



## Coping and work engagement in hospital nursing team

### *Coping e engajamento no trabalho de equipe de enfermagem hospitalar*

### *Coping y compromiso del trabajo en equipo de enfermería hospitalaria*

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Assess the relationship between coping and engagement in nursing professionals at a public hospital. **Methods:** This is a quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional study, carried out between December 2017 and January 2018, with 250 nursing staff workers in a public hospital located in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul. Nursing technicians and nurses participated. Three self-administered instruments were used: The Occupational Coping Scale, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and a questionnaire covering sociodemographic variables developed by the researchers. Descriptive statistics were used, and Pearson's correlation was used for analysis, considering  $p$  values  $<0.01$  as significant. **Results:** Sample composed of 139 (55.6%) nursing technicians and 111 (44.4%) nurses, 84% ( $n=210$ ) female. Positive, weak, and significant correlations were presented, mainly between coping planning and the dimensions in engagement: vigor (0.28), dedication (0.27), concentration (0.27) and total (0.30); and between total coping and engagement dimensions: vigor (0.22), dedication (0.21) and total (0.21). **Conclusion:** The significant correlations found between coping and engagement in nursing professionals demonstrate the relevance of evaluating these concepts. Therefore, certain occupational coping and engagement factors can help in the work activities of the nursing team.

**Descriptors:** Nursing Team; Hospitals; Psychology.

#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Avaliar a relação entre coping e engajamento em profissionais de enfermagem de um hospital público. **Métodos:** Trata-se de um estudo quantitativo, descritivo, correlacional e transversal, realizado entre dezembro de 2017 a janeiro de 2018, com 250 trabalhadores da equipe de enfermagem em um hospital público localizado no interior do Rio Grande do Sul. Participaram técnicos em enfermagem e enfermeiros. Empregaram-se três instrumentos autoaplicáveis: a Escala de Coping Ocupacional, a Utrecht Work Engagement Scale e um questionário abrangendo variáveis sociodemográficas, desenvolvido pelos pesquisadores. Utilizou-se estatística descritiva e, para análise, correlação de Pearson, considerando significativos os valores de  $p < 0,01$ . **Resultados:** Amostra composta por 139 (55,6%) técnicos em enfermagem e 111 (44,4%) enfermeiros, sendo 84% ( $n = 210$ ) do sexo feminino. Apresentaram-se correlações positivas, fracas e significativas, principalmente entre coping planejamento e as dimensões em engajamento: vigor (0,28), dedicação (0,27), concentração (0,27) e total (0,30); e entre coping total e as dimensões em engajamento: vigor (0,22), dedicação (0,21) e total (0,21). **Conclusão:** As correlações significativas encontradas entre coping e engajamento em profissionais da enfermagem demonstram a relevância da avaliação desses conceitos. Portanto, determinados fatores de coping ocupacional e engajamento podem auxiliar nas atividades laborais na equipe de enfermagem.

**Descritores:** Equipe de Enfermagem; Hospitais; Psicologia.



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Received on: 10/13/2020

Accepted on: 08/16/2021

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Evaluar la relación entre coping y compromiso de profesionales de enfermería de un hospital público. **Métodos:** Se trata de un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo, correlacional y transversal realizado entre diciembre de 2017 y enero de 2018 con 250 trabajadores del equipo de enfermería de un hospital público localizado en el campo de Río Grande de Sur. Participaron técnicos de enfermería y enfermeros. Se ha aplicado tres instrumentos auto aplicables: la Escala de Coping Ocupacional, la Utrecht Work Engagement Scale y un cuestionario con variables sociodemográficas desarrollado por los investigadores. Se utilizó la estadística descriptiva y, para el análisis, la correlación de Pearson, considerando significativos los valores de  $p < 0,01$ . **Resultados:** Muestra de 139 (55,6%) técnicos de enfermería y 111 (44,4%) enfermeros, de ellos el 84% ( $n=210$ ) era del sexo femenino. Se ha encontrado correlaciones positivas, débiles y significativas, principalmente entre coping planeamiento y las dimensiones del compromiso: vigor (0,28), dedicación (0,27), concentración (0,27) y total (0,30); y entre coping total y las dimensiones del compromiso: vigor (0,22), dedicación (0,21) y total (0,21). **Conclusión:** Las correlaciones significativas encontradas entre coping y compromiso de profesionales de enfermería han demostrado la relevancia de la evaluación de esos conceptos. Por lo tanto, determinados factores de coping ocupacional y compromiso pueden ayudar en las actividades laborales del equipo de enfermería.

