

Work And Mental Health: A Systematic Review Of Anxiety, Stress And Burnout Among University Professors

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between work and mental health, with a focus on anxiety, stress and burnout among university lecturers working in higher education institutions. To this end, a systematic review was carried out by searching for articles on the Google Scholar, Scielo and Web Of Science platforms. The inclusion criteria included only national articles associated with the subject of this research and published between 2022 and 2023. As a result, a sample of 7 articles was obtained, where it was possible to see that the relationship between work and the mental health of university lecturers highlights a challenging scenario that requires immediate interventions. Labour conditions and work overload, the main catalysts for the decline in mental health, highlight the need for an equitable distribution of responsibilities. Analysis of psychosocial factors reveals the complexity of relationships, with work organization, socio-professional relations and gender disparities directly influencing the experience of professionals. These factors result in symptoms of anxiety, insomnia, stress and emotional exhaustion, which reinforces the importance of institutional policies and practices aimed at promoting the mental health of university lecturers.

Key Word: Mental health; anxiety; stress; burnout; teachers.

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I. Introduction

The relationship between work and mental health is an intrinsic connection that plays a crucial role in the overall balance of human well-being. The professional environment can be both a source of fulfillment and satisfaction and a challenge that negatively impacts mental health. The way people experience work, their working conditions and the support available play determining roles in this dynamic (VAZQUEZ-COLUNGA et al., 2017)

According to Campos, Vêras and Araújo (2020), the relationship between work and mental health takes on a specific dimension when it comes to university teachers working in higher education institutions. Although this pedagogical context offers flexibility in terms of location and timetables, it presents unique challenges that can have an impact on educators' mental health. Face-to-face teaching, characterized by face-to-face interaction and traditional classroom dynamics, places specific demands on teachers.

Teaching at higher education institutions involves constant management of various aspects, such as content development, student guidance and participation in academic activities. The need to adapt to new teaching methodologies, as well as the pressure to maintain high quality standards, can generate anxiety among teachers. The responsibility for the effectiveness of the teaching process and the academic training of students adds a

significant burden to teachers and can have a significant impact on their mental health (PEREZ; BRUN; RODRIGUES, 2019).

Stress is another critical dimension to be explored in this context. University lecturers often deal with tight deadlines to revise and update teaching materials, answer student queries and take part in academic activities. The need to balance administrative and academic demands, often under pressure, can contribute to stress associated with the need to face the challenges inherent to teaching in public higher education institutions (ALVIM et al., 2019).

However, burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and a diminished sense of professional achievement, is also a significant concern. Teachers can experience burnout due to the intensity of the demands, the lack of meaningful face-to-face interactions and the possible sense of isolation arising from the academic environment. The challenge of maintaining a healthy balance between academic responsibilities and personal life can contribute to the manifestation of burnout (MASSA et al., 2016).

Faced with this problem, the aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between work and mental health, with a focus on anxiety, stress and burnout among university lecturers working in higher education institutions. It is hoped that the results of the research will provide theoretical and practical support on mental health in higher education teaching work. Analyzing these aspects will contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the implications of the work environment on teachers' mental health, enabling the development of effective strategies and policies to promote well-being.

II. Material And Methods

This study consisted of a systematic review, which is a type of research that uses a rigorous methodological approach to identify, analyze and synthesize evidence on a given topic (BRIZOLA; FANTIN, 2016). In the case of this study, the systematic review aimed to synthesize scientific articles associated with mental health in teaching work, with an emphasis on studies that address anxiety, stress and burnout.

The systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which, according to Galvão and Ricarte (2019), provide a detailed protocol for planning, conducting and reporting systematic reviews. These guidelines were chosen to ensure transparency, methodological rigor and quality in the presentation of results.

For the survey of studies, a systematic search was carried out on electronic database platforms such as Google Scholar, Scielo and Web of Science, using search terms for the theme of the review. The survey included the use of keywords associated with search descriptors, resulting in the following search sequence: ("mental health") and ("university professor") and ("anxiety" or "depression" or "burnout") and ("federal" or "public").

Inclusion criteria were established to select studies that met the specific objectives of the review. Thus, articles were included that directly addressed the relationship between work and mental health among university professors, covering topics such as anxiety, stress and burnout. The articles had to be of Brazilian nationality and published between 2022 and 2023.

