluated symptoms, above 50%, in the factors "Depressive-anxious mood" and "Decreased vital energy".

Therefore, the observed evidence reinforces the importance of mental health care services in the student context. Authors³³ highlight the need for universities to value the promotion of mental health and education for the well-being of university students, recognizing that psychological balance is essential for academic success.

Corroborating this perspective, by highlighting that a significant portion of the university student body presents with mental health disorders, the importance of early recognition of these symptoms is emphasized³⁴. Furthermore, the need for the implementation of preventive and interventional programs directed at psychological distress among university students³⁵ is reinforced. These programs should consider the sociocultural context and the specificities of academic life, aiming at promoting well-being, strengthening coping strategies, and providing comprehensive care for the mental health of students. Such programs should be sensitive to the sociocultural context and the specificities of the students, aiming at promoting well-being and comprehensive care.

In this context, group workshops are recommended as a strategy for preventing and managing symptoms, as they provide a space for interaction, listening, and sharing experiences among participants. These spaces favor the collective construction of coping strategies, strengthen bonds, and encourage mutual support³⁶. In addition, the workshops contribute to validating and acknowledging the students' suffering, promoting greater awareness of issues related to mental health and encouraging the development of self-care and emotional regulation skills.

CONCLUSIONS

This study identified a high prevalence of mental health disorders (CMDs) among health science students at a private higher education institution in the capital of Paraná state. Although the sample is representative, its restriction to a single institution limits the generalizability of the results. The main signs of psychological distress observed were sleep disturbances, nervousness, tension, worry, fatigue, and difficulty performing daily activities with satisfaction. Furthermore, the presence of suicidal ideation in some participants reinforces the need for further investigations and the implementation of permanent strategies for promoting mental health, prevention, and early identification of risk situations.

A comparison between the health science courses surveyed revealed differences in the prevalence of mental health disorders, with a higher occurrence among psychology students compared to nursing and medicine students. This finding suggests that curricular, emotional, and formative characteristics can influence the psychological distress of students, highlighting the need for mental health promotion strategies adapted to the specificities of each course, rather than uniform institutional approaches.

As an additional contribution, it is worth highlighting that the study was conducted in a private higher education institution, a context still little explored in the national literature, broadening the understanding of the phenomenon in different academic realities. In this sense, the development of actions based on translational

research is recommended, allowing these findings to be transformed into practical interventions, adapted to the specificities of each educational setting, with a view to promoting mental health in the university environment.

Considering the importance of caring for human beings, the coordinators of the investigated courses should join efforts to promote preventive and therapeutic actions among students, aiming to reduce the occurrence of severe mental disorders. Therefore, the study's findings point to the need to develop strategies within the scope of translational research in the context of higher education institutions, in order to convert epidemiological evidence into practical interventions focused on the mental health of students.

The results should be interpreted considering the limitations of the cross-sectional design, which allows for the identification of associations but does not establish cause-and-effect relationships. Even so, the study contributes to the epidemiological tracking of psychological distress among university students and highlights the need for longitudinal research to identify its main predictors throughout undergraduate studies. The findings reinforce the importance of implementing welcoming and supportive spaces for students, promoting mental health, strengthening bonds, and developing institutional student assistance policies.

REFERENCES

1. Goldberg DP, Huxley P. Common mental disorders: a bio-social model. London: Tavistock/Routledge; 1992. 194 p.
2. Rodrigues EP, Rodrigues US, Oliveira LMM, Laudano RCS, Nascimento Sobrinho CL. Prevalência de transtornos mentais comuns em trabalhadores de enfermagem em um hospital da Bahia. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* [Internet]. 2014 [cited 2025 Mar 25];67(2):296-301. Available from: <http://scielo.br/j/reben/a/8cTX7L9pgrbBS8sdXwcsTLy/?format=pdf&lang=pt>
3. Ribeiro ALB, André BP. Reflexões sobre a saúde mental dos estudantes universitários: uma revisão bibliométrica. *Caderno Pedagógico* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Mar 25];21(5):e4477. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54033/cadpedv21n5-185>
4. Santos GBV, Alves MCP, Goldbaum M, Cesar CLG, Gianini RJ. Prevalence of common mental disorders and associated factors in urban residents of São Paulo, Brazil. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública* [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2025 Mar 25];35(11):e00236318. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102-311X00236318>
5. Leão AM, Gomes IP, Ferreira MJM, Cavalcanti LPG. Prevalência e fatores associados à depressão e ansiedade entre estudantes universitários da área da saúde de um grande centro urbano do Nordeste do Brasil. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica* [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2025 Mar 25];42(4):55-65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-52712015v42n4RB20180092>
6. Graner KM, Cerqueira ATAR. Revisão integrativa: sofrimento psíquico em estudantes universitários e fatores associados. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2025 Mar 30];24(4):1327-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-81232018244.09692017>
7. Lopes FM, Lessa RT, Carvalho RA, Reichert RA, Andrade ALM, Micheli D. Transtornos mentais comuns em estudantes universitários: uma revisão sistemática da literatura. *Revista Psicologia em Pesquisa* [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2025 Mar 31];16(1):1-23. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34019/1982-1247.2022.v16.31105>
8. Oliveira EB, Zeitoune RCG, Gallasch CH, Pérez Júnior EF, Silva AV, Souza TC. Common mental disorders in nursing students of the professionalizing cycle. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2025 Mar 31];73(1):e20180154. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2018-0154>
9. Mari JJ, Williams P. A validity study of a psychiatric screening questionnaire (SRQ-20) in primary care in the city of Sao Paulo. *The British Journal of Psychiatry* [Internet]. 1986 [cited 2025 Apr 5];148(1):23-6. Available

