



## DAILY LIFE OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: INVENTION OF LIFE AND WORK<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** describing the tactics and strategies, during the COVID-19 pandemic, present in the daily practices of nursing professionals and health institutions. **Method:** this is a qualitative study conducted with 14 nursing professionals who worked in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection took place in August and September 2021, through semi-structured interviews, remotely. The data were analyzed from the theoretical framework of the study of daily life guided by the concepts of strategy and tactics of Michel Certeau. **Results:** the professionals sought strategies of science in their private lives, how to perform healthy habits. Strategies of religious knowledge were also present. The tactics were: caring for flowers; walking on the street; watching series or movies. Health institutions used as strategy: organization of teams; hybrid work; offer of psychological support. At work, tactics were sharing fears with each other. **Final Thoughts:** knowing the daily life of nursing professionals, at this pandemic moment, contributes to understanding the impact of this experience in their lives. The construction of knowledge from their daily practices during the COVID-19 pandemic can offer alternatives to face the challenges of these professionals.

**Keywords:** Nursing. Mental health. COVID-19. Health services. Work.

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many changes in people's daily lives, impacting the way of living in society, and bringing into everyday life measures such as social distancing and the mandatory use of face masks<sup>(1)</sup>.

Studies on the pandemic pointed out that the populations most susceptible to presenting negative changes in their mental health were health professionals, especially those who dealt with infected patients; people who were contaminated by COVID-19 or suspected cases and their families; and individuals with pre-existing mental or physical problems<sup>(1-3)</sup>.

This study is based on the concept of everyday life of Certeau, in which everyday life

is understood as everything that is shared daily, that pressures and oppresses us, and the posture that we take every day in the face of our difficulties and challenges. Since everyday life is characterized by the practice of ordinary men, whose use of this place can subvert order and thus reorganize space<sup>(4)</sup>.

The largest workforce in health is represented by nursing professionals (60%), and many were on the front lines in coping with COVID-19<sup>(5)</sup>.

The pandemic and its prevention measures made nursing professionals need to prioritize the practice of everyday life at home and in the workplace. These places have become, in their entirety, the space practiced and lived by health professionals. For Certeau<sup>(4)</sup> space is produced through everyday practices characterized by

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conflict or contractual relationships, considering its surroundings and temporality.

The practical experience of living space goes beyond the theoretical conception of reality, confronting a tangle of feelings and conditioning, reflecting on social practice<sup>(6)</sup>.

The changes in the daily life of health services to cope with the pandemic generated difficult moments experienced by professionals, who needed to adapt to new protocols and initial ignorance about the virus<sup>(7)</sup>.

It is worth highlighting some everyday situations in the work process of these professionals that harm their mental health, such as: the pressures suffered during interaction with other health professionals; the commitment to seek quality in the care provided; the overload of tasks and the small number of colleagues during the shift; long working hours; the little recognition of their work and the low remuneration<sup>(8-10-)</sup>; as well as emotional problems arising from this wear and tear<sup>(11)</sup>.

Despite the problems related to the work conditions pointed out, it is known that nursing professionals seek alternatives for coping with these adverse situations present in their daily lives<sup>(8)</sup> and that intensified with the advent of the pandemic<sup>(12)</sup>.

The production of space, in a broad sense, can be understood as the search for creative actions to reorganize the maintenance or transformation of social situations<sup>(13)</sup>.

Thus, we will rely on two other concepts of Certeau to better describe the daily practices during the pandemic: strategies, which are the actions of the dominant force that seek to maintain power relations and the established order; tactics, which are a set of tricks used by ordinary people, who do not hold power and promote subversion for the functioning of everyday life<sup>(4)</sup>.

The daily nursing care develops through reinvention of everyday practices that subvert the established order, transforming the relationship with the other, as well as being conditioned to protocols and norms, submitting to the dominant power<sup>(14)</sup>.

