

Quality of work life of university nursing teacher in liquid modernity

Qualidade de vida no trabalho dos docentes de enfermagem universitários na modernidade líquida

Calidad de vida laboral de profesores universitarios del área de enfermería en la modernidad líquida

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the quality of life at work of university nursing professors, considering the configuration of the liquid world. **Method:** qualitative, descriptive study, with a qualitative approach, carried out in two public universities. Study participants were 14 nursing professors belonging to universities. For data collection, a focus group was used and the data were analyzed using the content analysis technique. **Results:** there is an excess of activities and exacerbated demands, reflecting on work overload, as well as the dismantling of public universities, causing instability in the work process and consequent inadequate working conditions. **Final considerations:** the teaching work in the liquid world has different characteristics inherent to the practice of education, when compared to other groups of workers. Thus, there is a need for investment in public universities in order to provide funds for the development of teaching, research and extension, in the increment of science and technology.

Descriptors: Qualitative Research; Nursing; Faculty, Nursing; Quality of Life.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a qualidade de vida no trabalho dos docentes de enfermagem universitários, considerando a configuração do mundo líquido. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, descritivo, de abordagem qualitativa, realizado em duas universidades públicas. Os participantes do estudo foram 14 docentes de enfermagem pertencentes às universidades. Para a coleta de dados foi utilizado o grupo focal e os dados foram analisados à luz da técnica de análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** observa-se excesso de atividades e cobrança exacerbada refletindo na sobrecarga de trabalho, bem como desmonte das universidades públicas ocasionando instabilidade no processo de trabalho e consequente condições laborais inadequadas. **Considerações finais:** o trabalho docente no mundo líquido guarda características diferenciadas inerentes à prática da educação, quando comparada a outros grupos de trabalhadores. Assim, configura-se a necessidade de investimento nas universidades públicas a fim de proporcionar a disponibilização de verbas para o desenvolvimento do ensino, pesquisa e extensão, no incremento da ciência e tecnologia.

Descritores: Pesquisa Qualitativa; Enfermagem; Docentes de Enfermagem; Qualidade de Vida.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la calidad de vida en el trabajo de profesores universitarios de enfermería, considerando la configuración del mundo líquido. **Método:** estudio descriptivo, con enfoque cualitativo, realizado en dos universidades públicas. 14 profesores de enfermería pertenecientes a universidades participaron en el estudio. Para la recolección de datos se utilizó un grupo focal y se analizaron los datos mediante la técnica de análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** hay un exceso de actividades y exigencias exageradas, lo que se refleja en la sobrecarga de trabajo, así como el desmantelamiento de las universidades públicas, lo que provoca inestabilidad en el proceso de trabajo y consecuentemente condiciones de trabajo inadecuadas. **Consideraciones finales:** el trabajo docente en el mundo líquido tiene características diferentes inherentes a la práctica de la educación, cuando se compara con otros grupos de trabajadores. Por lo tanto, existe la necesidad de invertir en las universidades públicas con fines de poner a disposición fondos para el desarrollo de la enseñanza, la investigación y la extensión, en el incremento de la ciencia y la tecnología.

Descritores: Investigación Cualitativa; Enfermería; Docentes de Enfermería; Calidad de Vida.

INTRODUCTION

Humanity is constantly in motion, as technology propels it towards movement, since the world is always in a state of transformation. In this perspective, the transformations of work structures with predefined rules and structures, referred to as the solid phase in modernity, evolve into the liquid phase where such structures dissolve, leading to flexibility of the labor relations and contracts, characterized by the brief duration of their existences¹.

The precarization of teaching work, which began in the 1990s within the context of globalization and the Neoliberal reforms with deliberate policies that blurred the boundaries between the public and the private, has

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resulted in Brazilians experiencing an escalation of privatizations, overexploitation and weakening of union power in the field of work since then¹.

