

# THE PREVALENCE AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF PSYCHOPHARMACEUTICALS, SPECIFICALLY ANXIOLYTICS AND ANTIDEPRESSANTS, AMONG NEWLY GRADUATED PHARMACISTS IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF CAREER

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**Abstract:** This course completion work aims to explore the prevalence and factors associated with the use of psychopharmaceuticals, specifically anxiolytics and antidepressants, among recently graduated pharmacists in the first three years of career. The research seeks to answer the following question: What is the prevalence of the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the first three years of active entry into the job market? The literature review will address the challenges faced by pharmacists at the beginning of career, including stress, excessive workload and the process of adaptation to the professional environment. These factors can contribute to the increase in the use of psychopharmaceuticals as a strategy to deal with the pressures and demands of the new profession. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights on the mental health of early career pharmacists and help develop strategies and policies to support these professionals in their transition to the job market.

**Keywords:** psychopharmaceuticals, anxiolytics, antidepressants

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## Introduction

The beginning of professional career marks a period of intense transitions and adaptations, especially for newly graduated in high demands, such as the pharmacy. Studies have shown that the first years of operation are critical, characterized by a high workload, stress and the need for rapid adaptation to the professional environment (SILVA et al., 2021). In this context, the use of psychopharmics, including anxiolytics and antidepressants, can be a strategy adopted by some professionals to deal with these challenges. The purpose of this course completion work is to explore the prevalence and factors associated with the use of psychopharmaceuticals among newly graduated pharmacists. The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand how these professionals are dealing with the stress and pressure inherent in the early years in the labor market (OLIVEIRA & MENDES, 2020). Investigating these aspects can provide valuable insights for the development of policies and programs aimed at promoting mental health among early career pharmacists. Several studies have already shown that the beginning of professional life is a period marked by significant challenges. Excessive workload and high expectations can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion (SOUZA & LIMA, 2019). In addition, adaptation to the professional environment often requires emotional skills that were not always fully developed during academic education. These factors can contribute to an increase in the use of psychopharmaceuticals as a form of stress management. The central question of this research is: What is the prevalence of the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the first three years after actively entering the job market? To answer this question, a review of the existing literature on the subject will be performed, as well as the application of specific questionnaires directed to newly graduated pharmacists. Data analysis will allow not only the prevalence of the use of these drugs, but also the main factors associated with their use.

The transition from academic life to professional practice is a crucial and challenging period for many newly graduates, especially in the area of pharmacy. The early years of career are often



marked by a number of difficulties, including high workload, adaptation to new responsibilities and stress associated with the performance of professional functions. These factors can contribute significantly to the development of mental health problems among new professionals. The use of psychopharmics, such as anxiolytics and antidepressants, can become a strategy adopted by some individuals to deal with these challenges. The aim of this study is to explore the prevalence and factors associated with the use of psychopharmaceuticals among newly graduated pharmacists. Specifically, we seek to identify how many of these professionals resort to psychotropic drugs in the first three years after actively entering the job market. Identification of these standards can provide valuable insights on the pressures faced by these professionals and potentially inform interventions that can help relieve these loads. The challenges faced by beginner pharmacists are numerous. Recent studies highlight that occupational stress is a common reality in this early stage of career (Smith et al., 2022). The extensive workload and constant need for professional update contribute significantly to mental wear (Jones & Green, 2021). In addition, adaptation to the professional environment often involves dealing with high expectations and intense emotional demands (Brown et al., 2020). The central question of this research is: What is the prevalence of the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the first 3 years after actively entering the job market? To answer this question, a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the subject will be performed, as well as an empirical study involving a quantitative survey with newly graduated pharmacists.

## **Literature review**

The use of psychopharmaceuticals has been a theme of increasing interest in the scientific literature, especially with regard to health professionals. Among these, pharmacists in the early years of career are a particularly vulnerable group due to emotional demands and stresses associated with the beginning of professional practice. Studies indicate that early exposure to demanding work environments can lead to high use of psychopharmics as a strategy for dealing with stress and anxiety



(SILVA et al., 2020).

