

KNOWLEDGE OF RISK FACTORS FOR CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

CONHECIMENTO DOS FATORES DE RISCO DE DOENÇAS CARDIOVASCULARES POR ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS: EVIDÊNCIAS CIENTÍFICAS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify and assess scientific evidence regarding university students' knowledge about risk factors for Cardiovascular Diseases (CVD). **Method:** This is an integrative review, carried out in 2020, in the MEDLINE, CINAHL, PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. Based on the guiding question, the search for articles took place using the descriptors "Students", "Universities", "Knowledge", "Cardiovascular Diseases", and "Risk Factors" and their correspondents in English. **Results:** Of the 17 articles included, six were available from Scopus, and all were in English. It was observed that students have a low level of knowledge about risk factors for CVD and do not recognize their vulnerability to them, in addition to not adopting preventive measures and a healthy lifestyle. Publications suggested the need for health professionals in educational settings to improve knowledge related to health, incorporate healthy lifestyle practices, and develop strategies to reduce CVD risk levels. **Conclusion:** The deepening of knowledge and a critical look at the literature showed a lack in the production of Brazilian studies on the subject, awakening the need to conduct more research and literature reviews to strengthen evidence-based practice.

Keywords: Students; Universities; Cardiovascular Diseases; Risk Factors; Knowledge.

RESUMO:

Objetivo: Identificar e avaliar as evidências científicas em relação ao conhecimento de estudantes universitários sobre os fatores de risco de Doenças Cardiovasculares (DCV). **Método:** Trata-se de revisão integrativa, realizada em 2020, nas bases de dados MEDLINE, CINAHL, PubMed, Scopus e Web of Science. Baseado na pergunta norteadora, foi feita a busca dos artigos, utilizando-se descritores "Estudantes", "Universidades", "Conhecimento", "Doenças cardiovasculares" e "Fatores de riscos" e seus correspondentes em inglês. **Resultados:** Dos 17 artigos incluídos, 6 estavam disponíveis no Scopus e todos estavam em língua inglesa. Observou-se que estudantes tinham baixos níveis de conhecimento sobre os fatores de risco de DCV e não reconheciam a vulnerabilidade a elas, além de não adotarem medidas preventivas e um estilo de vida saudável. As publicações sugeriram a necessidade de profissionais de saúde em ambientes educacionais, visando aprimorar o conhecimento relacionado à saúde, incorporar práticas de estilo de vida saudáveis e desenvolver estratégias de redução dos níveis de risco de DCV. **Conclusão:** O aprofundamento do conhecimento e o olhar crítico sobre a literatura apontaram carência na produção de estudos brasileiros sobre a temática, despertando a necessidade de condução de mais pesquisas e revisões da literatura para fortalecimento da prática baseada em evidências.

Palavras-chave: Estudantes (Estudantes); Universidades (Universidades); Doenças Cardiovasculares (Enfermedades Cardiovasculares); Fatores de Risco (Factores de Riesgo); Knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

In the current context, Non-Communicable Chronic Diseases (NCCDs), such as Cardiovascular Diseases (CVD), diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases¹, represent a serious problem for global public health, as a consequence of the high number of deaths and disabilities² observed in developed and underdeveloped countries³. In fact, NCCDs are responsible for the death of 41 million people per year, a figure that corresponds to 71% of all deaths⁴. In etiopathogenic terms, they result from the action of genetic, physiological, environmental, and lifestyle factors⁴.

Defined as a group of disorders that affect the heart and arterial and venous circulation^{5,6}, which includes coronary artery and cerebrovascular disease and aortic atherosclerosis⁷, CVD represents the leading cause of death in the world⁸. Indeed, this condition is responsible for 30% of the 50 million deaths recorded worldwide in recent decades⁹. Its etiology, although it involves factors considered non-modifiable, such as gender, age, family history, and ethnicity, also comprises modifiable or avoidable elements, such as sedentary lifestyle, obesity, Systemic Arterial Hypertension (SAH), Diabetes Mellitus (DM), dyslipidemia, smoking, inadequate diet, and alcohol intake^{10,11}.

Although it affects mainly adults over 60 years old⁶, in addition to the occurrence in individuals under 40 years of age, usually associated with genetic conditions¹², the

literature shows the increased prevalence of risk factors for CVD among young adults, represented especially by obesity and sedentary lifestyle¹³. In particular, the greater occurrence of CVD in younger age groups may be related to the perception that these diseases only occur in older individuals^{14,15}. The dietary changes experienced by this public as a consequence of the urbanization process and easy access to processed foods also contribute to this reality¹⁶.