In addition, it asserts that the era of duty is replaced by the era of minimalist morality, indicating that the solidity of human relationships is perceived as threatening; therefore, fear and uncertainty serve as motivators and rapidly change such relationships. In this context, coupled with exacerbated individualism, there is certain decline in workers' protection structures, transforming workers themselves and also modifying the norms of protection in the workplace¹.

From this perspective, it is worth reflecting on the political and economic contexts in which the world of work finds itself. Today, Neoliberalism stands out, characterized by a social order in which a new discipline is imposed on labor and unconventional managerial criteria are established, using instruments such as free trade and the free mobility of capital. This Neoliberal model is ideologically legitimized through a political-economic theory that asserts free market as the guarantor of individual freedom to undertake and which assigns the State the minimal role of preserving the necessary institutional order².

Nevertheless, Bauman questions the dominant philosophy of modernity, constituted by the postulate of historical development, progress and a comfortable life at all costs. When this postulate is applied to society, it equates to eliminating certain categories of people or certain forms of human life.

In this line of thought, the teaching work process in the liquid and Neoliberal world highlights the need for studies focused on working conditions, workloads and their relationship with workers' health, with a particular emphasis on the repercussions on the quality of life of this professional group. In this perspective, the impact of the working conditions on workers' health has become a component of people's struggle in the pursuit of more beneficial standards for life at work³.

A teacher's Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) is associated with the satisfaction level the professional experiences in carrying out their duties, taking into account that each individual possesses specific characteristics and is part of a society that influences them in the social, cultural and economic aspects⁴.

Professional Quality of Life (QoL) involves the dynamic management of physical, technological and socio-psychological factors that affect the organizational climate and promote workers' well-being.

Thus, as the theme of Work-Related Quality of Life is studied, it is verified that it is associated with health, closely linked to the work environment. Moreover, in the workplace, there must be respect for rules and norms that promote WRQoL. From this perspective, it is emphasized that this concept involves notions of motivation, satisfaction, health and workplace safety, which in turn are intertwined with the work organization modalities and new technologies, a context in which workers, especially Nursing professors, are inevitably influenced⁴.

Thus, thinking about teachers' Quality of Life leads to a reflection on the mechanisms that enable these workers to be productive and feel satisfied in the workplace, generating science and technology and, consequently, making a significant contribution to development of the country².

In the context of Nursing teaching work, there are conditions that result in distress for workers and exert an impact on the quality of life of this professional group. In this perspective, they evidence work pace intensification, high work demands, low wages, deterioration of physical facilities, shortages of materials and labor force, weak employment contracts, and uncertainty about the future¹.

Considering this issue, the objective of this study was to analyze university Nursing professors' Work-Related Quality of Life, taking into account the configuration of the liquid world.

METHOD

This is a qualitative and descriptive study conducted in two public universities located in the city of Rio de Janeiro: a state university (University A) and a federal university (University B). These two institutions were chosen because they have their own specificities in the management models of faculty human resources, thereby contributing to greater richness in the data collected.

Faculty members who are involved in the teaching, research and extension dimensions were included. The inclusion criteria encompassed professors with statutory employment relationships or temporary contracts as substitute teachers. The exclusion criteria were not being engaged in teaching activities and being on leave or vacation during the data collection period.

For data collection, a qualitative research focus group was used, which allows obtaining valid information with a high reliability degree, low cost and a brief time frame. In addition, it has been used for human resources management and strategic planning of actions to be developed in work environments.

This type of group interview technique involves not only the presence of interviewees but also of a facilitator and a reporter. The reporter is responsible for documenting the nuances of the interaction, whereas the facilitator's role is to encourage the participation of all subjects by presenting the guiding topic in a comprehensive and open manner, leading the interaction.

This type of interview is based on the perspective that people form their opinions and attitudes through interactions with others, distinguishing it from individual interviews. In other words, individuals who share specific situations communicate, and this interaction influences the participants' awareness and behavior. In addition to these particularities, focus groups are capable of delving deeper into a topic collectively.