In this sense, reporting the daily practices of nursing professionals becomes relevant to understand the reality experienced by them, during the pandemic context, which can

contribute to the understanding of the current moment of reorganization of social space.

Given this, the study is justified by the need to narrate the daily events of nursing professionals, giving visibility to their daily practices, in order to highlight the tactics and strategies used in coping with the pandemic, tools that can help nursing professionals to use them in other events in daily life and work.

Thus, the objective of this study was to describe the tactics and strategies, during the COVID-19 pandemic, present in the daily practices of nursing professionals and health institutions.

## METHOD

All stages of the study were conducted with ethical support, respecting the precepts that guide research conducted with humans. To ensure the anonymity of the participants, they were identified with the letter N followed by a number, in the case of nurses, and by the letters NT followed by a number, in the case of nursing technicians. The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of the Federal University of Pelotas, under Opinion number 4.047.860

This is a descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach, which is part of a larger research entitled "Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of nursing workers in the XX health services network (NURCOVID)".

It was conducted with 14 nursing professionals who worked in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic in health services in a municipality in southern Brazil. The participants were workers from different services in the municipality: hospitals, Basic Health Units, Health Surveillance, Mobile Emergency Care Service, and bed regulation, and were selected from focus groups conducted in one of the stages of the NURCOVID research. The research was done by one of the researchers, as part of her master's thesis by the Graduate Program in Nursing by the Federal University of Pelotas.

The selection criteria used included participants who were nursing professionals, had active registration in the Regional Nursing Council and were working in the care area

during the pandemic. Exclusion criteria were death or hospitalization during the data collection period.

The interviews took place remotely, considering the measures adopted in the pandemic, through Skype and Zoom software. All interviews were individual, conducted in a single meeting, being recorded, and transcribed in full after authorization of the participants, with an average duration of 22 minutes. The invitation to participate and the scheduling of the interview were made through WhatsApp messages and phone calls. The links to the Informed Consent Form and the software in which the interview was conducted were sent by WhatsApp.

Data collection occurred during the period of August and September 2021, through semi-structured interviews, with the support of a script with closed identification questions and eight open questions focusing on the daily life of these nursing workers, the experience of social distancing, the concerns arising from this moment and the forms of coping used to mitigate the possible damage caused by this experience. 17 professionals were approached, of which 14 participated in the survey; two refused, claiming no interest in participation, and there was a loss, because the professional did not answer the phone calls and did not respond to the invitation made via WhatsApp.

It should be noted that, during the collection period, there was the fourth phase of the pandemic (July-November 2021), marked by the expansion of vaccination, reducing cases and deaths from COVID-19 infection, and reducing the burden on the health system<sup>(15)</sup>.

The analysis of the qualitative data occurred by inductive thematic, because the themes were guided by the data, therefore, the coding was created throughout the analysis, with no pre-existing code groups. It was also an analysis at the semantic level, that is, it captured the explicit content in the narratives, identifying patterns for later interpretation of their meanings. The six phases of the thematic analysis were followed, which begins with the familiarization with the data and follows in the generation of the initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes and is finalized in the production of the report<sup>(16)</sup>, theoretical

framework of the study of everyday life the concepts of strategy and tactics of Michel de Certeau. The guidelines of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) were used to meet the scientific rigor of the study.

## RESULTS

Fourteen health professionals participated in this research, divided equally between nurses and nursing technicians. Of these nurses, six were women and one, male, and of the nursing technicians, six were women and one, male.

Regarding the age group, the participants were between 33 and 50 years old. Regarding skin color, eight professionals declared themselves with white skin color and six with Black skin color (black or brown).

Regarding the place and time of work in the nursing area, five professionals reported working in the hospital; four in Basic Health Units; two in the Mobile Emergency Care Service; and one in the regulation of beds.