Faced with this new scenario, university students stand out as a vulnerable group for CVD, especially considering their sedentary behavior^{17,18}, alcohol and cigarette consumption¹⁹, stress²⁰, and alteration of eating habits²¹. Corroborating this assumption, studies report the presence of CVD risk factors among students from different courses, such as Medicine²², Nursing²³, Nutrition, and Physiotherapy²⁴.

In this sense, the literature emphasizes that enrollment in University favors the contact with and development of CVD risk factors by students, especially those who are forced to distance themselves from family and take responsibility for their housing, food, and financial conditions^{23,25}. With the progression of their studies, other factors are added, such as the extensive workload in the classroom and internships, adoption of consumption of industrialized foods due to the scarcity of time and money, limited access to healthy foods in the university environment, and reduced availability and time to exercise^{23,25,26}.

Despite the presence of these risk factors among university students, studies reveal a lack of knowledge of these factors among these students, which can interfere with their health status. In this sense, according to Rezende *et al.*²⁷, the assessment of the levels of knowledge and identification of risk factors is paramount for health promotion in the context of CVD, especially for the academic community, which is often a reference for society.

Thus, considering the above, this study aimed to identify and evaluate scientific evidence regarding the knowledge of university students about CVD risk factors.

METHODS

It consists of an integrative review of the literature, which aims to identify, describe, gather and synthesize results of studies. When it is well developed, it enables the integration of research on a given subject, fostering the development and direction of other investigations, assisting in decision making and allowing the incorporation of evidence in clinical practice²⁸.

Based on Sousa *et al.*²⁹, this review was elaborated in six stages, namely: identification of the theme and objectives of the integrative review; formulation of the guiding question; search in the literature and careful selection of studies; categorization of the studies found and analysis of the publications included; interpretation of the results; report of the

review and synthesis of the knowledge evidenced in the studies.

For the formulation of the guiding question, the PICO strategy was used, which represents an acronym meaning “patient, intervention, comparison and outcome”. These four components are fundamental to the research issue and the construction of the guiding question, particularly when studying a very specific topic²⁹.

Based on this strategy, this review considered “P” university students, “I” and “C” were not applied and “O” knowledge about cardiovascular diseases risk factors. In order to answer the objective of the study, the following guiding question was defined: “What do university students know about the risk factors for cardiovascular diseases?”. For the search of the articles, we used the controlled descriptors in Portuguese “Estudantes”, “Universidades”, “Conhecimento”, “Doenças cardiovasculares” and “Fatores de riscos”, indexed in the descriptors in Health Sciences (DeCS), and their respective correspondents in English “Students”, “Universities”, “Knowledge”, “Cardiovascular diseases” and “Risk factors”. All words were combined together and associated through the Boolean operator “AND”.

The search and analysis of the articles were carried out during the months of February and March 2020, through the Journal Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel

(CAPES)/Ministry of Education (MEC), using the following databases: *Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online* (MEDLINE); *Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature* (CINAHL); *National Library of Medicine* (PubMed); Scopus – multidisciplinary basis; and *Web of Science*.

We included in the review full articles, available for free, published in the last 10 years (2010 to 2020 – this time frame was based on the possibility of including a larger number of studies addressing the theme), in Portuguese, English and Spanish. We excluded repeated articles, editorials, letters to the editor, theses, dissertations, review articles, reports, and articles not related to the theme or not relevant to this review.

After collection, the data were organized based on the tool adapted from Ursi³⁰, consisting of a specific Check List model, divided into nine domains, whose objective is to facilitate the description and publication of the data present in articles³¹. These were primarily organized according to: article title; authors, journal and publishing field; place where the research was conducted and year in which it was published; and database in which it was indexed.

