

A New Post-Pandemic Perception of Nursing in the Social Sphere*

[English Version]

Una nueva percepción de enfermería post-pandemia en el ámbito social

Uma nova percepção da enfermagem pós-pandemia no âmbito social

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Abstract

The nursing profession is highly esteemed, as a result of collective effort and advances in science and technology. **Objective:** To examine the perception of nursing in the post-

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pandemic period within the social sphere. **Methodology:** A qualitative, descriptive approach grounded in Moscovici's theory of social representations was used. The study took place in a public-sector institution. The number of participants was determined by data saturation, considering the following criteria: being family members of patients cared for in the institution, being between 20 and 60 years old, and agreeing to participate by signing informed consent. The instrument consisted of an interview guide with fourteen open-ended questions, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using a chromatic coding technique, the most salient data were selected and organized into categories. **Results:** Findings were discussed in accordance with the theory and qualitative research method: conceptualization of the theory, empirical data, comparison, and logical reasoning. Results were presented by category, which included: perception of nursing during the pandemic, performance during the pandemic, social prestige, professional identity, professional visibility, professional development, professional competence, and nursing professionalism. **Conclusions:** The study shows how the perception of nursing has changed in the context of post-pandemic interventions related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Keywords: nursing; nursing supervision; pandemics; SARS Virus; social perception (obtained from DeCS/MeSH).

Resumen

La profesión de enfermería tiene una alta estima, resultado del esfuerzo desarrollado en conjunto con los avances científicos y tecnológicos. **Objetivo:** mostrar la percepción que se tiene de la enfermería post-pandemia en el ámbito social. **Metodología:** enfoque cualitativo, descriptivo, fundamentada en la teoría de representaciones sociales de Moscovici. El escenario fue en una institución del sector público. El número de participantes se determinó por saturación de datos, considerando los criterios: ser familiares de pacientes atendidos en dicha institución, tener entre 20 y 60 años, y aceptar participar, mediante consentimiento informado firmado. El instrumento fue una guía de entrevista de catorce preguntas abiertas, grabadas y transcritas textualmente. Con apoyo de la técnica cromática, se seleccionaron los datos más sobresaliente y se ordenaron por categorías. **Resultados:** los hallazgos se discutieron conforme a la teoría y al método de investigación cualitativa: conceptualización de la teoría, dato empírico, contrastación y razonamiento lógico. Se presentaron los resultados por categorías, las cuales son: percepción de enfermería durante la pandemia, desempeño durante la pandemia, prestigio social, identidad de la profesión, visibilidad profesional, desarrollo profesional, competencia profesional, y profesionalismo de enfermería. **Conclusiones:**

se muestra cómo ha cambiado la percepción de enfermería durante las intervenciones post pandemia por el virus SARS-CoV2.

Palabras clave: enfermería; supervisión de enfermería; pandemias; virus del SRAS; percepción social (obtenidos del tesoro DeCS/MeSH).

Resumo

A profissão de enfermagem possui alta estima, resultado do esforço desenvolvido em conjunto com os avanços científicos e tecnológicos. **Objetivo:** mostrar a percepção da enfermagem no período pós-pandemia no âmbito social. **Metodologia:** abordagem qualitativa, descritiva, fundamentada na teoria das representações sociais de Moscovici. O cenário do estudo foi uma instituição do setor público. O número de participantes foi determinado pela saturação de dados, considerando os critérios: ser familiar de pacientes atendidos na instituição, ter entre 20 e 60 anos e aceitar participar mediante assinatura do termo de consentimento informado. O instrumento consistiu em um roteiro de entrevista com quatorze perguntas abertas, gravadas e transcritas textualmente. Com apoio da técnica cromática, selecionaram-se os dados mais relevantes e organizaram-se por categorias. **Resultados:** os achados foram discutidos conforme a teoria e o método de pesquisa qualitativa—conceituação teórica, dado empírico, contrastação e raciocínio lógico. Os resultados foram apresentados por categorias, que incluíram: percepção da enfermagem durante a pandemia, desempenho durante a pandemia, prestígio social, identidade profissional, visibilidade profissional, desenvolvimento profissional, competência profissional e profissionalismo em enfermagem. **Conclusões:** evidenciase como a percepção da enfermagem mudou durante as intervenções pós-pandemia relacionadas ao vírus SARS-CoV-2.

