

# RECONNECT: MENTAL HEALTH IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF WORKERS

*RECONECTAR: SAÚDE MENTAL NO COTIDIANO DOS TRABALHADORES*

*RECONECTAR: SALUD MENTAL EN LA COTIDIANIDAD DE LOS TRABAJADORES*

✉ Larissa Ingrid Pinheiro Alves<sup>1</sup>, ✉ Kisia Dolores de Almeida Pinheiro<sup>2</sup> e ✉ Karen Lopes Felipe<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To promote self-care and mental health among healthcare professionals by providing moments of reflection, relaxation, and knowledge exchange to reduce stress and enhance well-being in the workplace. **Methods:** Conducted between August 2023 and January 2024 in healthcare units in Caucaia, Brazil, the project included discussion groups on self-care and workers' health, as well as integrative practices. Activities, lasting an average of 30 to 40 minutes, were held in groups or individual sessions and adjusted to the units' routines. **Results:** Participants reported emotional relief, reduced stress, and increased awareness of the importance of self-care. These low-cost and short-duration practices had a positive impact on professionals' well-being and productivity. **Conclusions:** The project highlighted the value of self-care in the workplace, delivering immediate results but emphasizing the need for ongoing and structural actions to foster sustainable mental health.

**Keywords:** *Mental Health; Self-Care; Occupational Health.*

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Promover o autocuidado e a saúde mental dos profissionais de saúde, oferecendo momentos de reflexão, relaxamento e troca de saberes para reduzir o estresse e fortalecer o bem-estar no ambiente laboral. **Métodos:** Desenvolvido entre agosto de 2023 e janeiro de 2024, em unidades de saúde de Caucaia/CE, o projeto incluiu rodas de conversa sobre autocuidado e saúde do trabalhador, além de práticas integrativas. As atividades, com duração média de 30 a 40 minutos, ocorreram em grupo ou sessões individuais, ajustadas às rotinas das unidades. **Resultados:** Os participantes relataram alívio emocional, redução do estresse e maior conscientização sobre a importância do autocuidado. As práticas, de baixo custo e curta duração, demonstraram impacto positivo no bem-estar e produtividade dos profissionais. **Considerações finais:** O projeto evidenciou o valor do autocuidado no trabalho, apresentando resultados imediatos, mas reforçando a necessidade de ações contínuas e estruturais para promover uma saúde mental sustentável. **Descritores:** *Saúde Mental; Autocuidado; Saúde do Trabalhador.*

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Promover el autocuidado y la salud mental de los profesionales de la salud, ofreciendo momentos de reflexión, relajación e intercambio de conocimientos para reducir el estrés y fortalecer el bienestar laboral. **Métodos:** Entre agosto de 2023 y enero de 2024, en unidades de salud de Caucaia, Brasil, se realizaron círculos de conversación sobre autocuidado y salud laboral, además de prácticas integrativas. Las actividades, de 30 a 40 minutos, ocurrieron en grupos o sesiones individuales, adaptadas a las rutinas laborales. **Resultados:** Los participantes reportaron alivio emocional, menor estrés y mayor conciencia sobre el autocuidado. Las prácticas, de bajo costo y corta duración, tuvieron un impacto positivo en el bienestar y la productividad de los profesionales. **Conclusiones:** El proyecto destacó la importancia del autocuidado en el entorno laboral, mostrando resultados inmediatos, pero reforzando la necesidad de estrategias continuas y estructurales para fomentar una salud mental sostenible.

**Descriptores:** *Salud Mental; Autocuidado; Salud Laboral.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Unified Health System (UHS) is anchored in an expanded concept of health, including not only the disease, but the physical, social and psychic aspects of human

1 Escola de Saúde Pública do Ceará. Fortaleza/CE - Brasil. 

2 Prefeitura Municipal de Caucaia. Caucaia/CE - Brasil. 

3 Escola de Saúde Pública do Ceará. Fortaleza/CE - Brasil. 

beings, as well as their abilities to deal with day-to-day problems and contribute to the community through their work <sup>1</sup>.

Health workers face overload due to the precariousness of working conditions and daily interaction with fragile users, which generates emotional and physical impacts. Problems such as impaired mental health and stress-related disorders can compromise the work environment, resulting in low productivity, absenteeism and high turnover <sup>2</sup>. Self-care is essential because chronic stress can lead to illness, including Burnout Syndrome (BS), prevalent among health professionals. Healthier working environments promote the well-being of workers and optimize work processes <sup>3-4</sup>.