Exclusion criteria were applied to remove studies that were not aligned with the objectives of the review or that did not meet the predefined criteria. In this way, the exclusion criteria included studies that were not of Brazilian nationality, as well as theses, articles, dissertations, monographs and expanded abstracts.

Analyzing the included studies involved the systematic extraction of data, such as the methods used, objectives, results and conclusions, as suggested by Donato and Donato (2019). Initial screening was carried out by checking the place of publication, title and abstract. During the initial screening, the selection process was conducted in order to identify studies that met the preliminary criteria of relevance and quality.

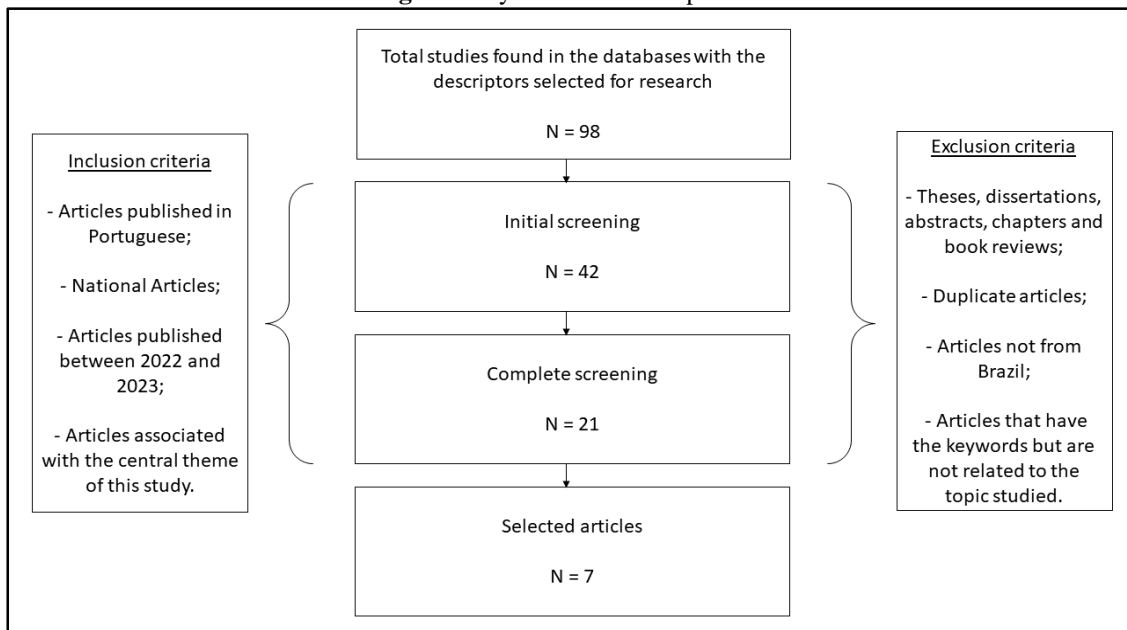
Checking the place of publication provided a preliminary assessment of the reputation and credibility of the sources, helping to identify recognised and reputable academic journals. This stage allowed for initial filtering, focusing on research from reliable and recognised sources in the academic field.

In addition, analyzing the titles of the studies played a crucial role in determining their thematic suitability and in identifying research that directly addressed the relationship between work and the mental health of university lecturers. The titles acted as initial indicators of the areas of focus and objectives of the research, enabling a more precise selection aligned with the purposes of the systematic review.

Subsequently, the full screening was carried out, which involved a thorough and comprehensive reading of the articles selected during the initial screening. This critical phase of the process allowed for an in-depth analysis of the methodologies, results and conclusions presented in each study. The full reading provided a more detailed understanding of the methodological quality, making it possible to assess the robustness of the research and the reliability of the data collected.

As a result of the systematic review process, seven articles were selected, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Systematic review process



Source: Research data (2023).

After selecting the articles, the data was organized in a spreadsheet to summarize the main results obtained. The organization involved the names of the authors, the objectives and the conclusions of the research.