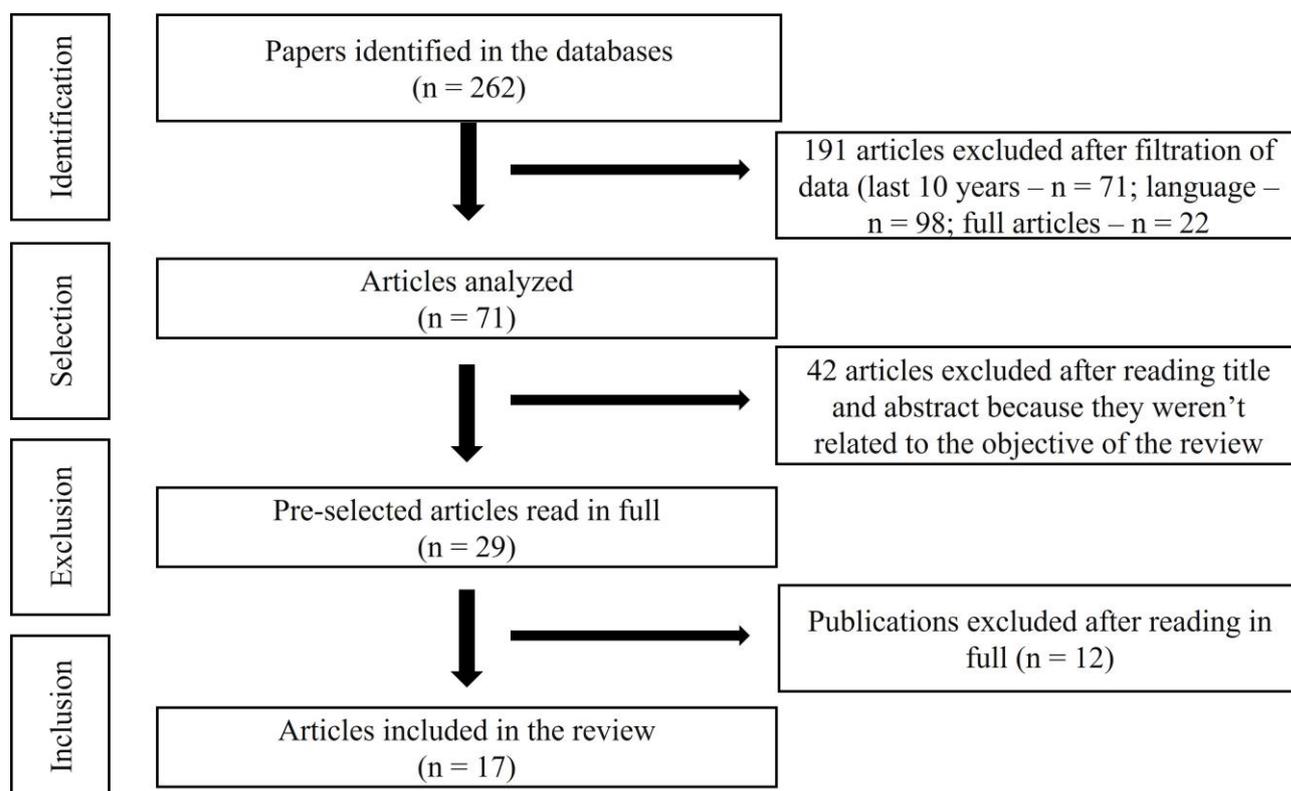
Subsequently, we examined the objective, type of study and evidence level and, later, the results and conclusion.

The analysis of the classification of the articles' evidence was based on the proposal by Stillwell *et al.*³². These authors categorize the research evidence into seven levels, in which the first corresponds to the best external evidence, presenting more reliable information, and the latter comprises information with a lower degree of reliability.

RESULTS

Through that search strategy, we found 262 papers, out of which 191 had been published in the last 10 years. Among these, 93 were in English, Spanish or Portuguese and, within those, 71 were available in full. After reading the title and abstract of the 71 publications, 42 were excluded because they were not related to the objective of the review. Of the 29 articles read in full, 9 were excluded for duplicity and 3 because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Thus, 17 publications comprised the review (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Flowchart identifying the study selection process to make up the integrative review. Redenção - CE, Brazil, 2020



Source: The authors

Out of all articles included, 5 were available on Scopus and all were in English. As for the year of publication, 3 were published in 2012, a quantitative equal to that observed in the years 2015, 2017 and 2019.

Regarding the place where the study was carried out, 3 were conducted in Turkey, a number equal to that found in the United States of America. Concerning the publishing field, 11 studies were developed in the field of Medicine (Table 1).

Table 1 – Characterization of the publications included in the review, according to title, authors, year, journal, field, country, and database. Redenção - CE, Brazil, 2020.

N.	Article title	Author and year	Journal and field	Country	Database
01	Knowledge, attitude, and practice on salt and assessment of dietary salt and fat intake among University of Sharjah Students	Ismael et al. 2019	Journal Nutrients Nutrition	United Arab Emirates	Scopus
02	Cardiovascular risk factors among lower Silesian students of the Faculty of Medicine: knowledge and	Kalka et al. 2016	Adv Clin Exp Med Medicine	South and Southeast Poland	Scopus