Since January 2022, the WHO recognizes BS as an occupational disease associated with stressful conditions and intense pressure at work, causing exhaustion, stress and physical exhaustion. In Brazil, however, BS was already recognized as an occupational disease since the decree of MH n. 1.339/1999 <sup>6</sup>.

In 2022, the WHO reinforced the need to prioritize mental health, pointing out that the "Comprehensive Action Plan for Mental Health 2013-2030" was progressing slowly. New recommendations were proposed to consolidate care systems and meet the target by 2030. In Brazil, 9.3% of the population suffers from anxiety, leading global rates. It is estimated that 37% face severe stress, while anxiety and depression reach 63% and 59%, respectively <sup>7-8</sup>.

During the period of work in the multiprofessional residence in Collective Mental Health by the School of Public Health of Ceará, in the city of Caucaia/CE, a worrying scenario was identified from observations of the team of residents in the territory among health professionals: an intense overload of work, accompanied by dissatisfaction with the service, lack of motivation and the feeling of not being valued. This reality showed the need for interventions aimed at emotional and psychological care of workers in the area. As a response to this reality, the project "Reconnect" was developed. The initiative was developed to address issues related to self-care among professionals, providing moments of deeper connection with themselves. The relevance of this work is to minimize the impact of psychological illness and promote the mental health of those who are dedicated to caring for other people, ensuring not only the well-being of these professionals, but also the quality of care provided to the population.

The main objective of the project was to promote self-care during the working day of health professionals, integrate moments of exchange of knowledge from their experiences and experiences, as well as guide on the benefits of this practice for mental health and well-being. In addition, the objective was to sensitize participants about the importance of self-care, highlighting its positive impacts on physical, mental and emotional health. Finally, the project also focused on building individual and collective strategies, with the intention of contributing to the improvement of the work environment and the quality of life of professionals.

## METHODS

The project, conceived in June 2023, was executed between August 2023 and January 2024, with a 15-day break due to the residence's holidays. The activities took place weekly or fortnightly, depending on the unit and the availability of professionals,

being carried out in UAPS, CAPS, Health Department, Home Care Service and Emergency Care Units. The largest concentration of shares occurred in UAPS and CAPS, due to greater planning viability.

For group actions, the coordination released professionals interspersed in meetings of 40 minutes. In the first 20 minutes, self-care, occupational health policies and strategies to deal with stress were discussed, followed by relaxation practices such as scald-foet, meditation and ear acupuncture. Individual sessions of 30 minutes, without the initial conversation, were organized in some units, offering combinations of techniques according to the participants' preference.

In CAPS, group meetings took place in the nursing room, while a reserved room was used at the health station. Other actions were scheduled for specific dates, such as Yellow September and Blue November campaigns. As they progressed, the activities were customized, taking into account the dynamics of the groups and the rotation of participants.

The central axis of the project was the self-care and health of the worker, seeking to create moments of pause and reflection in everyday life. Initially, the study followed a standard script with introduction, guided meditation and discussions about self-care, evolving to focus on relaxation and well-being.

The experience was practical and reflexive, including health professionals and other workers of the units, such as receptionists and general services personnel, on a voluntary basis. The materials used were either own or donated, and the activities had the support of mental health residents.

The results and impressions were collected from the participants' spontaneous speeches at the end of the sessions. No formal evaluation instruments were used, since the project was not initially planned as a scientific research. The analyses were based on qualitative observations of changes perceived by professionals. Although the project was not submitted to the ethics committee, aspects such as verbal consent and respect for the privacy of participants were strictly respected. This approach reinforces the character of experience reporting, focused on the direct impact of actions taken.

## RESULTS

The conversation rounds allowed the identification of frequent complaints related to exhaustion, anxiety, depression and stress among professionals. In response, discussions focused on self-regulation measures to help participants learn how to slow down and deal with these challenges more effectively. Topics such as sleep hygiene, breathing exercises, the importance of physical activity, time management, relaxation techniques and the need to maintain a balance between mental, physical, spiritual and social health were addressed. These guidelines aimed to promote the integral well-being of professionals, providing practical strategies for personal care in everyday life.