Palavras-chave: enfermagem; supervisão de enfermagem; pandemias; vírus SARS; percepção social (obtidos do DeCS/MeSH).

Introduction

The history of nursing must have two main purposes. On the one hand, it must contribute, identify and explain the particularities of nursing that are the product of the historical processes in which it has been immersed; and, on the other hand, to highlight the place of the profession in history (Sacristán, 2022).

The professional practice of nursing is currently highly esteemed globally. All this becomes from the efforts of professionals who have developed with scientific and technological advances, preserving their humanistic essence with patients (Pío *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, and to determine the current perception and social image of the functions of the profession, this research reveals the visibility and perception of nursing in the social field. Thus, it is made known what the social image of this profession is at the current time and context, and, therefore, the multiple consequences for the practice and training of human capital. The findings showed the real context of the profession, so it is projected as an option of vocational choice among young people, and the stated objective is to show the perception of nursing in the post-pandemic stage in the social field.

From a social point of view, there are judgments that are based on observation and/or discrimination, and try to find an explanation for people's behaviors once all data has been collected (Franco, 2020). Perception is the individual and cognitive mechanism that human beings perform. It consists of receiving, interpreting and understanding the signals that come from the outside, encoding them from the sensitive activity (Salcedo *et al.*, 2022).

As a result of the quality and high level of academic training, both scientific and humanistic, the profession has found its place in the society; it has made it necessary, valid and evolving. This consolidates it as an autonomous profession and with a promising future vision in academic teaching and performance in research (Pío *et al.*, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic showed a scenario full of personal and scientific uncertainties, it invites us to reflect on how the professions linked to the role of providing health care have been modified, and how they had a more visible performance (Ramacciotti & Testa, 2021). The professional approach of nursing has prevailed in the care area, and it is evident that they are essential professionals in the sustainability and viability of the health system (Martínez *et al.*, 2022).

With the pandemic, nursing began to take a vital place in the news; they included thanks and tributes to the nursing staff from the citizen collective (Adissi, 2023). It is of great interest to describe how the profession is represented by the media and how it was broadcast. An important sample could be observed on

how nursing actions were perceived, they made the image evident to the society (Martínez *et al.*, 2022).

In the post-pandemic context, new ideas arise around the maintenance of the health system. There is a perception that the Covid-19 emergency encouraged further training to optimize and improving nursing practice that highlights its professionalization (Danel *et al.*, 2022).

Nurses have an academic background especially suited to the growing challenges of the 21st century. Their educational training emphasizes the integration of physical and psychosocial health care needs that reaffirms their professional competence (Reynolds, 2020). As the role of nursing was institutionalized, a range of factors is included that is not only linked to hierarchical power, but also to professional training and the work process of nursing care (Pereira *et al.*, 2020).

In Mexico, nursing as a discipline has evolved due to professionalization processes, such actions have generated opportunities for its constant growth. Nowadays, the use of different methodologies and theoretical approaches, the richness of the practice of care is shown, but also its complexity (Ramírez *et al.*, 2019).

The specialization gives nursing the opportunity to enrich knowledge in a specific area of their academic profession, since care in health and technological development currently demand specific skills (Coras & Arcaya, 2021).

However, nursing is based on scientific evidence for the resolution of health problems, and it forms two areas of development: managerial care and research teaching. Within the clinical field data emerged as scientific support for the care practices (Aguirre, 2020).

The repercussions of the pandemic on nursing training were incentives to reflect on teaching methods, stimulating and enabling the development of fruitful health practices that favored safe and quality nursing care training (De Araújo *et al.*, 2023).

The pandemic was a challenge not only of communication, but also of constant training to show leadership, decision making and teamwork, and made their skills in the field evident. This is essential in comprehensive care (Valderrama, 2023).