III. Result and discussion

After carrying out the systematic review, it was possible to obtain a sample of 7 articles on mental health in higher education teaching, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Articles selected in the systematic review

Authors	Objective	Methodology	Conclusions
Cancian et al. (2023)	To investigate the quality of life perceived by university professors in four dimensions: mental health; physical health; social relationships and environmental relationships.	Quantitative exploratory research	The results show that teachers perceive a satisfactory quality of life. However, information related to mental health reveals the presence of weaknesses among educators. It was observed that 40 per cent of the participants face some form of mental health condition, either in isolation or in combination, as well as showing signs of physical and mental exhaustion during the course of their work.
Soares and Rosseto (2023)	To identify the main risk factors for psychological illness among teachers in higher education and their relationship with work.	Bibliographic research	The results highlight a clear relationship between teaching practice and various risk factors for mental health, such as work overload, administrative demands, overtime, pressure for productivity, limited resources and loss of career rights. In addition, signs of psychological impairment were observed, such as chronic fatigue, stress, insomnia, lack of motivation, anxiety symptoms, chronic pain and depressive symptoms. The central conclusion is that teachers' health is intrinsically linked to working conditions, individualisation and the capitalist system, where education is often adjusted to suit the interests of this system. The intense workload, combined with constant pressure, contributes to the decline in teachers' mental health, highlighting the urgent need for attention and specific interventions in the educational and social spheres.
Souza and Lima (2023)	To identify the main symptoms and/or signs of mental illness among Brazilian higher education teachers,	Systematic review	Excessive workload, deteriorating working conditions and socio-professional relations emerge as the main drivers of health problems, stress and professional exhaustion in the academic environment. These factors therefore impact on various areas of the worker's life, jeopardizing emotional and social ties and restricting the time available for leisure activities and health care. Despite the suffering evident in the work environment of university lecturers, it was observed that these professionals manage to find moments of pleasure and satisfaction in

			carrying out their duties.
Fernandes, Marinho and Schmidt (2022)	Analyzing the production of knowledge on the mental health of higher education teachers	Literature review	The categories that emerged from this analysis included psychosocial risk factors for mental health, encompassing subcategories such as the context of institutions/work organization, dissatisfaction and job satisfaction, working conditions, socio-professional relations, gender issues and health repercussions. It was clear that the challenges faced by education professionals are closely linked to work organization, demands for productivity, increased working hours, flexible working relationships, overload, excessive institutional control, lack of autonomy and social and financial devaluation. These elements have a negative impact on the mental health of these workers.
Santos, Neves and Cunha (2023)	Investigating multiple stressors and their risk factors for psychological illness in university professors	Integrative review	Most of the articles examined highlighted work overload as the main factor associated with the psychological problems faced by university professors. The results of this study indicate that university professors in Brazil face significant workloads, and this grueling routine has negative consequences for their health.
Machado et al. (2022)	To assess the quality of life and identify aspects of physical and mental health related to the professional practice of teachers at a public higher education institution in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.	Descriptive, cross-sectional and quantitative study	The results indicate a high rate of complaints related to physical and mental exhaustion in the workplace. With regard to quality of life, the data revealed higher scores in the domains of general quality of life, housing and social relations, with averages of 3.81, 3.79 and 3.47, respectively. Notably, the engineering professors had higher averages ($p = 0.04$) in quality of life. In this context, the study emphasizes the need for greater attention to be paid to the physical and mental health of university lecturers, with a view to improving working conditions and, consequently, quality of life.
Silva and Roazzi (2023)	To investigate how two elements of subjective well-being (life satisfaction and positive and negative affections) relate to the mental health of university lecturers in their workplace.	A quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional study.	The study addresses the relationship between subjective well-being and mental health in university professors, where it was found that life satisfaction and affect can influence professors' mental health at work, but this influence is not limited to the professional environment, but also affects other areas of social relations. Further research, including longitudinal studies and analyses in different occupational sectors and locations, is recommended for a more complete understanding of these complex relationships.

Source: Research data (2023).

Based on the authors' conclusions, there is a need to address working conditions, overload and psychosocial factors in order to promote the mental health of university lecturers. As evidenced in the study by Cancian et al. (2023), although teachers perceive a satisfactory overall quality of life, the presence of weaknesses in mental health, including signs of physical and mental exhaustion, highlights the need for specific attention to mental health issues.

In this sense, Soares and Rosseto (2023) converge on crucial conclusions regarding the mental health of teachers. The identification of a clear relationship between teaching practice and risk factors, such as work overload and constant pressure, highlights a worrying reality that demands the immediate implementation of specific interventions. Understanding this direct link between teaching responsibilities and mental health challenges underlines the urgency of systematically addressing the decline that educators face in this regard.