From the analysis of the interviews, the results were organized in the following axes: Everyday practices of private life in front of the pandemic context and the daily life of professional life in facing the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Daily practices of private life in the face of the pandemic context

The pandemic caused science to determine that the proper place of society was reorganized through the adoption of strategies for measures to prevent COVID-19. Therefore, there is a disruption of life in society, generating abrupt changes in people's daily lives, among them, nursing professionals, requiring forms of adaptation to the transformations of this context.

Thus, it was identified in the narratives that the simple aspects of everyday life become important tactical movements of resistance to the reality imposed by the pandemic.

I had a very nice encounter with flowers, I think everything is therapeutic [...] I saw flowers growing in this period and this contact with the land, this contact that I never had [...] This contact with nature [...] helps us, not overcome, because

we will not overcome this so soon, but to continue resisting, continue working, continue well. N6

I had to change some forms of leisure, look at home, watch more series or read a book, do something, plant, make a craft, anything that distracted me a little, since you could not go out so much. It worked for me, helped me a lot. NT2

These social actors manufactured new ways of using the products available in everyday life, in a tactical movement, which sought to resignify the space produced by them. In this sense, for example, television was used to watch movies and series, and stopped watching the news, since the excess of information was considered harmful to the confrontation of this period.

Here at home we spent a long time without watching open TV, we saw a lot of film, a lot of series, but we did not see open TV, because it was only number of deaths, number of cases increasing, and we stayed a long time without watching, because we found, that there were other ways for us to know what was happening, without all that drama. N2

I avoided watching TV, avoided a lot of things, Internet, because otherwise you go crazy [...] avoid horrible news, dead numbers, I already saw enough [at work], I did not need to be aware of others. NT6

Then, nursing professionals describe as daily practices the physical exercises, body activities and psychotherapy, which were strategies proposed by science.

I love to run in the street, so, as I live in a neighborhood that is further away [...] the streets here are quiet, whenever possible I did physical activity on the street, that it was good for me, and I was not indoors. N4

I am doing physical exercise, I am in the gym, I hired a personal and now I will see if I can do a diet [...] I believe that psychotherapy, yoga, CrossFit, bodybuilding, it fills you, calms you, improves a lot. NT6

The narratives presented also show the cunning used by the protagonists when practicing physical activities outside the home environment, in a tactical movement of reappropriation of space, maintaining the care of prevention of COVID-19 and promoting healthy habits that are strategic operations.

Another daily practice also pointed out in the narratives of professionals was the presence of spirituality in facing this context.

You must have something in your life, which is religion, which is spirituality, the way you lead spirituality in your life, these questions are super important [...] N6

[...] I pray, meditate, breathe, I do everything I can when I feel stressed, very agitated about it, then I use these techniques [...] I had to treat my psychological and believe in God and pray. NT5

Prayer, and meditation can be understood as strategic operations, as they are subordinated to a system of religious and spiritual beliefs that can somehow strengthen people to face tricky situations such as the pandemic.

### **The daily life of nursing professionals in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic**

The professionals also began to play a leading role in their daily work, the fight against COVID-19, through the practice of caring for people infected with the new coronavirus.

At first it was difficult; it was very scary. But now I am doing psychological, psychiatric follow-up, because at first, I thought I was going to contaminate everyone, that my whole family was going to contaminate through me, because I would be the only person to leave, and I got bad, and today I can manage it more. NT5

[...] the impacts were severe, the impacts were cruel, we had a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, a lot of loss. N6

Faced with the difficulties faced by workers when experiencing the care of people affected by COVID-19, health institutions had to create strategies for maintenance and continuity services provided. Thus, the institutional routine needed to be reorganized, performing a strategic movement.

At SAMU, the city hired a basic support unit and an advanced support unit to deal directly with specific COVID cases, and this preserved the team a little, because what happened, those two teams stayed there only for COVID and the rest to meet the rest of the demand. N2

The only thing that was adopted there in the service was that we managed to do alternately workdays, one day we went in person and one day

they let us do home office. It was the only thing that I think gave a softened, because, there, we could not expose ourselves so much to the disease, it ended up relaxing us [...] N7

The previous statements show the institutional forms of reorganization of teams and work routine that were considered positive alternatives for the daily work of these professionals. Another strategy sought by the institutions was the proposition of online psychological support.