Self-care proved to be an effective and efficient practice for improving mental health, especially in the work environment. During the project, it was possible to observe that professional relationships have a significant impact on the mental health of workers. The constant pressure and complexity of the services provided, combined with the need to deal with the suffering and pain of others, can increase the incidence of

mental illness among health professionals. However, the conversation wheels, moments of relaxation and deceleration demonstrated the positive potential of simple and low-cost activities carried out in short time intervals. These practices showed a direct impact on improving the performance, productivity and well-being of professionals, showing that small changes can generate significant results in mental health care.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the "Reconnect" project corroborate with the literature on mental health of health professionals, who often face adverse conditions in the work environment, such as long working hours, psychological pressure and high labor demand. These factors are widely associated with the development of stress, anxiety and, in more severe cases, Burnout syndrome <sup>2-4</sup>. During the conversation rounds, recurring complaints of emotional exhaustion, stress and anxiety among participants reinforce the relevance of these findings.

The practices implemented, such as meditation, cupping and scalding, are recognized in the literature as effective interventions for promoting well-being and reducing stress, these approaches contribute significantly to strengthening mental health, providing support in stress management and improving quality of life <sup>9-10</sup>.

In addition, the creation of spaces for dialogue aligns with humanizing approaches to the care and appreciation of workers, which recognize the importance of listening to and welcoming the experiences of those who work in high pressure environments. This exchange strengthens the bond between colleagues, promoting a sense of community and emotional support, both essential for a healthy work environment.

The report highlights the importance of inserting self-care practices within the file, ensuring greater adherence by professionals. The organization of activities during the workday proved to be strategic, allowing participants to experience moments of deceleration and self-care without the feeling of abandonment of their responsibilities.

The choice for short-term strategies, such as conversation wheels and relaxation practices, was particularly suitable for contexts of high labor demand. Even with time constraints, these interventions demonstrated an immediate positive impact, highlighting the importance of including these practices in institutional policies for workers' health.

The positive perceptions of participants reinforce the need to expand these actions to other units and consolidate them as part of daily work. This not only improves individual well-being, but also contributes to a more harmonious and productive work environment.

The implemented activities were well received by participants, who reported emotional relief and a sense of embracement. The division of time between reflexive discussions and relaxation practices was essential to integrate theory and experience, promoting not only awareness but also concrete actions of care.

The adaptive logistics (40 minutes per group and individual meetings of 30 minutes) proved to be effective in ensuring the participation of professionals without compromising the operation of the units. However, the individual meetings, being

shorter and focused exclusively on relaxation techniques, limited the exchange of experiences, but offered a personalized moment of care.

The main challenges faced were related to the release of professionals and initial resistance to self-care practices. These barriers are frequent in projects that seek to change the established work dynamics, especially in high overload contexts.

The need to adjust the schedule to the availability of units also brought logistical challenges, highlighting the importance of engagement of managers in planning actions. For future initiatives, it would be useful to adopt more intensive awareness-raising strategies such as introductory lectures or practice demonstrations before the start of the project.

The potential of the project lies in the simplicity and effectiveness of the practices. Low cost and short duration techniques proved to be feasible and impactful, generating tangible benefits for the participants. Moreover, the welcoming approach contributed to the creation of an environment of trust and appreciation, essential for the humanization of work.

The "Reconnect" project presents a replicable and adaptable model to different contexts, which can benefit health teams in various configurations. By prioritizing the mental health and well-being of workers, it promotes not only quality of life, but also productivity and the quality of care offered to patients.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The report achieved its purpose by highlighting the benefits of self-care in the professional context, especially when facing challenges related to mental health. Relaxation and self-regulation activities proved to be valuable practices that provided immediate relief and improvement in the well-being of professionals. However, it is essential to recognize that self-care, although beneficial, does not solve all issues related to mental illness in the workplace. Factors such as interpersonal relationships, working conditions and task overload remain critical and have a direct impact on mental health.

The main potentialities of the process were the promotion of a support space, the appreciation of personal care and the implementation of accessible and simple practices, such as relaxation moments and time management techniques. In addition, the project can be easily replicated in different contexts, which expands its application possibilities in other teams or health units. The experience was also enriching, as it provided reflections on the dynamics of work and their impact on professional relationships.

The context of work in health requires a more comprehensive approach that includes structural and organizational changes to sustain long-term improvements. Thus, the project contributed positively to immediate well-being, but reinforced the need for a continuous commitment and more elaborate strategies to promote sustainable mental health in the professional environment.

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