	distribution				
03	Knowledge, attitude, and practice of Malaysian Public University students on risk factors for cardiovascular diseases	Ibrahim et al. 2016	Journal of Applied Pharmaceutical Science Medicine	Malaysia	Scopus
04	Prevalence of obesity and hypertension among University students' and their knowledge and attitude towards risk factors of Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	Baig et al. 2015	Pak J Med Sci Medicine	Saudi Arabia	Scopus
05	Diabetes Mellitus-related knowledge among University students in Ajman, United Arab Emirates	Khan et al. 2012	SQU Medical Journal Medicine	United Arab Emirates	Scopus
06	Awareness of cardiovascular risk factors among University students in Turkey	Güneş et al. 2019	Primary Health Care Research & Development Medicine	Turkey	PubMed
07	Prevalence, risk awareness and health beliefs of behavioral risk factors for cardiovascular disease among University students in nine ASEAN countries	Peltzer et al. 2018	BMC Public Health Pharmacy	Nine countries in the ASEAN*	PubMed
08	Assessment of knowledge of critical cardiovascular risk indicators among college students: does stage of education matter?	Sarpong et al. 2017	Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health Nursing	United States of America	PubMed
09	The perception and knowledge of cardiovascular risk factors among Medical students	Reiner et al. 2012	Meoica'l Education- Croat Med J. Medicine	Croatia	Medline
10	Cardiovascular health risk behavior among Medical students in a teaching hospital	Giri et al. 2012	J Nepal Health Res Council Medicine	Nepal	Medline
11	Awareness and knowledge of cardiovascular disease risk factors among Medical students	<u>Maksimović</u> et al. 2017	Wien Klin Wochenschr Medicine	Serbia	Medline
12	An experiential cardiovascular health education program for	Holland et al. 2014	The ABNF Journal	United States of America	Web of Science

	African American college students		Medicine		
13	Cardiovascular disease risk factors and knowledge level in Nursing students	Kaya et al. 2019	Clin Exp Health Sci Nursing	Turkey	Web of Science
14	Factors predicting nutrition and physical activity behaviors due to cardiovascular disease in Tehran University students: application of health belief model	Najarkolaei et al. 2015	Iran Red Crescent Med J Medicine	Tehran	Web of Science
15	Knowledge, attitude and behaviour regarding dietary salt intake among Medical students in Angola	Magalhães et al. 2015	Cardiovascular Journal of Africa Medicine	Angola	Web of Science
16	University students' knowledge levels about cardiovascular risk factors and assessment of their health behaviours in Turkey	Kes et al. 2018	Journal of American College Health Nursing	Turkey	CINAHL
17	Cardiovascular risk factors among college students: knowledge, perception, and risk assessment	Tran et al. 2017	International Journal of Caring Sciences Nursing	United States of America	CINAHL

*ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Source: The authors

Concerning the objectives of the studies, they mainly involved evaluating the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding CVD risk factors by university students. Other objectives mentioned were: - to study the prevalence of obesity and hypertension among university students; - to investigate the knowledge and practices related to DM by these students; - to determine the prevalence of CVD risk factors in this public; - to assess the impact of medical education on knowledge and acknowledgment of the

importance of implementing preventive measures against CVD, according to the perception of medical students; - to know the results of the risk assessment of CVD among university students; - to identify the important predictors of nutrition and physical activity in relation to CVD in these students (Table 2).

Regarding the methodological design, 16 articles were descriptive studies, and, on the evidence level, all publications presented level VI.

Table 2 – Characterization of the publications included in this review, according to objective, type of study, and level of evidence. Redenção - CE, Brazil, 2020.

N.	Objective	Type of study	Evidence level
01	To investigate the knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to the presence of salt in the diet of UOS ^a students and to evaluate the ingestion of total, saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, and sodium	Descriptive	VI
02	To evaluate medical students' knowledge about CVD ^b risk factors and their prevalence in the population researched	Descriptive	VI
03	To measure and evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of university students concerning CVD ^b risk factors	Descriptive	VI
04	To investigate the prevalence of obesity and hypertension among university students and their knowledge and attitudes regarding CVD ^b risk factors	Descriptive	VI
05	To evaluate university students' knowledge and practices regarding DM ^c , including the differences related to gender and family history	Descriptive	VI
06	To determine the awareness level of university students, especially freshmen, in terms of CVD ^b risk factors (high cholesterol, stress, hypertension, smoking, obesity, diabetes, physical inactivity, family history of CVD ^b , unhealthy diet, exposition to passive smoking, and low socioeconomic level)	Descriptive	VI
07	To investigate the prevalence, awareness, and health beliefs related to CVD ^b risk factors among university students in nine countries in the ASEAN ^d	Descriptive	VI
08	To estimate and compare the awareness level of students in the 1 st professional year in the Pharmacy course and university students in the 2 nd semester of the same course about their numbers (cholesterol, arterial pressure, blood sugar, and BMI ^e)	Descriptive	VI
09	To evaluate the perceptions, knowledge, and awareness regarding CVD ^b risk factors among medical students	Descriptive	VI
10	To evaluate health behavior and the perception of medical students related to cardiovascular diseases	Descriptive	VI
11	To evaluate the knowledge and attitude of medical students related to CVD ^b risk factors and to evaluate the impact of medical education in the knowledge and acknowledgement of the importance of implementing preventive measures of these diseases for these students	Descriptive	VI
12	To investigate the application of a culturally specific test and a curriculum developed for African American university students in order to increase awareness about the risk of CVD ^b	Descriptive and mixed	VI