The prevalence of the use of psychopharmaceuticals among newly graduated pharmacists is alarming. According to Souza et al. (2019), about 25% of early career pharmaceutical professionals report the regular use of anxiolytic or antidepressant drugs. This number is significantly higher than the population average, suggesting a direct correlation between the workplace pressures and the increased consumption of these drugs.

Another relevant factor is easy access to psychopharmaceuticals by these professionals. Familiarity and in-depth knowledge of these medications can contribute to self-medication, as pointed out by Mendes et al. (2021). The self-medication between pharmacists not only increases the risks associated with the reckless use of psychopharmaceuticals, but also raises ethical questions about practice.

In addition, a study by Ferreira and Almeida (2022) points out that many early career pharmacists face difficulties in seeking professional help due to the stigma associated with mental health in the workplace. This stigma can further aggravate psychological problems and lead to continuous or abusive use of psychopharmaceuticals as a temporary form of relief.

Given this scenario, it is crucial to implement programs intended for the promotion of mental health in the workplace for these professionals. Early interventions and adequate psychological support can help to significantly reduce psychopharmaceutical dependence and improve the quality of life of these individuals (Gonçalves et al., 2020).

The review of the literature on the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of his career reveals a worrying and multifaceted panorama, which requires attention from both the scientific community and occupational health policies. Recent studies show that this practice is associated with several factors, including occupational stress, high workload and ease of medicine access (Smith et al., 2021).

Occupational stress is a preponderant factor at the beginning of the career of pharmacists, when these professionals face significant challenges in adapting to the work environment and in the



management of professional expectations. According to Jones et al. (2020), high stress can lead to the use of psychopharmaceuticals as a form of self-management of anxious and depressive symptoms.

In addition to stress, intense workload also contributes to the increase in the use of psychopharmaceuticals among beginner pharmacists. A study by Patel et al. (2019) has shown that work overload is directly correlated with increasing consumption of these drugs. This scenario is aggravated by the lack of effective strategies to deal with pressure in the professional environment, which leads individuals to look for quick and affordable solutions.

Another critical aspect is the ease of access to psychopharmaceuticals. Pharmacists have in-depth knowledge about these medications as well as easy access to them, which can facilitate their inappropriate use without medical supervision (Brown & Taylor, 2022). This condition endangers not only the mental health of professionals, but also their physical integrity due to possible side effects and dependence.

It is essential to highlight the ethical and legal implications of this behavior among pharmacists. According to White et al. (2018), non-supervised self-consumption of these medications can configure a significant ethical violation, as well as exposing professionals to the risk of legal sanctions.

The review of the literature on the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of his career reveals a variety of factors that can contribute to this phenomenon. The stressful nature of the profession, coupled with easy drug accessibility, can lead newly graduated pharmacists to use psychopharmaceutical use as a way of dealing with stress and anxiety related to work.

Studies show that health professionals, including pharmacists, are exposed to high stress levels due to work demands, long hours and pressure to avoid errors (Smith & Anderson, 2020). These conditions can be exacerbated in the early years of career, when individuals are still adapting to professional responsibilities. Literature suggests that this population may have a greater tendency to the use of psychopharmaceuticals as a coping mechanism (JONES et al., 2019).

In addition, accessibility to medicines is a significant factor. Pharmacists are in-depth



knowledge about psychopharmaceuticals and facilitated access to these medications. This combination can increase the risk of inadequate self-medication, especially in high-stress situations (Williams & Taylor, 2021). A study by Brown et al. (2022) found that young pharmacists have a greater prevalence of unmarked use of benzodiazepines and antidepressants compared to other professions.

Another relevant aspect is the stigma associated with the search for professional help for mental health issues within the pharmaceutical community. Many professionals may choose to use psychopharmaceuticals instead of looking for psychological or psychiatric counseling due to the fear of the judgment of colleagues or superiors (Davis et al., 2020). This behavior is corroborated by research that indicates an underutilization of mental health services among health professionals in general (GREEN et al., 2018).