Nurses' assistance during the pandemic has been relevant since it demands a strengthening nursing position in health as a discipline and profession with its own proposal for facing socio-natural disasters (Campillay *et al.*, 2021).

The current context provides us a wide view, reconstructing the way in which the nursing role is performed. Creating healthy workplaces is the key to motivating cultural transformation, and it is essential to provide highly efficient health care (Flórez, 2022). Nursing professionals have shown an academic training

according to the challenges of the century. The educational preparation of nurses emphasizes the integration of the patient's physical, emotional, and psychosocial health care needs (Reynolds, 2020).

The nursing professional has all the skills and is highly qualified not only in clinical area, but also in managing resources, personnel and policies, and being based on scientific evidence for decision-making (Lascano *et al.*, 2022). They also encourage to respond current and future challenges.

The world needs nursing to lead global health, since in this health crisis has promoted health improvement and living conditions of the population (Sánchez, 2020). Their performance has been recognized, thus, their participation in hospital management and quality teams is needed to face difficult situations such as the pandemic, because professionals denote belonging, commitment, responsibility, service and ability to lead (Saltos *et al.*, 2022).

The professionals require awareness in their scientific-technical capacity to lead greater professional autonomy to propose and lead processes, policies and action plans; and to investigate the identified critical nodes on which changes are necessary to rethink the profession (Campillay *et al.*, 2021).

Global nursing has launched the fight against the disease, in patients care and in preventive actions as part of the professional seal, as nursing practice demands constant and sustained development.

Methodology

This research was developed with the qualitative approach towards the deep description of the phenomenon to understand and explain it through methods and techniques from its conceptions and epistemic foundations (Sánchez, 2019). This research is considered as a descriptive investigation, since in this it is necessary to avoid making inferences about the phenomenon, the main thing is the observable and verifiable characteristics (Guevara *et al.*, 2020).

The development of the research was based on Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations, it directly shows a relationship between discursive (communicative) reality and factual reality, imagination and action, it works as a link between the internal and external universe of individuals. Through

communication processes, an interpretative map of the world and its interaction in it is glimpsed (Rubira-García & Puebla-Martínez, 2018).

It was conducted in a public sector institution. 46 participants were determined by data saturation. Their choice was based on following criteria: to be relatives of patients treated in said institution, 20 years up and under 60 years. Minors, people who were not affiliated users of the institution, and patients and staff working in the institution were excluded. The instrument for gathering information was an interview guide of fourteen open-ended questions.

Regarding the research procedure, data consisted on the perspectives and points of view of the participants, and it was carried out in several steps. First the interview technique was applied, the interviews were recorded, and later all the communications of participants were transcribed verbatim. Second, the analysis of data from the interviews was entirety which made it possible to identify the important aspects. With the chromatic technique most outstanding was selected, labeling these fragments by colored cards. Third, the findings were categorized according to the most relevant ideas. Fourth, the data were grouped in order of importance by a format into categories and subcategories. Finally, the findings were discussed with Moscovici's theory of social representations, conceptualizing the categories and subcategories, and contrasting the empirical data with the theoretical foundation to get logical reasoning according to the qualitative research method and, finally, to the presentation of the results by categories.

The ethical aspect was regulated by the *General Health Law on Health Research* (1984) with the written informed consent of the interviewee. To ensure the participation of social actors during the data collection process, the informed consent was made known verbally and written and its signature was requested prior to the interview.

To protect the privacy of the individual, the social actors of the research were labeled with a letter and a number, as shown in the following example (E-1). The research was classified without risk, since these are studies without intentional interventions or modifications in physiological, psychological and social factors of participants. Finally, the research project was sent to the ethics committee for approval, according to registration number 001/2023.

Results and Discussion

For the presentation of the results, the findings were grouped by categories: perception of nursing during the pandemic, performance during the pandemic,

social prestige, identity of the profession, professional visibility, professional development, professional competence, and nursing professionalism.