**Descriptores:** Grupo de Enfermería; Hospitales; Psicología.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the labor sense, work can take on a very relevant role in people's daily lives and can be a generator of achievements, as well as causing illnesses. Thus, studying ways to face stress and avoid illness in the professional area are targets of human, social, and health sciences investigation. Research relating to the themes of stress and coping among health professionals reveals worrying results about the high levels of stress in these workers and the work context<sup>(1-4)</sup>.

When conceptualizing coping, it is understood that there is a big difference between two approaches, namely: dispositional and transactional<sup>(5)</sup>. In this article, the focus is on the dispositional approach, which analyses coping as a style and is considered an individual's personality constitution that stands out to the influence of time or other factors showing the stability of behaviors related to coping with stressful situations<sup>(5,6)</sup>.

Work engagement is determined as a positive mental state, not only occurring in brief situations, which is established by presenting a high degree of energy and achievement, as it is a positive and rewarding experience related to the performance of tasks at work<sup>(7)</sup>. Thus, engagement can be represented by three main bases: dedication, concentration, and vigor<sup>(7)</sup>.

In this sense, focusing on coping and work engagement, it is possible to act for promoting health in the health professionals work environments. Significant gains can become consequences through the balance between the work environment demands and the professional skills, thus enabling positive aspects related to the worker's performance<sup>(8)</sup>.

Concerning nursing work, it can be inferred that it encompasses a dynamic context, involving different tasks in areas such as health promotion, prevention, treatments, and rehabilitation<sup>(9,10)</sup>. Thus, in the specialized literature, studies consider the various illnesses that this category can experience in the work environment<sup>(2,11,12)</sup>.

The theme of stress and coping, for example, was the target of international research with undergraduate students in obstetrics and nursing, analyzed through an integrative review covering a total of twenty-five articles<sup>(13)</sup>. The lack of guidance and instruction by the educators on dealing with stressful events experienced by students during the training period is highlighted in the research mentioned above<sup>(13)</sup>.

Through a systematic review of the literature, it was indicated that, in health institutions, there is a high incidence of Burnout Syndrome, with the nursing team being the most affected category, as it is generally shown to be the group that occupies mainly these spaces<sup>(3)</sup>. Considering that these professionals are a population with a high possibility of illnesses, the need to understand aspects in the work context that can help in these demands is demonstrated.

In this scenario, the analysis of the relationship between coping and engagement factors in the work environment can contribute to intervention and action planning strategies to promote the nursing workers' health<sup>(1,3,14)</sup>. In addition, the study justifies itself by the relevance of contributing with results that enlarge this discussion and is focused on a higher appreciation and recognition of the nursing teamwork, considering the importance of their role in the organization and care of patients<sup>(2)</sup>.

Thus, this research focuses on evaluating the relationship between occupational coping and work engagement in nursing professionals in a public hospital.

## METHODS

It is a quantitative, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional study developed from December 12, 2017, to January 12, 2018, with nursing professionals working in a public hospital located in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul. Sampling was for convenience. 250 professionals participated in the research, being the same nurses and nursing technicians. The total number of participants was defined, considering a total population of 952 workers and a sampling error of 5%.

As inclusion criteria, the professional should have been a member of the nursing team for at least one year, as they have already experienced some stressful situations. For the exclusion criteria, it was demarcated to be away from work activities in the period, either due to a medical certificate or on vacation, and to be working at the hospital for less than a year.

Data collection took place from the printed instruments and was personally made at the hospital by the researchers of this study during the professionals' work shifts. The instruments were self-administered, thus favoring participation in the research without jeopardizing the work routine. The researchers approached the workers, individually or collectively, explained the information on the research: the objectives, inclusion criteria, and filling instructions, and then invited them to participate. After accepting, the Informed Consent Form (ICF) was read and signed by each participant, one remaining with the participant and the other with the researcher.

Most participants answered the survey at the approaching time, with the application time about 20 minutes. The instruments were given, for later collection, only to participants who were part of teams in which external people couldn't remain in the work sector, such as in the Surgical Center, for example.

Three instruments were used: a questionnaire containing sociodemographic questions, developed by the authors; the validated<sup>(5)</sup> Escala de Coping Ocupacional (ESCO) and authorized for use in this research and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) already published, validated, and adapted for Brazil<sup>(15)</sup>. The Occupational Coping Scale (ESCO) consists of a Likert-type scale (0 to 3 points), with four possible options (never, rarely, sometimes, and always) for the analysis of 24 items<sup>(5)</sup>. These items are divided into four dimensions: Planning, Negative Emotions, Social Interaction and Avoidance. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was adjusted for the general factor ( $\alpha=0.70$ )<sup>(5)</sup>.