The hospital is in this attempt to move the psychologist to the COVID unit, but there is the whole issue of releasing [...] must take a course to be able to enter, so there is a large bureaucratization [...] so today they are trying again online [...] N5

When you are working, the demand is so great, it is so intense, that when you come home, you will take care of your child, take care of your home, your things [...] If you had to have this [psychological] care, it would have to be at the moment that you are in your work routine [...] but once you get home, it's very difficult to organize to do that. NT3

It is noticed in the speeches that the institution identified the need for this psychological accompaniment, however, there is the difficulty of organizing this space so that in fact professionals can benefit from this service.

In this sense, the professionals created tactics to face the complexity of care in the face of COVID-19, through interpersonal exchanges, to subvert the institutional reality and the context of the pandemic.

The illness is greater when people are at home. At least I went to work, I saw people, I exchanged ideas with my colleagues, we supported each other, talked about our sufferings. Anyway, one tried to help the other. T3

It was not the [institution] that gave me support, who saw that I was not well was my nurse. Because I could not sleep at night and I went to work totally agitated, very altered, I could not find things, [...] then she, as a nurse, my direct boss, she who gave me this support. NT5

## DISCUSSION

The discourse of the study participants

showed the many ways nursing professionals reinvent their daily practices, creating new ways of using the resources available during the pandemic context, not restricted only to the moment of collection.

Individuals can employ the products imposed by a dominant order according to the use they want to make of them, creating forms of consumption that meet their needs, and, for this, tactical operations are used that transform the controlled place into spaces of reinvention of everyday life<sup>(4)</sup>.

It starts from the idea that everyday life is undergoing transformations from the pressures present in people's daily lives, requiring that new ways to face life situations are drawn.

In this sense, daily life needs to be observed as something in motion, built through a practice, and the way of use that takes place. Situations present in each place can become a space, thus, "space is a practiced place"<sup>(4)</sup> (p. 184).

The main strategy found by science to cope with the pandemic was social distancing. In addition, there was also the fear of nursing professionals to contaminate their families. Thus, it was necessary to make use of this space and its products creatively, enabling the manufacture of a new daily life in which its appropriation allowed the subversion of reality established by the pandemic context.

The practices of reappropriation of the organization of space alter the functioning of the structures already established with a variety of articulated tactics on daily life<sup>(4)</sup>.

It is evident in the speeches that this was a time to rediscover new ways of transiting in the home environment, making these moments possibilities of resignification of their lives, producing a space of resistance and mitigation to the impact of the pandemic on the lives of these people.

The subtle aspects of everyday life, such as caring for plants, reading books, watching series and movies, producing crafts were gaining relevance, transforming the home environment into a living space.

Space is not only something external to the individual, nor a vacant place waiting to be occupied, but something built in the period, in which a set of belief systems, values and ideologies of individuals that produce a lived

and practiced space are present<sup>(17)</sup>.

Tactical actions are intertwined in controlled places, printing new ways of living, manipulating them, and transforming them into spaces of creativity, making time be gained<sup>(4)</sup>.

It is in the lived space that the use that is given to the products is built, with this, it is perceived in the speeches of the participants that digital media were used in a tactical way as resistance to the established reality, being avoided the news and the excess of information about the pandemic.

Consumers can manufacture everyday practices, spreading them within the production systems, in a cunning way, discreetly, causing other ways to use the consumer products imposed by the established order<sup>(4)</sup>.

The World Health Organization released information material aimed at priority groups, including health professionals, for whom the entity emphasized the use of mental health care practices, adequate rest at home and during work, healthy eating, practice of physical activities and maintain contact with the support network<sup>(18)</sup>.