Work overload has emerged as one of the main catalysts for the decline in teachers' mental health. The constant accumulation of administrative tasks, lesson preparation, student assessment and other responsibilities demand a significant amount of time and energy, often going beyond reasonable limits. This scenario contributes directly to educators' physical and mental exhaustion, justifying the need for interventions that address the equitable distribution of responsibilities and promote a more manageable workload.

In addition to work overload, the constant pressures present in the educational environment are identified as another determining risk factor for teachers' mental health. Society's growing expectations, administrative demands and the diversity of students' needs form a challenging context in which teachers operate on a daily basis. Awareness of these factors, as evidenced by the studies, highlights the importance of interventions aimed at reducing external pressures and providing an environment more conducive to teachers' mental well-being.

Administrative demands, which are often excessive and disproportionate, overload educators, requiring overtime and imposing constant pressure for productivity. The combination of these factors, together with limited resources and the loss of career rights, creates an adverse working environment that challenges the balance between professional and personal life.

The immediate consequence of these adverse conditions is evidenced by the signs of psychological impairment observed in teachers. Chronic fatigue, due to the excessive workload, manifests itself as a constant presence of physical and mental exhaustion. Stress, exacerbated by uninterrupted demands and pressure for productivity, contributes to an environment conducive to the development of anxiety symptoms and insomnia, directly affecting the quality of teachers' sleep.

Lack of motivation, a symptom commonly associated with adverse working conditions, is a clear indication of the erosion of psychological well-being. In addition, the manifestation of chronic pain suggests an interconnection between accumulated stress and the adverse physical effects on teachers' bodies. Depressive symptoms, another worrying development, point to the urgent need to address the working conditions that contribute to the decline in the mental health of these professionals.

Understanding these psychological symptoms not only highlights the challenges faced by teachers, but also emphasizes the urgency of implementing intervention strategies. Promoting a more equitable working environment, reviewing excessive administrative demands, providing adequate resources and valuing career rights are key elements in mitigating these adverse impacts on educators' mental health.

Souza and Lima (2023) add that excessive workload, when analyzed in conjunction with deteriorating working conditions, emerges as one of the main drivers of the mental health problems faced by professionals. The constant accumulation of responsibilities and tasks, often exacerbated by tight deadlines and increasing demands, creates an environment favorable to the development of stress and professional exhaustion among workers.

Poor working conditions play a crucial role in this scenario, as they directly affect the quality of the working environment. Unfavorable environments, a lack of adequate resources, insufficient support systems and a lack of recognition are all factors that contribute to the deterioration of working conditions. These elements combined intensify the negative impact on professionals' mental health, increasing the risks of stress and exhaustion.

Furthermore, socio-professional relationships play a fundamental role in the mental health equation in the workplace. When interactions between colleagues, superiors and subordinates are characterized by tension, lack of support and inadequate communication, the environment becomes prone to conflict and contributes to the deterioration of professionals' psychological well-being. Social isolation in the workplace can further accentuate the feeling of being overwhelmed and aggravate mental health problems.

Fernandes, Marinho and Schmidt (2022) point out that there are several categories that constitute psychosocial risk factors for the mental health of education professionals. These categories encompass subcategories that shed light on different aspects of the work environment of these workers. The context of the institutions and the organization of work emerge as determining factors, outlining the conditions in which educators perform their duties. Dissatisfaction and job satisfaction represent subcategories that directly reflect the subjective experience of professionals, while working conditions point to the tangible elements that shape the labor scenario.

Socio-professional relationships emerge as another important category, highlighting the importance of interpersonal interactions in the workplace. Gender issues also become a point of analysis, indicating that gender disparities can influence the experiences and challenges faced by education professionals. Finally, the health repercussions category encompasses the direct consequences of exposure to these risk factors, revealing the negative impacts on workers' mental health.

The challenges faced by education professionals are deeply intertwined with the organization of work. Demands for productivity, increased working hours and more flexible labor relations emerge as crucial elements that contribute to the overload and exhaustion of these professionals. Excessive institutional control, lack of autonomy and social and financial devaluation add additional layers of stress and dissatisfaction, amplifying the risks to mental health.

According to Santos, Neves and Cunha (2023), work overload is consistently identified as the predominant factor associated with the psychological problems faced by university professors. University lecturers in Brazil face substantial workloads. This grueling routine not only reflects the pressures inherent in the academic environment, but also has direct and negative implications for the mental health of these professionals.