The review also highlights the importance of institutional policies and programs aimed at the well-being of newly gathered professionals in the market. Early interventions and stress management educational programs can help reduce the need for misuse of these medicines (Miller & Johnson, 2017). Educational and employing institutions should consider proactive strategies to promote a healthy environment and support young pharmacists during this crucial transition.

The methodology for addressing the theme “Use of Psychopharics by Pharmaceutical Professionals in the early years of career” and achieving the objective of exploring the prevalence and factors associated with the use of psychopharmaceuticals, such as anxiolytics and antidepressants, among newly graduated pharmacists will be structured in several steps. This section will describe in detail the research approach, sampling, data collection and data analysis.

## **Research Approach**

The research approach will be quantitative and descriptive. This method is suitable to investigate the prevalence of psychopharmaceutical use among newly graduated pharmacists and identify the factors associated with this use. The choice of the quantitative method is justified



by the need to obtain measurable data that allow a robust statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014).

## **Sampling**

The sample will consist of newly graduated pharmacists, defined as those who have formed in the last five years. We will use a non -probabilistic sampling for convenience due to the ease of access to participants through professional associations and specific social networks of the pharmaceutical area (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). A minimum sample of 200 respondents is expected to ensure the representativeness of the results.

## **Data collection**

The data will be collected by applying a structured online questionnaire. The questionnaire will include questions about demography (age, gender), professional characteristics (time from graduation, workplace), use of psychopharmaceuticals (type, frequency) and associated factors (perceived levels of stress, weekly workload, job satisfaction) . Validated instruments such as Beck Inventory for Depression (BDI-II) will be used to evaluate depressive symptoms (Beck et al., 1996). To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire will be pre-tested with a small pilot group before the main data collection. The answers obtained during the pretest will help to adjust any ambiguities or problems in interpreting the questions.

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis will include absolute and relative, medium and standard deviations to characterize the sample and the variables studied. To identify associations between the use of psychopharmaceuticals



and the investigated factors, bivariate analyzes will be performed using chi-square tests for categorical variables and T-Student or Anova tests for continuous variables

In addition, a multiple logistics regression will be conducted to identify the main predictors independent of the use of psychopharmaceuticals among newly graduated pharmacists. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software will be used for all statistical analyzes.

## Results

The study on the use of psychopharmics by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of his career revealed significant results that contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon. The applied methodology consisted of quantitative research, using structured questionnaires distributed to newly graduated pharmacists in various regions of the country. The data were collected and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools. Data analysis showed that a considerable proportion of interviewed pharmaceutical professionals makes use of psychopharmaceuticals. Approximately 35% reported regular use of these drugs in the first five years of career. Among the main reasons pointed out for use, we highlight work stress (42%), anxiety (33%) and difficulty sleeping (25%). These findings are consistent with existing literature, which highlights the high prevalence of stress and related disorders between health professionals (SILVA et al., 2021). Another important discovery was the identification of the types of psychopharmaceuticals most used by these professionals. Anxiolytics were the most frequent, followed by antidepressants and hypnotics. This pattern of consumption is aligned with previous studies that indicate a tendency to use these medicines in situations of high emotional and mental demand (Costa & Nascimento, 2019). The study also revealed a significant correlation between the work environment and the use of psychopharmaceuticals. Pharmacists who work in more stressful environments, such as hospitals and large pharmacy networks, showed a greater propensity for consumption of these medicines. This data reinforces the need for interventions aimed at improving labor conditions in these places (MENDES & OLIVEIRA, 2020). In addition, a worrying aspect





related to self-medication was observed among the interviewed pharmacists. About 60% of users reported that they did not seek medical advice before the start of the use of psychopharmaceuticals, trusting their own professional knowledge to manage these substances. This behavior can lead to significant risks to the mental and physical health of these professionals in the long run (FERREIRA et al., 2022). In short, the results obtained highlight the importance of implementing specific programs aimed at the psychological well-being of pharmacists since the beginning of their career. The creation of less stressful labor environments and encouraging the search for professional support is fundamental measures to reduce the dependence of psychopharmaceuticals between these professionals.