Yet on the Occupational Coping Scale (ESCO), the Planning Factor consists of 10 items and comprises elements that follow higher objectivity aspects towards solving problems<sup>(5)</sup>. The Negative Emotions Factor consists of 07 items that refer to the negative actions performed, both affective and behavioral, because of the diversities at work<sup>(5)</sup>.

The Social Interaction Factor encompasses 04 items related to communication with other people as a form of support and aid in the perception of possible ways to solve problems at work<sup>(5)</sup>. The Avoidance Factor contains 03 items, showing elements corresponding to react in an avoidant way concerning the difficulties presented in the work<sup>(5)</sup>.

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) consists of 17 items ( $n=17$ ) evaluated by a Likert-type scale (0 to 6 points), with seven alternatives (0. never, 1. almost never, 2. rarely, 3. sometimes, 4. often, 5. very often, and 6. always), based on the theoretical perspective called resources and work demands (RWD)<sup>(15)</sup>. The psychometric properties of the scale indicate 03 dimensions for the instrument: vigor, dedication, and concentration<sup>(7)</sup>. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the general factor is  $\alpha=0.95$ , demonstrating the adequacy of the scale<sup>(15)</sup>.

The dimensions vigor, dedication, and concentration, used in the scale factorial structure, have the following characteristics: vigor is measured concerning the energy and focus placed on the work, which persists even if something goes wrong; dedication, on the other hand, describes the purpose attributed to the work in which it generates professional fulfillment; and concentration represents the intense involvement in doing the activities, being linked to the pleasure of the work you are doing<sup>(7,15)</sup>. Thus, the dimensions together demonstrate work engagement as a positive mental state of well-being and achievements<sup>(7,15)</sup>.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0, was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation were used, considering p values  $<0.01$  as significant.

To carry out the research, the precepts of Resolution No. 466/12 of the National Health Council of the Ministry of Health were followed. In addition, the project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Santa Maria, under Opinion No. 3,088,518.

## RESULTS

Below, the data are presented through tables for better visualization. Concerning the resulting sample, there was greater participation of nursing technicians (55.6%;  $n=139$ ) than nurses (44.4%;  $n=111$ ) and a predominance of

female participants (84%; n =210). They were aged between 23 and 64 years, with a mean of 40 years ( $\pm 9.5$ ). Thus, in this research, the general characterization of the sample profile was defined and shown in Table I.

Table I - Sociodemographic characteristics of nursing staff professionals. Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil, 2018.

Variables	Alternatives	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Office</b>	Nursing Technician	139	55.6%
	Nurse (a)	111	44.4%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	210	84%
	Male	40	16%
<b>Age group</b>	Up to 25 years old	4	1.6%
	from 25 to 35	79	31.6%
	from 35 to 45	101	40.4%
	From 45 to 60	59	23.6%
	Over 60 years old	7	2.8%

Table II shows the result of the correlations between the variables of the ESCO and UWES instruments. Correlations are positive and weak but significant between coping planning and the dimensions of engagement. So, we have: vigor (0.28), dedication (0.27), concentration (0.27) and total (0.30). Between total coping and the dimensions of engagement, we have vigor (0.22), dedication (0.21), and total (0.21). As for coping with negative emotions with engagement, the correlation was positive, weak, and significant only with vigor (0.21). The factors coping social interaction and coping avoidance show no significant correlations with any dimension of engagement.

Table II - Correlations between the factors of the Occupational Coping Scale (ESCO) and the dimensions of the Utrecht Work Engagement (UWES). Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil, 2018.

	Engagement Vigor r	Engagement Dedication R	Engagement Concentration r	Engagement Total r
<b>Coping Planning</b>	+0,28**	0,27**	0,27**	0,30**
<b>Coping Social Interaction</b>	-0,07	-0,00	-0,00	-0,03
<b>Coping Negative Emotions</b>	+0,21**	0,14*	0,04	0,14*
<b>Coping Avoidance</b>	-0,01	-0,00	-0,06	-0,03
<b>Coping Total</b>	+0,22**	0,21**	0,14*	0,21**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; r: Pearson's correlation test

## DISCUSSION

It is shown that there was a large percentage of females in this research sample (84%), which is a frequent characteristic in the nursing context<sup>(2,11)</sup>. There was also higher participation of nursing technicians than nurses. This can be explained because technicians are characterized by having a large contingent of professionals working in hospitals<sup>(16)</sup>.