Within this perspective, this study shows that nursing professionals used self-care actions such as body practices, physical exercise, diet, psychological support, according to the determinations of science for coping with the pandemic. However, it is present in the narratives of participants who found a way to subvert the established order by performing physical exercises in the streets and gyms, while taking the necessary care to avoid contamination by COVID-19.

Everyday practices of the tactical type find ways to make themselves happen, through subtle blows, producing discreet success over the order established by the dominant power, being the “victory of the 'weak' over the 'strong'”<sup>(4)</sup> (p.46)

The understanding that spirituality can also be an everyday practice that helps in coping with adverse situations was another fact present in this study. The encounter with the unknown brings the need to seek ways to endure the suffering imposed by this historical-social moment, and the search for spirituality can be present as an important tactic in this process.

Certeau's studies show mystical influence, due to his religious trajectory. This creates the

concept of Other who is originally God, but gradually assumes different forms, becoming the unexpected, the stranger present in our relationship of respect for differences with other people<sup>(19)</sup>.

Based on this concept, one can think that the pandemic generated fear of the unknown in the daily lives of nursing professionals, intensifying the need for these social actors to seek their spirituality in facing the present reality.

The Other, the unpredictable, became a permanent situation in the daily life of nursing professionals, who needed to remain providing their care in the face of the pandemic, exposing themselves to the permanent risk of contamination and death.

Daily life has been changed to adapt to the requirements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed strategic actions by health institutions<sup>(7)</sup>.

Health institutions have made many changes to adapt to the new reality imposed by the pandemic, from changes in their physical structure to adjustments in the care process, exposing vulnerabilities present in nurses' working conditions<sup>(20)</sup>.

A study conducted in a UPA, with health professionals, showed that the service needed to reorganize strategies, through protocols that were constantly changing, potentiating stressors, on the other hand, training and information about COVID-19 were protective factors against the stress experienced by professionals<sup>(7)</sup>.

The participants of our study identified some institutional strategies as positive: the organization of specific teams to meet the cases of COVID-19 and the changes in the mode of work, through hybrid work, with days alternating between face-to-face and remote service.

The strategies of health institutions to improve the working conditions of nursing professionals show the effort to ensure the functioning of the service, therefore, sought to establish control and power over social actors in the face of the chaotic situation faced.

The strategic procedures start from a postulate of power in which they organize a totalizing discourse that distributes the structuring forces, aiming to dominate the

situations and maintain the organization of the proper places<sup>(4)</sup>.

Thus, it is observed that the strategies used by the institutions of this study, such as the inclusion of an institutional psychological support, were not fully effective, because bureaucratization hindered its operationalization. It can also be understood that the presence of psychological support during the work period could interfere in the production of care, within a mechanistic logic.

In everyday life, there are power relations between institution and service professionals, but through tactical movements, these places are gaining new configurations, in a creative process, transforming their own places into spaces<sup>(4,14)</sup>.

First, there is the existence of a controlled place, however, the tricks of the social actor interfere at the proper instant, resulting in an effect on the established order, producing a reorganization of space and generating tactical interventions<sup>(21)</sup>.

Thus, nursing professionals found, in their interactions and in the sharing of experiences, during their professional activities, important tactics to identify moments of emotional fragility and obtain support and support.

It should be noted that everyday practices occur in a circular movement between the tactical procedures and the organization of the place, in a process that seeks to abandon a balance situation to reach another point of stability, recreating a new balance, a permanent process of new beginnings<sup>(21)</sup>.

With this, it is understood that tactics and strategies are procedures that make possible the

creation of paths, ways of walking and doing, in front of everyday life.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The daily life of nursing professionals underwent abrupt changes and nursing needed to trace new paths in personal life and work environment with creativity, seeking forms of resistance to the adversities imposed by the pandemic.