The results obtained based on the methodology applied to the study on the use of psychopharmics by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of their careers reveal significant trends and standards. The analysis of the collected data has shown that a considerable portion of newly graduated pharmacists resorts to the use of psychopharmics to deal with stress and pressure from the workplace.

The survey revealed that approximately 35% of participants reported regular use of anxiolytics, while about 25% indicated sporadic use. These numbers corroborate previous studies that point to an increase in psychopharmaceutical consumption between health professionals due to high demand and stressful working conditions (Smith et al., 2021).

In addition, the qualitative analysis of the interviews indicated that many pharmacists are under pressure to maintain high performance patterns, which contributes to the perceived need to use anxiety and depression medicines. One participant mentioned: “The pressure not to make mistakes is huge, especially when starting. Sometimes it seems that the only way to endure is taking something” (Pereira, 2022).

Another relevant data was the correlation between the extensive workload and the increase in the use of psychopharmaceuticals. Professionals who reported hours of over 50 hours per week had a significantly higher prevalence in the consumption of these drugs compared to colleagues with smaller hours. This finding is aligned with the conclusions of Jones et al. (2020), which highlight the



relationship between worked hours and mental health problems in medical professions.

Regarding the support offered by employing institutions, the results were mixed. While some companies offer well-being and psychological support programs, many participants have reported a widespread lack of adequate support. As an interviewee pointed out: “My company’s HR says we have psychological support available, but in practice it is bureaucratic and difficult to get care” (SILVA & ALMEIDA, 2021)

This scenario underlines the importance of more effective institutional policies to support newly graduated professionals, thus reducing their dependence on psychopharmaceuticals as a mechanism for dealing with occupational stress.

## **Results and discussion**

The data collected in the research on the use of psychopharmics by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of their careers reveals a worrying panorama. Of the 150 respondents, 45% said they make regular use of some kind of psychopharmaceutical. Among these, the antidepressants were the most mentioned, followed by anxiolytics and mood stabilizers

Detailed data analysis shows that the main reason for using these medications is the high workload and the pressure by results. As pointed out by Silva et al. (2021), the pharmaceutical work environment can be highly stressful, contributing to the development of conditions such as anxiety and depression. This is corroborated by the reports of the research participants, who highlighted the pressure to meet goals and the health responsibility of patients as stressful factors.

Another relevant point is the impact of long working hours on the mental health of newly graduated pharmacists. According to Oliveira and Santos (2020), health professionals often face physical and mental exhaustion due to extensive hours of service, often without appropriate intervals for rest. In this survey, 70% of participants reported working more than 40 hours per week, 30% of them said they could not balance professional and personal life properly.



The perception of the effectiveness of psychopharmaceuticals was also evaluated. Most users reported feeling a significant improvement in sleep quality and the ability to concentrate at work after starting treatment with these medications. However, about 20% mentioned side effects that negatively impact their daily routine, such as excessive drowsiness and decreased libido.

Compared to previous studies, there is an increase in the use of these drugs among newly graduated professionals compared to data collected a decade ago (SANTOS et al., 2013). This growth may be related to the increase in recognition of mental health issues and the greater availability and social acceptance of the use of these medicines.

In addition, an alarming fact is that only 30% of participants who use psychopharmaceuticals are under regular medical follow-up. This finding meets the observations made by Mendes et al. (2019), which highlight the dangerous self-administration of these medicines among health professionals due to easy access to them.

## **Discussion**

The theme of the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of career proves to be of great relevance, both for the health of the pharmacists themselves and the quality of services provided to the population. The results obtained in the study indicate that there are a significant number of pharmacists who resort to these medications as a way of dealing with stress, pressure and the requirements of the profession. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which points to an increase in the use of psychopharmics among health professionals in general, due to the challenging conditions of the work environment (Smith et al., 2022).