13	To determine the knowledge about CVD ^b risk factors and the evaluation of risk among Nursing students	Descriptive	VI
14	To identify important predictors in nutrition and physical activity related to CVD ^b in university students in Tehran	Descriptive	VI
15	To determine the ingestion of salt and to evaluate the knowledge, attitude, and behaviors related to that ingestion among medical students	Descriptive	VI
16	To evaluate the knowledge levels of university students about CVD ^b risk factors and their health behaviors	Descriptive	VI
17	To evaluate the knowledge and perceptions of university students about CVD ^b risk factors and to identify these risks	Descriptive	VI

^aUniversity of Sharjah (UOS); ^bCardiovascular diseases; ^cDiabetes Mellitus; ^dAssociation of Southeast Asian Nations; ^eBody Mass Index.

Source: The authors

Regarding the results observed in the articles, they emphasized that, despite the differences between university students from different colleges and course time, in general, students had low levels of knowledge about CVD risk factors. Among these factors, were mentioned physical inactivity, high-fat diet, smoking, obesity, genetic factors, hypertension, and type 2 DM. The studies also pointed out the presence of risk factors among students, such as overweight, obesity, hypertension, excessive intake of fats and sodium, lack of physical activity, alcohol intake, and smoking (Table 3).

Some studies also found that, despite the students' awareness of CVD risk factors, they did not see themselves at risk of developing these diseases, did not adopt preventive measures and did not have a healthy lifestyle practice. Other authors also

showed a low level of knowledge about health indicators among university students, the perception that the Medicine course was harmful to health and differences between genders regarding attitudes and practices in health.

Regarding the conclusion, the articles, in general, concluded that university students had an insufficient level of awareness and knowledge about CVD risk factors, as well as high prevalence of these factors among them. The studies also suggested the need for the presence of health professionals in educational environments, in order to improve health-related knowledge, incorporate healthy lifestyle practices and develop strategies to reduce CVD risk levels among students.

Table 3 – Characterization of the publications included in this review, according to results and conclusion. Redenção - CE, Brazil, 2020.

N.	Results	Conclusion
01	Among the students, the results indicated a low knowledge score regarding the presence of salt in the diet, as well as a high prevalence of overweight (28%), obesity (14%), and stage 1 (31%) and 2 (20%) hypertension. A high percentage of students who exceeded the recommended intake of total fat (48%), saturated fat (90%) and trans-fat (64%), and sodium (89%) was observed. All students did not meet the adequate recommended potassium intake	Knowledge, attitudes and practices related to salt consumption among students revealed the non-recommended intake of total, trans and saturated fat, and sodium. This result highlights the need to develop specific awareness campaigns regarding the culture of salt and fat intake and its association with health
02	The students correctly identified five risk factors for CVD ^a , among which the most cited were lack of physical activity and high-fat diet, followed by smoking, obesity, genetic factors, and hypertension. The results showed that there is a relatively healthy awareness on the part of students regarding risk factors for CVD ^a . However, there was no correlation with a healthy lifestyle	The study revealed an insufficient level of awareness of the CVD ^a risk factors among medical students
03	Among university students from different colleges, significant differences were found in relation to knowledge of CVD ^a risk factors (SAH ^b , DM ^c , sedentary lifestyle, heredity, stress, smoking, unhealthy diet, and lack of physical exercise), as well as differences in attitude and practice between the genders. The data indicated that the practice of healthy lifestyle was not adequate among the participants	The study suggests that students should increase health practice for the prevention of CVD ^a . Despite the high knowledge by students, it is not consistent with the attitudes and practices
04	The results indicated that 7.5% of the participants were hypertensive, 29.8% were overweight, 10.7% were moderately obese, and 7.9% were severely obese. Most participants were aware that a healthy lifestyle could prevent CVD ^a , although they did not practice it	There is a large gap in knowledge, attitude, and practice among the young Saudi university population in relation to the risk factors of CVD ^a
05	Of the participants, 25% were overweight or obese and only 27% exercised regularly. About DM ^c , 70% of the students knew that the disease was characterized by the presence of high blood sugar levels and that family history was an important risk factor. More than half of those surveyed linked obesity and physical inactivity to risk factors for DM ^c	Despite exposure to various sources of information, the level of students' knowledge about DM ^c is inadequate. It is recommended that health professionals engage in educational environments in order to improve health-related knowledge and incorporate healthy lifestyle practices among students