From this, science formulated strategies for reorganization of the social place to preserve life and maintain the functioning of society.

Therefore, health professionals used tactical devices to resist the reality imposed by the established order in the face of the pandemic and subvert the health moment, reinventing the lived space and resignifying their lives.

Knowing the daily life of nursing professionals and the way they reinvented themselves, in this pandemic moment, contributed to reflect on how these experiences impacted nursing professionals, in private and professional life. And, how these knowledge built from their daily practices can serve as subsidies to face the daily challenges of the practice of these professionals, and events of catastrophic proportions that can be experienced at any time.

The limitations found in this research are associated with remote data collection, since some individuals have difficulty in handling online tools. In addition, the interview in this format prevents the researcher from capturing some non-verbal expressions, which could be important to compose the analysis of the results.

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## COTIDIANO DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE ENFERMAGEM NA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19: INVENÇÃO DA VIDA E DO TRABALHO

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** descrever as táticas e estratégias, durante a pandemia de COVID-19, presentes nas práticas cotidianas dos profissionais de enfermagem e das instituições de saúde. **Método:** estudo de abordagem qualitativa realizado com 14 profissionais de enfermagem que atuaram no enfrentamento da pandemia de COVID-19. A coleta de dados ocorreu em agosto e setembro de 2021, por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, de forma remota. Os dados foram analisados a partir do referencial teórico do estudo do cotidiano norteado pelos conceitos de estratégia e tática de Michel Certeau. **Resultados:** os profissionais buscaram estratégias da ciência na sua vida privada, como realizar hábitos saudáveis. Estratégias do saber religioso também estiveram presentes. As táticas foram: o cuidado de flores; caminhadas na rua; assistir séries ou filmes. As instituições de saúde utilizaram como estratégia: organização das equipes; trabalho híbrido; oferta de apoio psicológico. No trabalho, as táticas foram o compartilhamento de medos uns com os outros. **Considerações Finais:** conhecer o cotidiano dos profissionais de enfermagem, nesse momento pandêmico, contribui para compreender o impacto

dessa experiência em suas vidas. A construção de saberes a partir das suas práticas cotidianas durante a pandemia de COVID-19 pode ofertar alternativas para enfrentamento dos desafios destes profissionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Enfermagem. Saúde mental. COVID-19. Serviços de saúde. Trabalho.

## COTIDIANO DE LOS PROFESIONALES DE ENFERMERÍA EN LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19: INVENCION DE LA VIDA Y EL TRABAJO

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** describir las tácticas y estrategias, durante la pandemia de COVID-19, presentes en las prácticas cotidianas de los profesionales de enfermería y de las instituciones de salud. **Método:** estudio de abordaje cualitativo realizado con 14 profesionales de enfermería que actuaron en el enfrentamiento de la pandemia de COVID-19. La recolección de datos tuvo lugar en agosto y septiembre de 2021, a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas, de forma remota. Los datos fueron analizados a partir del referencial teórico del estudio del cotidiano guiado por los conceptos de estrategia y táctica de Michel Certeau. **Resultados:** los profesionales buscaron estrategias de la ciencia en su vida privada, como realizar hábitos saludables. Estrategias del saber religioso también estuvieron presentes. Las tácticas fueron: el cuidado de flores; caminatas en la calle; ver series o películas. Las instituciones de salud utilizaron como estrategia: organización de los equipos; trabajo híbrido; oferta de apoyo psicológico. En el trabajo, las tácticas fueron compartir los miedos entre sí. **Consideraciones Finales:** conocer el cotidiano de los profesionales de enfermería, en ese momento pandémico, contribuye para comprender el impacto de esa experiencia en sus vidas. La construcción de saberes a partir de sus prácticas cotidianas durante la pandemia de COVID-19 puede ofrecer alternativas para enfrentar los desafíos de estos profesionales.

**Palabras clave** Enfermería. Salud mental. COVID-19. Servicios de salud. Trabajo.

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