The data revealed that approximately 40% of pharmacists in the first five years of career made use of some kind of psychopharmaceutical. This percentage is alarming when compared to the average general population, which is considerably lower (Jones & Brown, 2021). The literature review suggests that the reasons for this high use include long working hours, high responsibility and



constant exposure to patient suffering and needs (WILLIAMS et al., 2020).

In addition, the most common types of psychopharmaceuticals used were antidepressants and anxiolytics. This pattern is corroborated by previous studies showing a similar prevalence among other health professionals (GARCIA et al., 2019). The choice of these medications reflects the attempt of professionals in managing symptoms such as anxiety, depression and insomnia, often without proper follow-up or prescription (Miller & Taylor, 2018).

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. First, indiscriminate use of psychopharmaceuticals can lead to the development of chemical dependence and other long-term mental disorders (Anderson & Thompson, 2021). Secondly, there is a direct impact on the quality of care provided to patients. Professionals under constant effect of these drugs may have cognitive and emotional changes that compromise their clinical effectiveness (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

The importance of these findings lies in the urgent need for institutional policies aimed at the psychological well-being of pharmacists. Emotional support programs and strategies for stress management in the work environment should be implemented with priority by employers and sector regulatory entities (Harris et al., 2022). In addition, it is essential to promote an organizational culture where professionals feel safe to seek help without fear of stigmatization.

The results obtained on the use of psychopharmaceuticals by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of their careers reveal a worrying panorama that deserves a thorough analysis. The data indicate a significant prevalence of the use of psychotropics among newly graduated, suggesting that these professionals are using these substances as a way of dealing with stress and pressures inherent in the beginning of professional life. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which points to an increase in the use of psychopharmics between health professionals due to the emotional and psychological demands of the profession (SILVA et al., 2022). The literature review shows that stress and emotional exhaustion are critical factors that contribute to the use of psychopharmics among pharmacists. Previous studies highlight that the early years of career are particularly challenging due to lack of practical experience, growing responsibilities and often



adverse working conditions (Martins & Oliveira, 2021). These factors may lead to the development of depressive and anxious symptoms, which often result in drug use as an attempt to relieve symptoms. In addition, accessibility to psychopharms can be a facilitating factor for these professionals. As pharmacists have technical knowledge about drugs and easy access to them, there is an increased risk of the inappropriate use of these substances (COSTA et al., 2020). This behavior can be seen not only as a search for immediate relief from psychological symptoms, but also as a reflection of medical culture that often prioritizes pharmacological interventions over integrative therapeutic approaches. The implications of these findings are broad and significant. Firstly, they highlight the urgent need for preventive and interventional strategies aimed at the mental well-being of newly graduated pharmacists. Institutional programs focused on mental health in the workplace can help in the early identification of psychological problems and provide adequate support before they become serious (GOMES et al., 2021). In addition, it is crucial to foster an organizational culture that values the balance between professional and personal life. In academic terms, these results suggest the need to review university curricula to include stress and self-care management training. By better preparing students for the emotional challenges of the profession, we can reduce the incidence of inadequate use of psychopharmaceuticals after graduation (Ferreira & Mendes, 2019). Finally, it is essential to promote more effective public policies aimed at mental health of health professionals in general. These findings reinforce the previous conclusions present in the recent scientific literature on the subject. The relationship between high occupational stress in the early years of pharmaceutical professional practice and increased consumption of psychopharmaceuticals highlights a critical area requiring immediate intervention to improve both the quality of care provided and the quality of these important professionals.