In this context, data collection was carried out by the female lead researcher and four research assistants, including two of the researcher's scholarship recipients and two volunteers. It is noted that the lead researcher had prior experience in data collection using the aforementioned technique.

As a first step, the research was presented to the study participants through an initial contact with the researcher, and the participants were recruited to explain the procedures for conducting the research. It is noted that the initial contact with the participants was made either in person or by telephone.

It is important to emphasize that the data collection settings were the participating institutions. The lead researcher organized a room to carry out the dynamics of the activities. Data collection took place in February 2022, with each session lasting a mean of two hours.

Subsequently, the participants signed the Informed Consent Form. After this procedure, the research team provided the group with a sociodemographic characterization form. Subsequently, the focus group was conducted, during which the researcher led the session by reading the guiding questions, validating the answers at the end of the session.

The research assistants collaborated in observing behaviors and expressions, as well as in obtaining testimonials, which was done with the aid of an audio recorder on a mobile device. They also assisted in timing duration of the focus groups, which lasted a mean of two hours. It is noted that there were two focus groups, one held at University A and another at University B. The guiding questions that facilitated the debates in the groups were the following: a) How is Work-Related Quality of Life understood in the context of liquid modernity or post-modernity? and b) How can Work-Related Quality of Life for teachers be promoted in this context?

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which is characterized by a set of techniques for analysis and interpretation, involving three defined stages: pre-analysis; exploration of the material; and treatment of the results, inference and interpretation⁵.

For such purpose, the author proposed three phases for content analysis: i) Pre-analysis, which involves organizing the material, such as selecting the documents and defining the objective; ii) Exploration of the material, which includes source classification and coding; and iii) Treatment of the results, which encompasses data inference and interpretation. Inference itself is an intermediate phase between the analytical description - which operates according to systematic and descriptive procedures of the content of messages - and the conclusive interpretation by the researcher.

In this perspective, three categories were obtained when performing the content analysis, which are characterized in the Results section.

For development of this research, the guidelines set forth in Resolution 466/2012 from the National Health Council were followed, and the research protocol was submitted for review by the Research Ethics Committee of the institutions involved.

RESULTS

A total of 14 Nursing faculty members participated in the study, with eight from University A and six professors affiliated with University B.

The categories that emerged through the content analysis technique will be presented below in detail, which were named as follows: i) Excess of activities and excessive demands reflecting in work overload; ii) Dismantling of public universities: instability in the work process and inadequate working conditions; and iii) Quality of life and the feeling of satisfaction in being a teacher.

Excess of activities and excessive demands reflecting in work overload

During the focus group sessions in both universities, the participants emphasized the excess of activities in Higher Education teaching, leading to work overload and excessive demands for productivity, thus generating a feeling of exhaustion due to the multiple tasks performed:

Some characteristics of post-modernity are that professors don't have fixed working hours. There's work at night and during the weekends. (P9)

The public university has this aspect, teaching, research and extension; productivity demands apply to all these areas and in the pursuit of science. (P1)

There's a lot of pressure at work that doesn't fit within the working hours; you can't manage to complete all the activities within the university, like reading reports, conducting research and writing articles [...] (P3)

The professors pointed out the multitude of tasks in the teaching, research and extension scopes, in addition to the administrative duties that are imposed on the job, which results in exhaustion for the workers. Employment contracts are for a mean of 40 hours; however, this hour load is frequently exceeded, encroaching into the hours devoted to rest and leisure.

Nevertheless, internal and external stressors in a specific environment can be considered triggers for mental health deterioration. Such being the case, the work environment can also be considered a factor that promotes mental health, as it provides social interactions for people.

