

Factors Associated With Occupational Stress In Teaching Work: A Study With Professors Of A Federal University In The Municipality Of Três Rios/Rj, Brazil

Anselmo Ferreira dos Santos¹, Eleonora Barbosa Santiago da Costa², Lucas Alves de Oliveira Lima³, Adilson Gomes de Campos⁴, Karen Cristina Barreto Trovão Rodrigues⁵, Helberty Vinicios Coelho⁶, Hilton Giovani Neves⁷, Maria Amélia dos Santos Peres⁸

¹(Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Amazonas, Brazil)

²(Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Amazonas, Brazil)

³(Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

⁴(University of Várzea Grande, Brazil)

⁵(Federal University of the State of Amazonas, Brazil)

⁶(Vale do Rio Doce University, Brazil)

⁷(Matogrosso State University, Brazil)

⁸(Matogrosso State University, Brazil)

Abstract: *The present research aimed to analyze the main factors associated with occupational stress in teaching work at a Brazilian Federal University. To this end, an exploratory research with a qualitative approach was carried out through the application of in-depth interviews with a sample consisting of 15 teachers. As a result, it was found that stressors were associated with work overload, relationship difficulties, lack of appreciation, poor remuneration and inadequate work infrastructure. Work overload was shown to be the main stressor, which shows that teachers' routine is characterized by an excessive load of activities and responsibilities, leading to a significant impact on physical and mental health. Thus, it is necessary to implement stress management and well-being policies in the academic environment, seeking to reduce overload and promote a healthier and more welcoming environment for teachers. In addition, investing in training programs and emotional support for teachers can contribute to facing these challenges and improving the quality of life at work.*

Key Word: *Occupational stress; Well-being; Teacher.*

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I. Introduction

Occupational stress is an increasingly present phenomenon in modern society, affecting individuals from all professional spheres. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, work dynamics were drastically transformed, generating new challenges and pressures for workers. Since then, occupational stress has become a growing concern, and this is no different in the context of teaching work. In a world characterized by accelerated rhythms, ambitious goals and a constant search for productivity, the pressures of the work environment have become a significant challenge for many people, especially for teachers (BAIÃO; CUNHA, 2013; FERNANDES; VANDERBERGUE, 2018).

In the context of higher education teaching work, occupational stress takes on a particularly relevant and complex dimension. This is because teachers face unique challenges in their work environment, ranging from increasing pressure to achieve positive academic results to managing dysfunctional behaviors in the classroom. The demanding nature of the educational profession, coupled with scarce resources, constant changes in educational systems and the lack of adequate recognition, can contribute significantly to increased stress levels in this professional group (SOUZA; LIMA, 2022).

Occupational stress is characterized by being, according to Silva and Salles (2016), a negative response of the individual to the demands and pressures of the work environment. It is, therefore, a physical, mental and emotional reaction that occurs when work demands exceed the worker's ability to deal with them adequately. This phenomenon affects different aspects of the professional's life, including their physical, mental and social health. Occupational stress can be the result of several sources, such as tight deadlines, excessive responsibilities, interpersonal conflicts and lack of autonomy, generating a negative impact on both the physical and mental health of workers.

The physical consequences of occupational stress in teachers' work can be significant and affect teachers' overall health in a number of ways. The strain caused by the pressures of the work environment can lead to a range of health problems, both short- and long-term. One of the most common effects is the emergence of physical symptoms such as frequent headaches, muscle tension, back, neck and shoulder pain, as well as gastrointestinal problems such as heartburn and ulcers. Stress can also lead to a weakened immune system, making teachers more susceptible to infections and diseases (PRADO, 2016).

Nevertheless, occupational stress in teaching work has significant consequences for teachers' mental health. Constant pressure, task overload and lack of recognition can lead to the emergence of symptoms of anxiety and depression. It should also be noted that feelings of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, characteristic of burnout syndrome, are often observed in this context (ALVES; NETO, 2019).

As Costa and Neto (2020) reiterate, the situation of occupational stress in teaching work is especially worrying, considering the particularities and challenges faced by these professionals. The technological revolution and changes in education have created a scenario in which teachers constantly need to adapt to new methodologies, deal with students with different needs and face pressure for exceptional academic results.

In view of this problem, the present research aimed to analyze the factors associated with occupational stress at work of university professors at a Brazilian university. It is expected that the results of this research will provide theoretical and practical subsidies on the factors associated with occupational stress in this professional group. By understanding the factors associated with occupational stress in university teachers, it will be possible to identify possible points of intervention and implement appropriate preventive and support measures.