06	The study revealed that male students are less aware of the risk factors for CVD ^a (high cholesterol, stress, hypertension, smoking, obesity, diabetes, physical inactivity, and others) than female students. Comparisons between the BMI ^d groups revealed that obese individuals attributed less importance to risk factors of CVD ^a	The observations indicated that the levels of awareness of CVD ^a risk factors need to be improved among university students. Therefore, it is extremely important that primary care health professionals develop interventions to reduce risk levels of CVD ^a
07	In all nine ASEAN ^c countries, there was a prevalence of CVD ^a risk factors among students. For the five risk factors considered (smoking, unhealthy diet, obesity, physical inactivity, and harmful alcohol use), students' awareness of the involvement of these factors in CVD ^a was low. However, the female students presented lower prevalence of these factors and a "healthier" belief when compared to male students, except in exercising	The research found a high prevalence of behavioral risk factors for CVD ^a , limited awareness of these risks and negative health beliefs. The results may favor the development of health promotion strategies among university students of ASEAN ^c .
08	The students' level of knowledge about the four health indicators (cholesterol, arterial pressure, blood sugar, and BMI ^d) was extremely low. Among the Pharmacy students of the 1 st year and freshmen, differences were observed in terms of knowledge about total cholesterol and arterial pressure. In both groups, less than 50% of the students knew their BMI ^d , with a higher percentage found among those in the 1 st professional year. The percentage of correct answers to the other three health indicators (cholesterol, blood sugar, and BMI ^d) was low among students	The research revealed a low level of awareness of students about their health indicators. It also showed that two or more years of higher education and the choice of a professional health career make a difference in the level of students' awareness about health. However, more research is needed to understand the low level of awareness of critical health indicators among students
09	Although insufficient, the perception and knowledge of some CVD ^a risk factors (dyslipidemia, arterial hypertension, and metabolic alterations) were significantly better among undergraduate students than among freshmen. At the end of medical school, many students were smokers, despite knowing the harmful effects of smoking. They had a reduced awareness of the contribution of obesity in the development of CVD ^a	The results suggest an urgent need to raise awareness among medical students about the importance of obesity and reduced physical activity in the development of CVD ^a
10	Faced with the possibility of developing CVD ^a , 85 (53%) students showed concern, although only 33 (38%) had adopted preventive practices (physical activity, and regular consumption of fat and salt). Of the total number of participants, 101 (64%) believed that life in medical school had a	The study showed a high prevalence of risk behaviors for CVD ^a among medical students

	detrimental effect on health	
11	More advanced students in medical school had greater knowledge about the risk factors for CVD ^a (cholesterol, metabolic syndrome, and lipid-lowering therapy) than those who were at the beginning of the course. Only about 20% of the students knew all the risk factors included in the metabolic syndrome. Factors such as physical inactivity, obesity, type 2 DM ^c , smoking, and hypertension were not considerably classified as important CVD ^a risk conditions	The study clearly showed that medical students' knowledge of the CVD ^a risk factors should be improved. Furthermore, medical education should provide basic knowledge that enables the effective prevention of these diseases
12	Regarding the program, which consisted of weekly classes, during which occurred experimental activities, self-assessments, discussions, and homework with African American students, its effectiveness was verified. Several benefits of the intervention were identified, such as increased knowledge about risk factors for CVD ^a and physical capacity, as well as better eating habits and greater knowledge about stress management strategies	Experimental workshops with small groups can be effective for understanding the risks and establishing healthy habits for the prevention of CVD ^a among African American university students
13	The students' level of knowledge about CVD ^a risk factors (BMI ^d , arterial pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglycerides) was low. The percentage of overweight and obese participants was 18.8% for men and 22.1% for women. An inversely proportional relationship was observed between the higher level of knowledge about the CVD ^a risk factors and the reduction in blood sugar and cholesterol values	The research showed a reduced knowledge of the CVD ^a risk factors among Nursing students, in addition to the presence of these risk factors
14	It was found that the female students had a more adequate nutrition. A positive association was observed between knowledge, perceived severity of CVD ^a and self-efficacy with the practice of physical activity, as well as a negative relationship between this behavior and perceived barriers (fear of strangers, bad weather, and many school tasks)	The study indicated that the contrasts between health beliefs can predict the risk behavior of college students in the face of heart disease. However, more research is needed to verify the predictors of high-risk behaviors in these students
15	Among the students, salt intake was higher than the internationally recommended maximum limit, although they were aware of its consequences. Less than half of the participants reported being aware of their high sodium intake. Regarding potassium, the average intake by the students was lower than the recommended value. In	The study indicated a high salt intake among medical students and an inadequate perception of their intake level, as well as insufficient attitude and behavior in relation to their control. Given this scenario, nutritional education is necessary to improve the knowledge and eating habits of these students