Regarding the correlations between coping and engagement, the occurrence of a positive and statistically significant but weak correlation was between coping planning and the different dimensions of engagement. This result may, to some extent, be related to the search for more active coping strategies concerning the problem by committed professionals. The correlation, for example, between total engagement with coping planning (0.30), which in ESCO<sup>(5)</sup> includes characteristics such as: thinks that challenges are ways to overcome; identifies that in the face of great difficulties, higher planning of people engaged in the work environment can occur.

This finding is in line with the results of a study carried out with 310 participants that investigated which coping strategies were most used by nursing assistants and technicians at a general hospital<sup>(17)</sup>. The study results showed that 58.4% used problem-oriented strategies, making it the type of strategy most used by the sample<sup>(17)</sup>. As a form of support against stress, the relevance in the coping strategies training development related to problem-solving aimed at nursing workers is identified<sup>(18,19)</sup>.

As for the construct coping negative emotions and its correlation with engagement, there was a positive, weak, and statistically significant index only with the vigor dimension. As mentioned earlier, negative emotions represent the way to emotionally assess the situation, qualifying it negatively and can generate unfavorable behaviors such as getting angry, getting aggressive, impulsive, or blaming yourself<sup>(5,6)</sup>.

However, negative emotions do not present themselves as efficient ways to relieve stress<sup>(20)</sup>. In a survey carried out with 1,806 Polish nurses, it was found, through correlation coefficients, that attitudes such as blaming and denial had a positive, weak, and significant link with the manifestation of Burnout syndrome in the workplace<sup>(20)</sup>.

Concerning the relationship between coping social interaction and coping avoidance, it should be noted that no significant correlations were observed with engagement in any of the factors in the present study. This lack of correlation can be understood by the issue of engagement being subject to changes linked to various conditions<sup>(21)</sup>. Engagement is shown to be formed by several aspects intertwined by knowledge acquired both in the personal sphere and in work activities and by dispositional conditions, and may, therefore, vary<sup>(21)</sup>.

As for the correlations between coping total and engagement, it is noteworthy that they were positive and significant for vigor, dedication, and total engagement in the present study. Such correlations, although weak, may indicate that, between the categories, there is a suggestive relationship between coping total and engagement, presenting the possibility that both trends are necessary for better interaction in the workplace. In a similar study, it is noteworthy that the relationship of lower levels of stress with the use of adaptive coping strategies by nurses was demonstrated<sup>(20)</sup>. These data are in line with studies that obtained similar data, in which they showed significant relationships between positive psychosocial factors in the work environment and engagement in nurses, providing a more assertive environment for their employees<sup>(21-23)</sup>. In this way, the relationship coping and engagement seems, together, to support a better working condition for the nursing team.

Because of this, in this study, there is evidence of a positive correlation between occupational coping, referring to coping planning and coping total, with the dimensions of engagement. Through this, the expansion of knowledge on the subject can foster interventions focused on more effective coping tactics and improved engagement for nursing professionals<sup>(18,19,24,25)</sup>.

Therefore, it is paramount to highlight that for the nursing team to be able to perform the service skillfully to the population, well-being at work, including coping and engagement factors, must be considered<sup>(18,25,26)</sup>. Because of this, studies such as the one carried out in this research are necessary so that the possible difficulties that workers are facing and the potential in the labor context can be established<sup>(14)</sup>.

It should be noted that the present study had certain limitations. Because the research is applied only in one hospital, the data obtained may not extend to other institutions and scenarios. In addition, because the study is cross-sectional and correlational, it is not possible to infer causality in the results.

## CONCLUSION

Positive, significant, but weak correlations were found, mainly between coping planning and coping total with dimensions of engagement. Thus, certain coping occupational and engagement factors can help in the work activities of the nursing team.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

**Adaiane Amélia Baccin** contributed to the elaboration and design of the study; acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data; and writing and/or reviewing the manuscript. **Anniara Lúcia Dornelles de Lima**, **Vanessa Cirolini Lucchese** and **Silvio José Lemos Vasconcellos** contributed to the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data; and writing and/or reviewing the manuscript. **Juliana Kuster de Lima Maliska** and **Leila Mara Piasentin Claro** contributed to the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data. All authors have approved the final version to be published and are responsible for its content.

**Manuscript based on the master's thesis entitled:** *“Coping and Engagement in Hospital Nursing Work”*, year 2018, 76 pages.

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**How to cite:** Baccin AA, Lima ALD, J Maliska JKL, Claro LMP, Lucchese VC, Vasconcellos SJL. Coping and work engagement in hospital nursing team. Rev Bras Promoç Saúde. 2021;34:11734.

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