from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/abs/validity-study-of-a-psychiatric-screening-questionnaire-srq20-in-primary-care-in-the-city-of-sao-paulo/94BFEF754ADABF52A244AEA28BC436>

10. Leite HMS, Cayana EG. Sintomas depressivos entre acadêmicos da área de saúde de uma universidade pública em contexto pandêmico: um estudo de prevalência. *Brazilian Journal of Health Review* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Apr 5];7(1):5926-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34119/bjhrv7n1-479>
11. Oliveira ARCL. Fatores associados ao uso de psicofármacos e aos sintomas de ansiedade e depressão em estudantes universitários [dissertation on the Internet]. Ribeirão Preto: Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Enfermagem de Ribeirão Preto; 2023 [cited 2025 Apr 5]. Available from: <https://teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/22/22131/tde-15052023-164215/> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11606/D.22.2023.tde-15052023-164215>
12. Gomes CFM, Pereira Junior RJ, Cardoso JV, Silva DA. Common mental disorders in university students: epidemiological approach about vulnerabilities. *SMAD Revista Eletrônica Saúde Mental Álcool e Drogas* [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2025 Apr 9];16(1):1-8. Available from: https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/pdf/smad/v16n1/en_v16n1a09.pdf
13. Oliveira MP, Stahnke DN, Horta RL, Costa JSD. Prevalência de depressão entre estudantes de Medicina em universidade de Goiás. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Apr 12];48(2):e045. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-5271v48.2-2023-0178>
14. McHenry J, Carrier N, Hull E, Kabba M. Sex differences in anxiety and depression: role of testosterone. *Frontiers in Neuroendocrinology* [Internet]. 2014 [cited 2025 Apr 10];35(1):42-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yfrne.2013.09.001>
15. Abreu MM, Macedo JP. Saúde mental em estudantes de Psicologia de uma instituição pública: prevalência de transtornos e fatores associados. *Revista da SBPH* [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2025 Apr 10];24(1):91-103. Available from: <https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/pdf/rsbph/v24n1/09.pdf>
16. Castro VR. Reflexões sobre a saúde mental do estudante universitário: estudo empírico com estudantes de uma instituição pública de ensino superior. *Revista Gestão em Foco* [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2025 Apr 12];9(1):380-401. Available from: https://portal.unisepe.com.br/unifia/wp-content/uploads/sites/10001/2018/06/043_saude_mental.pdf
17. Santos ALT, Souza JF, Ribeiro CL, Nascimento PAC, Santana TB, Pereira HCV. Prevalência de transtornos mentais menores em estudantes da área da saúde e os fatores relacionados. *Saúde Coletiva (Barueri)* [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2025 Apr 12];11(67):6677-90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36489/saudecoletiva.2021v11i67p6677-6690>
18. Toneli LS, Almeida CL, Silva RG, Caldeirão TD, Haddad PCMB, Silva DA. Transtornos mentais comuns em enfermeiros: uma revisão integrativa. *Revista Recien: Revista Científica de Enfermagem* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Apr 20];14(42):110-21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24276/rrecien2024.14.42.110121>
19. Oliveira VA, Gomes LMD, Freitas PHC, Silva RQ, Ferreira JB. Benefícios da prática regular da atividade física no tratamento da depressão: uma revisão narrativa da literatura. *Research, Society and Development* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Apr 20];13(5):e8013545827. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v13i5.45827>
20. Grether EO, Becker MC, Menezes HM, Nunes CRO. Prevalência de transtornos mentais comuns entre estudantes de medicina da Universidade Regional de Blumenau (SC). *Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica* [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2025 Apr 20];43(1 Suppl 1):276-85. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-5271v43suplemento1-20180260>
21. Rocha ES, Sassi AP. Transtornos mentais menores entre estudantes de medicina. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica* [Internet]. 2013 [cited 2025 Apr 20];37(2):210-6. Available from: <http://educa.fcc.org.br/pdf/rbem/v37n02/v37n02a08.pdf>