	relation to other classical risk factors for CVD ^a , a high prevalence of physical inactivity and alcohol intake was observed, as well as a low prevalence of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity	
16	Among the students, low levels of knowledge about CVD ^a risk factors (smoking, alcohol, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, BMI ^d , and stress) were found. Of the participants, 46.1% were smokers, 31.9% consumed alcohol, 20.8% were overweight, 1.6% were obese, and 26.1% had chronic diseases. The results showed that students did not have healthy behaviors, such as physical exercise, adequate nutrition, and stress control	The evaluations of knowledge levels showed that the students did not have adequate knowledge and that there was a positive and significant relationship between positive health behaviors and levels of knowledge about CVD ^a risk factors. In this sense, it can be suggested that studies and screening in chronic diseases and regular medical consultations can prevent these diseases
17	Participants knew the CVD ^a risk factors (diabetes, overweight/obesity, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, smoking), but did not perceive themselves as at risk of developing them. When the CVD ^a risk factors were evaluated, it was found that more than 50% of the students had one or more of these factors	The high level of knowledge of the CVD ^a risk factors was not sufficient to reduce the risks of these diseases among students. Thus, changing the perception of these factors may play a greater role in reducing the risks of these diseases in the long term

^aCardiovascular Diseases; ^bSystemic Arterial Hypertension; ^cDiabetes Mellitus; ^dBody Mass Index; ^eAssociation of Southeast Asian Nations.

Source: The authors

DISCUSSION

The statistics presented in the literature reveal that CVD represents one of the main causes of death in the global context. Therefore, the relevance of studying cardiovascular risk factors in university students is based on the situation that this public, due to physical, emotional, and social transformations, seeks independence and new experiences, associated with a high burden of stress caused by the university environment, and becomes vulnerable to risk behaviors, even with access to information¹⁹.

Thus, understanding these factors can prevent, maintain, or restore the health of this

population and avoid socioeconomic impacts³³, since these elements can be modifiable according to the environment and exposure time³⁴.

In this review, we evaluated the productions that addressed the prevalence, knowledge, attitudes, and practices in relation to CVD risk factors in university students. The verification of these aspects in young adults makes it possible to identify the susceptibility level of these individuals to these diseases. Therefore, the compilation of the studies will help to identify gaps in knowledge, which may improve the practices and policies aimed at the promotion and



prevention of CVD among university students.

Evaluating the number of studies included in this review according to the database, the highlight for Scopus can be understood because it is the largest database, containing abstracts of peer-reviewed publications, from Elsevier³⁵. As for the language of the articles included here, the fact that all are in English can be justified because it is one of the strategies used for scientific internationalization³⁶ or because possible databases that include articles in the Portuguese language weren't included in the review.

Regarding the greater number of studies published in different years, this result may suggest the relevance and interest of the theme portrayed here in different moments. As for the place of study included in this review, the emphasis on Turkey, in addition to the USA, was an unexpected data, since China has stood out for encouraging the development of research³⁷. The prominence of the USA can be justified by the possibility that this country develops more research in this area as a consequence of eating habits, lifestyle, and occurrence of cardiovascular diseases in the population, since it is considered one of the global leaders in science and technology³⁸.

Concerning the field of publication of the articles, the large number of papers available in journals in the medical field, although it evidences the importance of the

theme for Medicine, suggests a deficiency in the integration between the different health fields, which is in line with what is stated in the literature. According to Guimarães and Branco³⁹, health work should involve interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary actions.

Regarding the majority of publications presenting, as a methodological design, the descriptive study, although it describes data that were verified, recorded, analyzed, classified and interpreted, without the interference of the researcher and with the use of standardized data collection techniques⁴⁰, it does not seek to evaluate a possible association between the cause of the disease and its effect⁴¹. On the predominance of studies with evidence level VI, this finding suggests that the publications do not present strong evidence, which may impair their clinical applicability³².

When analyzing the objectives of the articles included, the greater number of publications that evaluated the knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to CVD risk factors in university students exceeded the expectations of this review because they were not limited to the knowledge of these factors. This result is important in the sense that interventions aimed at the promotion and prevention of CVD, of an individual or collective nature, are better performed if based on the knowledge of the attitudes and practices of the public to which they are intended⁴².

The same can be said in relation to the studies portrayed here, which proposed to present the prevalence of risk factors or of CVD itself among university students, the results of the assessment of this risk and the analysis of the impact of education on knowledge and acknowledgement of the importance of implementing preventive measures against CVD. Indeed, knowing these different aspects can interfere in actions aimed at preventing, maintaining, and restoring the health of university students in the face of these diseases.

Concerning the results presented by the studies included in the review, the fact that, in general, students presented low levels of knowledge about CVD risk factors was surprising, especially considering that this phenomenon occurred among students from different colleges and course time. Also emphasizing how unforeseen this finding is, it is known that these students presented numerous risk behaviors for these diseases and that the University represents an important means of disseminating information on these risk factors to many young people⁴³.