Dismantling of public universities: instability in the work process and inadequate working conditions

Currently, in Brazil there is significant political instability with the constant turnover of government ministers, both in Education and Health, which exerts a negative impact on the teaching practice in the health area, especially in Nursing. In addition, it is important to highlight the successive budget cuts in public universities, compromising the work process and working conditions in these institutions:

The current policy involves budget reduction, cuts, reduction of human and material resources. These are situations where we have to create overcoming strategies. (P1)

We have a college that was established, a space for a specific demand, and now the demand is ten times larger, and we don't have a place to work. The physical environment is inadequate, and we lack material resources. (P9)

Our salary is incompatible with the activities we perform. We haven't had wage adjustments for a long time. (P8)

The interviewees emphasize the instability in their teaching activities, as there were references to budget cuts and the reduction of material and human resources. The incompatibility of their salaries with the activities performed is also highlighted. The lack of a space for teaching in the field is a characteristic of colleges; thus, there is shortage of rooms for student guidance and the demand is much greater than in the past due to the increasing number of students. There has been no restructuring of physical spaces to meet the growing number of teaching activities, nor an increase in material resources compatible with technological advancements and the speed of changes in a liquid world.

Quality of life and the feeling of satisfaction in being a teacher

As an intervening factor in this context, which proved to be inadequate for the professors' good quality of life, the feeling of satisfaction resulting from the practice of teaching was highlighted, motivating the professionals to continue their work activities. Developing educational activities brings satisfaction in the workplace, as the act of teaching Nursing reveals competence in teaching and love for the Nursing profession.

Despite the paradox that characterizes this liquid world, I have satisfaction even in the face of so much work, knowing that the hours I work are for the growth of the country and the advancement of science. (P7)

Before being a teacher, I'm a nurse. I love being a nurse. I think this that love for the profession makes me teach it in a better way (P14).

The social recognition of being a professor at a public university has a positive impact on my work-related quality life (P1)

The activities at the university are carried out with a lot of dedication and commitment. And this brings me satisfaction. (P13)

It is noted that, despite negative intervening factors stemming from the current context, the participants feel satisfaction in promoting science and development of the country. The group's perception reveals the paradox between the excess of work and the feeling of satisfaction in being able to contribute to the development of science in the country. Through education, hope is provided to citizens, based on scientific knowledge.

Thus, the social recognition of teaching activities at the university brought motivation and satisfaction to the work done.

DISCUSSION

The internal and external interactions of an individual in work environments promote self-esteem, resilience and emotional skills; however, when compared to stressful environments, they can lead to distress, illness and suicidal thoughts. In light of this, the World Health Organization has prioritized the reporting of work-related diseases⁶.

The globalization process has brought about social, economic, political, scientific, technological and cultural transformations, especially in the labor market, where competitiveness and demands for competencies, skills, initiative and clarity in work performance prevail.

Workplace demotivation also leads to flawed or inefficient performance of activities, with room for the practice of presenteeism, which can be understood as 'absenteeism' with physical presence.

The scientific production associated with work-related disorders is a subject that still generates certain taboo when it comes to bringing such discussion to the Public Health sphere and, thus, leads to lack of incentives for health promotion in this population, oftentimes neglected in the actions of the Reference Centers Specialized in Occupational Health and the National Network of Workers' Health Care, which are part of the Unified Health System services⁷.

In this sense, the professors' role in universities is defined by the Law of National Education Guidelines and Bases, which lists teaching activities and, in Article 43, it establishes actions for teaching and research that are in line with the model currently adopted in public education at Brazilian universities⁸.

Professors take on countless roles, assuming different functions in their work, which can indeed overwhelm them. Following this line of thought, there is a recommendation for studies focused on teachers' working conditions, including those from the Nursing field, as the teaching routine involves multiple tasks with varying hour loads. Professors act as educators and researchers, needing to stay updated with countless technologies that emerge constantly in the liquid world⁹.

In this perspective, with the speed of changes, teachers become part of the Neoliberal production mode at the expense of physical and mental health, most of the times without realizing it in the process they are involved in¹⁰. In this way, precarization is observed in the world of work marked by the increase in unemployment, labor devaluation, reduction of workers' rights and increasingly low salaries¹¹.

For Nursing faculty, there is an increasing demand for participation in scientific events and for more publications, leading to an intensified pace and work overload, as well as a salary gap over the years affecting teaching and research quality and the health of these workers^{11,12}.