Perception of Nursing during Pandemic

During pandemic, nursing staff adapted to various challenges. The speed of pandemic generated and started an initial chaos when attending to the emerging call of a large-scale public health problem (Eslava, 2021). The nursing performance during pandemic had a great participation, as it was understood and projected in the following ideas:

They dealt with all the new aspects of the health situation, and I think their professionalism was highly revealed, so we were living in a pandemic. (E-20, personal communication, 2021).

With the pandemic, [the nursing performance] was more noticeable, but I think it was not because of fear but because of the risk they faced. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

The relatives of the patients mentioned that the participation of nursing during the pandemic was more evident. A change became evident, showing the profession's essential role to provide interventions to the patient diagnosed with Covid-19. It also provides assurance by preventing and observing complications in a timely manner, and evaluating the patient's response to treatment (Lahite *et al.*, 2020). Some participants expressed that nursing has always projected a positive image and that it has been maintained, as shown below:

It is the same perception, I think, so far with more respect, because they are the ones who are day to day and put more effort into their work. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

According to social comments, the perception of nursing had been maintained for a long time, and it was not visible until now. However, thanks to its performance during the SARS-CoV2 pandemic, a perception was projected with great extension, compared to the past. Therefore, the dissemination carried out in relation to the positive nursing intervention is important, now it is more visible.

It became evident that some participants during the pandemic had no change to their perception of nursing work. From the perspective of social perception,

the human by nature is a highly sensory being and, in the same way, a social being, in this way we analyze the interpersonal relationships we create that allows us to act based on past experiences (Franco, 2020). Some participants acknowledge that the perception they had of nursing work before and during the pandemic has been maintained, as shown in the following:

What I have seen, for me is the same, because it is the same responsibility when doing their work [...] for me it is still the same perception, there is no difference than before. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

Thus, the social image of a person or a group remains because the identity associated with a profession; it not only depends on what professionals think of it, but on how society sees this group. This rejection to changing ideas is linked to ignore the level of responsibility and skills of the nursing staff, and the support to always acting.

Performance during the Pandemic

Ethics in the performance of nursing functions is significant for the importance of its social commitment, thus, in a pandemic situation it was the guarantor of patient rights, safeguarding the integrity of the subject of unsafe activities in the hospital field (Lahite *et al.*, 2020). That crucial work is also recognized by participants, who mention nursing performance during the pandemic as follows:

That they are great heroes, because they dedicate everything for their work. Their performance involves everything they have to do in their profession. (E-8, personal communication, 2021).

The daily performance makes the difference of a nurse care to her patient. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

In this regard, the participants mentioned that nursing became more visible with the pandemic. Gómez (2022) expresses that

[...] the virus known as coronavirus transformed the lives of many human beings, in that sense, nursing played fundamental roles in confronting a lethal

virus. Once again, it is confirmed that it is an essential discipline and profession for the development of society and preserve life. (p. 191).

It is worth mentioning that, thanks to the media, nursing was given more recognition. Through news programs on radio, television and social networks, it was shown how they performed in providing good care to patients who were infected. Because of this, the way in which society recognizes the profession can be seen. Performance in nursing is vital and well-known, which bring prestige in this field.

However, there are still pending developments within the profession, and the patients' relatives state that:

Everything spreads by word of mouth, good advertising is always said, I believe that's where good performance in any profession can be reflected. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

It would be more worthwhile for the great work of nursing to be explained, so that we, like the outside world, do not see it as nothing more than the one who gives the injection and takes my pressure; that is nothing, to the great capacity that they have to do. (E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

There is interest of social actors when they suggest ways to give visibility and dissemination of the activities carried out by nursing staff. It is important that nursing still projects its work and professional competence to find its place within the media, where the social function of nursing can be seen.

The expression of interest by participants encourages us to promote the dissemination of nursing work, since it shows greater empathy and sensitivity towards the recognition of the profession. It works as a stimulus for the constant development of professional skills and competences.