22. Rocha IL, Varão FS, Nunes JR. Transtornos mentais comuns entre os estudantes do curso de medicina: prevalência e fatores associados. *Brazilian Journal of Development* [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2025 Apr 20];6(12):102989-103000. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34117/bjdv6n12-698>
23. França LCM, Gomes JRS, Costa MB, Gomes C, Dib RV, Oliveira ACS, et al. Espiritualidade e religiosidade para universitários: uma revisão de literatura. *Enfermagem Brasil* [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2025 May 10];22(2):258-74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33233/eb.v22i2.5315>
24. Lima HR, Oliveira PK, Silva MZ, Martins CM, Zuber JFS, Muller EV. Correlação entre qualidade de vida e transtornos mentais comuns em estudantes da área da saúde. *Saúde Coletiva (Barueri)* [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 Apr 5];15(93):14670-89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36489/saudecoletiva.2025v15i93p14670-14689>
25. Bianchi GC, Miaso AI. Fatores associados aos transtornos mentais comuns, risco suicida e uso de estimulantes em estudantes universitários. *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 Apr 5];78(6):e20240501. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2024-0501pt>
26. Araujo Filho ACA, Silva SM, Alves JS, Alves HLC, Monteiro AKC, Araújo AKL. Prevalência e fatores preditivos de transtornos mentais comuns em estudantes de enfermagem. *Journal of Nursing and Health* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 May 20];14(2):e1426126. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15210/jonah.v14i2.26126>
27. Ferreira CMG, Kluthcovsky ACG, Cordeiro TMG. Prevalência de transtornos mentais comuns e fatores associados em estudantes de medicina: um estudo comparativo. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Médica* [Internet]. 2016 [cited 2025 May 20];40(2):268-76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1981-52712015v40n2e02812014>
28. Carleto CT, Moura RCD, Santos VS, Pedrosa LAK. Adaptação à universidade e transtornos mentais comuns em graduandos de enfermagem. *Revista Eletrônica de Enfermagem* [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2025 May 20];20:v20a01. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5216/ree.v20.43888>
29. Sunde RM, Oliveira NC, Jaeger Filho CC, Esteves LF, Paz BM, Machado WL. Risk factors associated with suicide in university students: a scoping review. *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia* [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2025 May 20];22(2):832-52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12957/epp.2022.68656>
30. Santos AVO, Santos Júnior FMF, Galvão LR, Suzart NS, Moreira TDS. Relação entre variáveis sociodemográficas e saúde mental em estudantes do ensino superior brasileiro: uma revisão sistemática. *ARACÊ* [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 May 5];7(6):29064-89. Available from: <https://periodicos.newsciencepubl.com/arace/article/view/5574>
31. Seo C, Di Carlo C, Dong SX, Fournier K, Haykal KA. Risk factors for suicidal ideation and suicide attempt among medical students: a meta-analysis. *PLoS One* [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2026 May 5];16(12):e0261785. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261785> PMID: 34936691; PMCID: PMC8694469.
32. Pereira TA, Nascimento VSM, Amorim APD, Amorim AM, Mussi RFF. Saúde mental e cotidiano universitário: uma breve revisão integrativa. *Práticas e Cuidado: Revista de Saúde Coletiva* [Internet]. 2024 [cited 2025 Jun 2];5:e20265. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14712583>
33. Silveira LB, Kroef CR, Teixeira MAP, Bandeira DR. Uso do Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20) para identificação de grupo clínico e predição de risco de suicídio. *Revista Psicologia e Saúde* [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2026 May 5];13(4):49-61. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20435/pssa.v13i4.1219>
34. Bonfim LGS, Marchiorato AAL, Barbosa DAP, Mäder BJ. Níveis de estresse e ansiedade em uma residência interprofissional em pediatria. *Espaço Saúde* [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2025 Jun 2];22:e748. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22421/1517-7130/es.2021v22.e748>

35. Rodrigues DS, Cruz DMC, Nascimento JS, Cid MFB. Prevalência de transtornos mentais comuns e fatores associados em estudantes de uma universidade pública brasileira. *Cadernos Brasileiros de Terapia Ocupacional* [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2025 Jun 2];30:e3305. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2526-8910.ctoAO252833051>
36. Mota AAS, Pimentel SM, Mota MRS. Expressões de sofrimento psíquico de estudantes da Universidade Federal do Tocantins. *Educação e Pesquisa* [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2025 Jun 10];49:e254990. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1678-4634202349254990>