In this scenario, workers' exposure to humiliating and embarrassing situations, with long-lasting negative and inhumane hierarchical differences in the workplace, can lead to intense anxiety in them and subsequently trigger diseases such as depression and other psychosomatic ailments¹³.

Teachers need to engage in research activities as a requirement of universities and publish in scientific journals. As time is insufficient to carry out all activities during the workday, these activities are performed outside working hours, compromising rest and leisure, as well as the workers' health care⁹.

Regarding the dismantling of public universities, it becomes necessary to recall the Brazilian recent history in terms of political, economic and legal issues. Thus, the State gradually began to shirk its responsibilities for investments in public education, as provided by the 1988 Constitution, by reducing the budget of public universities, while simultaneously encouraging the private sector¹⁴.

It is noted that the material and human resources are insufficient for the proper development of the activities proposed. There is a significant imbalance in the effort undertaken by teachers, which affects their physical and emotional health. The work process for the development of teaching, research and extension activities becomes inadequate, with working conditions that sometimes lead to workers' exhaustion¹⁵.

The impairment of the work organization and process resulting from the dismantling of public universities implies unfavorable working conditions. Thus, there is a need for investment in public universities and, above all, for the withdrawal of Constitutional Amendment 95/16, which freezes spending on health and education for 20 years. Therefore, funding should be provided for the development of teaching, research and extension, in the advancement of science and technology, as well as investments in laboratories and research grants, in short, in the physical structure of the university and its maintenance.

Thus, throughout the exposure to the teaching work, post-traumatic stress and Burnout Syndrome signs and symptoms can emerge, which can be preventable and/or manageable if diagnosed, as well as physiological disorders, alcoholism, drug addiction and even suicide⁶.

University professors undergo pressure to meet targets and, consequently, the pressure for increased productivity is reconfiguring the teaching work and transcending the physical boundaries of the university, with transfer of work activities to the home environment, directly impacting their health¹⁶. Nursing teachers' work encompasses the teaching-learning process activities, as well as the demands for countless research and extension tasks¹⁷.

In a research study on university professors' quality of life and lifestyle, a contradiction is made evident in the teachers' labor relations, highlighting that, despite the difficulties encountered in teaching, many of them consider their work challenging and meaningful. This generates a feeling of satisfaction despite recognizing negative factors in the work environment⁹.

In the perspective of subjectivity, the construction of the labor sense marked by recognition can be somewhat positive when work is based on sublimation conditions of distress, such as recognition, solidarity and autonomy¹⁸.

Study limitations

The study was conducted only at two public universities located in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, precludes generalizing the results to all educators in the country. However, this study can be replicated with other groups of educators who experience activities similar to the participants in this research, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the information, as well as improving service and quality in the education area.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The teaching work in the liquid world holds distinctive characteristics inherent to the practice of education, when compared to other groups of workers. However, in times of liquid modernity, freedom and autonomy appear disguised as subordinated to new institutional arrangements and increased productivity.

The results of this study contribute to expanding Nursing professors' knowledge regarding their Work-Related Quality of Life in the context of the liquid world configuration. In addition, this study also contributes to targeting policies and reflective practices that act on the prevention of stressful events and on the promotion of work-related quality. In addition to that, it is hoped that the results presented will guide new scientific productions based on respect for human dignity and work-related quality of life.

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Author's contributions

Conceptualization, SNPF; methodology, SNPF; software, não se aplica; validation, SNPF; formal analysis, SNPF, KGS and JMS; investigation, SNPF, KGS and JMS; resources, SNPF and NVDOS; data curation, SNPF and NVDOS; manuscript writing, SNPF, KGS, JMS; ECC, TCMMLV and NVDOS; manuscript review and editing, SNPF, KGS, JMS; ECC, TCMMLV and NVDOS; visualization, KGS; supervision, NVDOS; project administration, NVDOS; financial acquisition, SNPF and NVDOS. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.