Social Prestige

Nursing practice currently has great esteem globally because of the effort of professionals who have adapted and developed with scientific and technological advances preserving their humanistic essence (Pío *et al.*, 2020). About the importance of professional nursing work, family members of patients state that:

It is an important job [...] in this case, within the institution, in the services, I think they are the core of hospitals. (E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

There is a general public's appreciation of nursing, as it creates a safe environment and participates in health policies, educates and promotes it; it is globally recognized as the discipline of care. It also plays a main role with its science-based innovations under the fundamental contribution of Florence Nightingale (Gavilanes *et al.*, 2022). The responses of the social actors indicate that:

It is a very dignified job because they are people who are exposed to many diseases. With this pandemic, I think they are exposed more than they should be, they are in contact with sick people. I admire them for everything they've been through. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

I respect them because it is hard and very heavy work because a lot of time is spent with patients. I respect and admire them for all of them. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

This reflects the feelings of the participants. However, in the theory of social representations it is established that memory is kept in motion, taking objects, people and events, which labels with a name. In this way, it becomes familiar with the strange through the integration of new information, it allows clarifying the relationship between groups, individuals and their environment (Manrique, 2022).

Thus, nursing staff, through their actions, have proven to have a high professional and humanistic value, which was reflected in their roles during the patients care. Thus, the performance during the health emergency, the autonomy of the profession has been recognized. In this way, it was shown how a collective experience can determine the prestige to a sector.

Identity of the Profession

The identity of a profession is conceptualized as the set of qualities that allow the subject to feel part of a professional team. In the same way, professional identity is understood from the sociological perspective, of what the professional is within the structured overview (Franco, 2020). Thus, "identity" is understood as a cycle of socialization that gives the subject access to discover his or her own particularity. From different perspectives, this is a social construction, therefore,

a distinction coexists, it is accentuated when archetypes are found in common in a relationship (Olave, 2020). When talking to the interviewees, they mention some unquestionable aspects for the identification of nursing staff:

Nurses' attire is distinctive, they bring their uniform, the nursing staff bring their cap and the suit; their sweater and the colors, the shoes too. From the clothing I do recognize them, they are nurses. (E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

Not everyone can practice, you have to have the skill, you have to have the skill to be able to treat different cases. (E-23, personal communication, 2021).

Therefore, and according to Vergara (2008), to study social representations from the structuralist field is relevant to consider that a social representation is constructed and performed in a set of reflective nature; that is, one where its members evaluate their belonging and issue criteria to recognize who belongs to the group and who does not.

The interviewees mention some characteristics that they consider notorious of professional nursing work. Not only is their professionalism and recognized ability, but also the humanistic aspects as significant in themselves, considering them values and indicators that give identity to the professional.

The participants consider the skills and competencies relevant and typical of nursing, since they believe that they must have specialized characteristics when performing nursing functions.

Professional Visibility

The nursing profession has been characterized by providing care with a high critical and reflective level of social reality, giving visibility through research and the application of theoretical models that ensure quality care. This allows growth as a profession, and a transformative impact on the health system (Gutiérrez & Gallard, 2020). However, the lack of knowledge of their professional work is pointed out, as reflected in the following communication:

There is a lack of information, the information of saying that nursing is a very broad career, so big that they learn too much, we know that they can do many things, the only we need is for their work to be recognized and made known. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

As described by the participants and in contrast to the theory of social representations, these are going to constitute cognitive structures in which certain elements are identified as stereotypes, opinions, beliefs and norms that usually keep a positive or negative attitude. Once the value systems and principles that define the collective consciousness have been interpreted, the limits that individuals set for interacting with the world are established (Chourio, 2012). In this way, when people generate their opinion regarding the training of nursing professionals, they can share stereotypes or beliefs far from reality, which are accepted collectively. That is why, the work performed by nursing staff must be given visibility, so that the population has greater certainty of professional performance with respect to other members of the health team. These actions seek to renew the identity of nursing, creating new paradigms that give a real representativeness to the profession.

Professional Development

Throughout the development of nursing as a profession, one of the main duties to society is to carry out their work with up-to-date, high-quality standards. To do this, it is necessary to continue preparing at a scientific and practical level, and reinforcing their skills and knowledge (Pío *et al.*, 2020). To talk about professional development, in this research, family members of patients were questioned and mention that:

Nowadays, a bachelor's degree is required, I feel very qualified for this generation.