However, this data may result from the way the media and the consumerism of today's society link these risk factors to pleasure, especially in fast food advertisements, in addition to the fact that it is accepted that the consequences of behavioral risk factors on health are usually manifested at older ages⁴⁴. This data can also result from the parents' education level, especially the

mother's, because of the role that she undertakes in the care of children⁴⁵. Indeed, in research by Paulitsch et al.⁴⁶, the authors observed that students whose mothers had 5 to 11 years of schooling were more likely to have an additional risk factor compared to those whose mothers had schooling greater than or equal to 12 years.

Thus, regardless of the cause of misinformation, its consequence may not decrease the incidence of CVD among university students, in addition to promoting the increase in costs for the public and private sectors⁴⁷.

Regarding CVD risk factors, the literature classifies them into modifiable risk factors (environmental and behavioral), such as smoking, alcoholism, high cholesterol, systemic arterial hypertension, physical inactivity, stress, and secondary conditions (DM, obesity, contraceptive use, and abdominal obesity), and non-modifiable risk factors (genetic and biological), represented by heredity, gender, and advanced age⁴⁴.

Specifically, the risk factors for CVD reported in the studies included here were numerous and comprised both modifiable and non-modifiable factors, with a higher number among the former. These factors were also observed by other authors^{44,48}, who highlighted sedentary lifestyle. The latter, together with hypertension, smoking, hyperglycemia, and overweight/obesity, is one of the globally known CVD risk factors⁴⁹.

In this review, smoking was the modifiable risk factor most cited by students, which may be associated with the high practice of this habit among university students⁵⁰ and/or the fact that it is one of the main modifiable cardiovascular risk factors⁵¹. According to the literature, smoking is responsible for numerous and diverse chronic diseases and for half of all preventable deaths⁵⁰. It is considered responsible for the increase of oxidative stress, inflammatory process, and endothelial and platelet dysfunction, phenomena that can cause damage to the body⁵¹.

Concerning the result presented by the articles that, despite being aware of the risk factors of CVD, students did not believe in their vulnerability to these diseases, it can be understood if it is assumed that the age above 45 years for men and 55 years for women is considered as a susceptibility factor to CVD⁵². As for the non-adoption of preventive measures by students, this result may be associated with the very belief that they are not susceptible to CVD and/or with lack of time⁵³. As for the lack of practice of a healthy lifestyle, despite the awareness of risk factors, it can be explained by problems in time administration, the need to perform well⁵³, impairment of eating habits and mealtimes, and adoption of a more sedentary lifestyle⁵⁴.

Regarding the low level of knowledge about health indicators among university students, this finding is worrisome because it suggests that these students are unaware of

the reality experienced by them, which may compromise the application of policies and strategies aimed at good action and performance of the health system, as well as the monitoring of these diseases in this population.

Concerning the perception of university students that the Medicine course was harmful to their health, this result corroborates Stegers-Jager et al.⁵⁵, who reported that the challenge of medical schools is to provide academic environments that do not compromise health and stimulate progress in studies. Specifically, the chronic stress experienced by these students may increase the risk of cardiometabolic and neurodegenerative diseases, in addition to causing cognitive decline and adverse effects in the hippocampus⁵⁵.

This data can also be understood if we admit that medical students present, in general, an inadequate lifestyle marked by sedentarism, inadequate eating habits, limited time for leisure, and high workload, as well as high frequency of tests and expectations of themselves, social isolation, competition with friends, and excessive subjects to study^{56,57}.

As for the differences between genders regarding the health attitudes and practices of university students observed by the studies discussed here, this result seems to reflect the stereotypes related to gender, especially expressing the image of the man as the one who is stronger, who does not take care of himself or others and who does not seek

health services. On the other hand, the woman is the one who is naturally a caregiver and who requires more attention due to the particularities of the female organism⁵⁸. This data is worrisome, since men seem to be more vulnerable to chronic and severe illnesses, in addition to having an earlier death^{59,60}.

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude that the reduced knowledge about the risk factors of cardiovascular diseases presented by university students from different educational institutions and course time, associated with the non-recognition of vulnerability to these diseases and non-adoption of preventive measures and healthy lifestyle, emphasizes the urgency of the development and application of strategies aimed at health promotion.

The data in the review enabled us to deepen the knowledge and critical look about what is produced by the national and international literature on the theme portrayed here. In this context, few Brazilian studies were included, which alerts us to the need to conduct more research related to the knowledge of cardiovascular disease risk factors among university students, fostering the elaboration of new literature reviews and strengthening evidence-based practice.

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