Work overload for university professors can manifest itself in various ways, including the need to deal with a significant load of classes, administrative responsibilities, student guidance, research, and other professional commitments. The accumulation of these responsibilities, often exacerbated by tight deadlines and the constant pressure to produce results, contributes to a working environment where stress and exhaustion become prevalent.

The grueling routine of university lecturers not only impacts on the quality of the work they do, but also has direct consequences for their physical and mental health. The chronic stress associated with work overload can lead to a range of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression and professional burnout. In addition, the impact on physical health can manifest itself through symptoms such as constant fatigue, sleep problems and other indicators of physical wear and tear.

Machado et al. (2022) reveal a worrying scenario, showing a high rate of complaints related to physical and mental exhaustion among professionals in the workplace. This finding points to the urgency of addressing issues related to occupational health, emphasizing the importance of developing strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of these conditions on workers' well-being.

With regard to assessing quality of life, the data collected in the studies by Machado et al. (2022) provide a broad view of the situation, highlighting that the highest scores were observed in the domains of general quality of life, housing and social relations, reaching averages of 3.81, 3.79 and 3.47, respectively. These positive results in certain aspects suggest that, despite the adversities in the work environment, there are areas of professionals' lives that still enjoy satisfactory levels of quality.

In the context of these results, it is important to pay special attention to the physical and mental health of university lecturers. Recognising the overload faced by these professionals and implementing concrete measures to improve working conditions becomes imperative. By addressing the specific demands of higher education, institutions can contribute not only to the individual well-being of teachers, but also to promoting a healthier and more productive academic environment.

Finally, Silva and Roazzi (2023) emphasize the existence of an interconnection between the subjective well-being and mental health of university professors. The central finding suggests that life satisfaction and affect play crucial roles in influencing the mental health of these professionals in the workplace. In addition, the authors point to a relevance that transcends professional boundaries, also affecting other spheres of teachers' social relationships.

The discovery that the influence of these factors is not restricted to the professional context highlights the complexity of these relationships. This suggests that the impact of teachers' subjective well-being and mental health is not limited to the specific demands of the academic environment, but permeates various aspects of their social lives. This finding broadens the understanding of how life satisfaction can shape mental health and, consequently, the overall quality of teachers' social interactions.

Given these findings, there is a need for more in-depth research. The suggestion of longitudinal studies highlights the importance of understanding dynamics over time, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of changes in teachers' perceptions of well-being and mental health. In addition, the recommendation for analyses in different occupational sectors and locations recognises the diversity of contexts in which university professors are inserted, providing a more complete and contextualized understanding of these complex relationships.

IV. Conclusion

This systematic review found that the relationship between work and mental health, with a focus on anxiety, stress and burnout among university professors, reveals a challenging and urgent scenario that demands attention and specific interventions. Work overload, highlighted as one of the main catalysts of mental health decline, emerges as a central concern, highlighting the need to address the equitable distribution of responsibilities.

In addition, the constant pressures in the educational environment, stemming from society's growing expectations and administrative demands, increase the challenges faced by teachers. The lack of adequate resources, excessive institutional control and the loss of career rights create an adverse environment that challenges the balance between professional and personal life, causing emotional exhaustion in higher education teaching work. These adverse conditions manifest themselves in university lecturers through anxiety symptoms, insomnia, chronic fatigue, lack of motivation and even depressive symptoms.

The direct relationship between deteriorating working conditions and psychological impairment highlights the urgent need for interventions. Promoting a more equitable working environment, reviewing excessive administrative demands and valuing career rights are crucial elements in mitigating the adverse impacts on educators' mental health.

The analysis of psychosocial factors, categorized by different studies, reveals the complexity of these relationships. In this scenario, work organization, socio-professional relations and gender disparities directly influence the experience of education professionals. However, a lack of support, inadequate communication and social isolation in the workplace aggravate mental health problems.

The need to pay special attention to the physical and mental health of university teachers is evident, recognising the adversities they face and implementing concrete measures to improve working conditions. Promoting a healthier academic environment not only benefits the individual well-being of teachers, but also contributes to the overall quality of social interactions.

Given these findings, it is imperative to carry out more in-depth research, including longitudinal studies that allow for a more comprehensive understanding of changes in perceptions of well-being over time. The diversity of contexts in which university professors find themselves highlights the importance of analyses in different occupational sectors and locations, providing a more complete and contextualized understanding of these complex relationships.

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