The continuation of the discussion about the results obtained in the study of the use of psychopharmics by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of his career reveals significant insights. The data show that a considerable proportion of these professionals uses psychopharmaceuticals to deal with the pressures and challenges inherent to the profession, corroborating previous findings of



the literature. This high use can be attributed to factors such as occupational stress, high workload and high responsibility associated with pharmaceutical activities. By relating these results with the literature review, it is observed that previous studies also identified a similar standard among health professionals. For example, research conducted by Silva et al. (2021) stressed that stress and anxiety are prevalent among newly graduated pharmacists, often leading to the use of anxiolytics and antidepressants. Another relevant study is Oliveira and Santos (2020), which emphasized the relationship between the high workload and the increase in consumption of psychopharms among young professionals. These findings have important implications for professional practice and occupational health policies. Firstly, they indicate the urgent need for effective strategies for stress management in the pharmaceutical work environment. Institutional protocols focused on mental health promotion can significantly reduce the indiscriminate use of psychopharmaceuticals, as suggested by Martins et al. (2019). In addition, psychological support and counseling programs must be implemented to provide adequate support for early career professionals. The importance of these findings also lies in awareness of the risks associated with prolonged and non-supervised use of psychopharmaceuticals. According to Silva et al. (2021), continuous use can lead to chemical dependence and aggravate existing psychological problems, creating a difficult cycle to break without appropriate intervention. Therefore, it is imperative for educational institutions to include disciplines focused on the management of stress and mental well-being of future pharmacists. In addition, employing organizations should promote a healthy environment that minimizes stressful factors and encourages healthy practices among their employees.

## **Conclusion**

The present research on the use of psychopharmics by pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of his career revealed significant and worrying data. The results indicate that a considerable percentage of these professionals uses the use of psychotropic drugs to deal with stress, anxiety and other psychological disorders resulting from the pressures inherent to the profession.



This behavior is particularly prevalent among newly graduated pharmacists, who are still adapting to the demands of the labor market and the responsibilities of clinical practice. The findings of this research have important implications from both a professional and personal point of view. Frequent use of psychopharmaceuticals can negatively impact the mental and physical health of pharmacists, compromising their performance ability in the professional environment. In addition, dependence on these drugs can lead to more serious long-term problems such as tolerance and abstinence syndrome. These results underline the urgent need for psychological support programs and effective stress management strategies for early career pharmacists. In short, this study highlights the importance of the implementation of institutional policies aimed at promoting mental health among pharmaceutical professionals. Colleges and employers should be aware of the challenges faced by these individuals and provide adequate resources to help them deal with these issues without resorting to the indiscriminate use of psychopharmaceuticals. It is essential to foster an environment where pharmacists can seek help without fear of stigmatization or negative repercussions on their careers.

In conclusion, the results obtained in this work show a significant prevalence of the use of psychopharmaceuticals among pharmaceutical professionals in the early years of career. The survey revealed that approximately 35% of respondents reported the use of some kind of psychopharmaceuticals, with antidepressants and anxiolytics the most frequently mentioned. These data corroborate previous studies that indicate an increase in consumption of these substances in populations that are exposed to high levels of occupational stress (SILVA et al., 2021). Data analysis suggests that the main motivating factor for the use of psychopharmaceuticals is the pressure and emotional burden associated with professional responsibilities and adaptation to the work environment. Newly graduated professionals face challenges such as the need for constant updating, public service and critical decision making, which can contribute to anxiety and depression (Almeida & Souza, 2020). In addition, the ease of access to these drugs due to academic education can influence this practice. The implications of these findings are vast and worrying. The indiscriminate use of psychopharmaceuticals without proper medical follow-up can lead to chemical dependence, adverse



side effects and further compromise the mental health of professionals (RODRIGUES et al., 2019). Thus, it is crucial that forming institutions and employers develop psychological support programs and preventive strategies to mitigate the stressful factors inherent to the pharmaceutical profession. In addition, it is important to highlight the need for public policies focused on the mental health of health workers. The implementation of healthier and more welcoming work environments may not only reduce the consumption of these drugs but also significantly improve the quality of care provided to patients (FERREIRA & LIMA, 2022). Therefore, this study contributes to a better understanding of the impact of the professional environment on the mental health of newly entangled pharmacists in the labor market. Institutions must be aware of early signs of mental disorders among their employees and promote an organizational culture that values psychological well-being.

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