(E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

In regarding knowledge, there is no doubt that they are trained and it is seen that there is a good response from the staff [...] nursing does dominate knowledge. About professionalism, they have a good response towards the patient. E-23, personal communication, 2021).

They must be competent, that is why, they have a training, and by having a uniform and a badge, it means that they have a preparation and must be competent in their performance. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

As reflected before and according to the theory of social representations, these are founded by social groups, at the same time that their action governs; in addition, they explain how the social converts an idea into representation and how

it is transmitted to the social (Materán, 2008). When talking about professional development in nursing, the interviewees relate efficiency when carrying out the corresponding activities of the group, with prior professional preparation and acquisition of knowledge through academic training.

Nurses carry out their activities based on scientific knowledge, and have the foundations for their actions; however, patients' relatives relate the image of a uniform to their social development.

Professional Competence

Professional competence is conceptualized as a set of skills. In the field of nursing, the ability to unequivocally plan and organize care to facilitate equity in access to health services is demonstrated through the efficient application of knowledge (Mazacón *et al.*, 2020). Speaking about competence in the context of nursing, participants when interviewing them mention the following:

I consider them competent; the follow-up they give to their patients speaks very well of them. They approach it with personal commitment, and well, that's a point in their favor. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

I think they are competent, so far, I have not found any or have not been touched by a nurse who treats me and who does not know what to do. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

They know many things about any topic you talk to them or any question you ask them; they know how to answer it. (E-11, personal communication, 2021).

The above is consistent with the theory of social representations, as described by Serge Moscovici (1979), who states that these are a form of socially shared knowledge and its individual and psychological nature is considered. They arise in a context of daily exchanges of social thoughts and actions between the agents of a social group (Dioses & Torres, 2023).

Competence in the field of nursing is related to the skills that the health professional owns, the interviewees recognize that the nursing staff is competent to carry out their activities and the corresponding care.

Nursing Professionalism

In the last century the profession has faced challenges that laid the foundations to consolidate the practice from an ethical point of view. Hence, the importance of developing individual professional skills for the achievement of nursing performance (Aguirre, 2020). From such an overall view, some participants mention nursing professionalism as follows:

I think they need to be up to date with advances in science. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

They should not stop learning to make their work more constant. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

According to the theory of social representations, the transformation of an abstract idea is mentioned; the individual seeks to make the object by forging a vision of the object itself, which is consistent with his vision of the world (Manrique 2022).

Nursing, throughout the pandemic, was subject to change due to its actions. Currently, this work is carried out with methods supported by scientific evidence, the result of these updates. To such changes, the care and work provided by the staff is seen by the relatives of patients, who describe them as professionals with vast knowledge; in addition, they mention the importance of keeping their knowledge updated.

Conclusions

At the conclusion of this research, it can be mentioned that thanks to the cooperation of the participants, it shows how nursing opinion and perception has changed during the interventions in the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic. The visibility of this profession was more evident; the media were very important so that society could make nursing work visible, and thereby, expand the panorama of how it develops its activities. This contributed to strengthening nursing's public image from the social field. Likewise, due to the pandemic, it was observed that the projection increased, since the nursing staff was the one who interacted the most with the patients who were infected by SARS-CoV2. The importance of this profession was shown to society, since it is essential within health area.

With Moscovici's theory of social representations, participants were shown to have diverse ideologies. This made it possible to analyze the image of nursing

to develop a broad knowledge, and thereby observe its image before society. According to the meanings obtained through social representations, it is shown that for the participants, nursing work projects humanism, trust and loyalty.

It is very important to convey to the population what nursing really is professionally, only in this way will it be possible to perfect and improve society's perception of this group. Therefore, appropriate recognition through the different communication channels is necessary, and also continuing to develop strategies related to visibility.

The limitation presented during the development of the research was that the participants did not want to collaborate in person because of the SARS-CoV2 virus, which delayed the development of the interviews.

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