II. Material And Methods

The present research was characterized as exploratory, since the intention was to analyze the factors associated with occupational stress in teaching work at a Brazilian Federal University. This method was chosen due to the need to investigate a phenomenon that has not yet been studied and to understand the complexity of university teachers' experiences in relation to occupational stress. This type of research allowed the collection of initial information, the identification of relevant variables and the deepening of knowledge on the subject, making it possible to direct future research in a more precise and grounded way.

As for the approach, this research was configured as qualitative, which allowed a more in-depth and detailed analysis of the experiences and perceptions of teachers in relation to occupational stress. As Godoy (1995) points out, the qualitative approach is especially suitable for investigating complex and little explored phenomena, such as occupational stress in the university context. Through in-depth interviews and careful observations, it was possible to capture the richness and diversity of teachers' reports, as well as to understand the influence of contextual and individual factors in this process.

The qualitative approach allowed participants to express their experiences more broadly and in their own terms, which enriched the understanding of the phenomenon under study. In addition, the flexibility characteristic of this type of research made it possible for new insights to emerge during the data collection process, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of aspects related to university teachers' occupational stress.

The sample of this research, which constitutes the universe of participants in a given population (MATTAR, 2001; MALHOTRA, 2011), was composed of 15 university professors from a university that is located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The selection was made through convenience sampling, where the criterion for choosing the respondents was based on the practicality and accessibility of the teachers available to participate in the study, corroborating what Meister and Freitag (2018) suggest. Thus, the sample consisted of university professors who were willing to collaborate voluntarily, facilitating data collection and streamlining the research process. Previous contact was made with potential participants through e-mails and in person, explaining the objectives and relevance of the research. Subsequently, teachers who showed interest and availability were included in the sample.

For data collection, fieldwork was conducted with face-to-face visits to the University in order to obtain direct interaction with the lecturers. The fieldwork was directed under the application of in-depth interviews with the teachers. In-depth interviews are, as Duarte (2004) points out, a qualitative data collection technique that seeks to understand the perspective, experiences, knowledge and opinions of the participants in a more in-depth way. In this context, the teachers were the participants of the interviews, and the objective was to analyze the main factors associated with occupational stress among these professionals.

The application of in-depth interviews provided a space for participants to express themselves in a more detailed and open way, allowing a more in-depth analysis of the main factors associated with stress in their professional activities. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire, which is an approach that combines closed questions with open questions that allow broader and more diverse answers (FREITAS; AGUIAR, 2021). The questionnaire contained open-ended questions related to the topic of study, but allowed teachers to provide detailed answers and explore their experiences more freely.

The interviewees' responses were noted and, in addition, all in-depth interviews were recorded with the agreement of the respondents. In order to maintain the anonymity of the teachers, all recordings were properly coded and stored securely, ensuring that the identities of the participants were preserved throughout the process of analysis and dissemination of the results. When coding the recordings, interviewees were assigned codes rather than using their real names.

As this is an exploratory research with a qualitative approach, the focus is tied around the perceptions of the subjects. Because of this, the technique of discourse analysis was used to analyze the data, thus encompassing the detailed examination of in-depth interviews with teachers, with the aim of identifying linguistic patterns, meanings and discursive constructions that reveal the perceptions and visions of the participants on the subject under study, which is occupational stress among teachers.

III. Result

After data collection, it was possible to verify, first, the profile of the teachers interviewed. As a result, it was found that the sample was composed of eight men and six women, which shows the male predominance. The interviewees had a diversity of ages, with the age range varying from 32 to 57 years. This range of ages may reflect the presence of younger professionals who have just entered the teaching career, as well as those with more experience accumulated over the years. As for the degree of education, seven of the interviewees have a master's degree, six have a doctorate and two have a post-doctorate.

In relation to the main theme of this study, which is occupational stress, teachers were asked about the main factors that contribute to generating stress at work. Based on the answers obtained, it was found that the majority of teachers, in a total of six people, emphasized that the main stress factor is linked to work overload, involving elements such as lack of time to carry out all the required activities, excessive responsibilities, large volume of corrections of tests and works, in addition to an extensive workload of classes.

Teaching work is stressful due to the workload we have. In addition to face-to-face classes, we have to do research, attend meetings, plan classes at home and correct tests. This is exhausting (E4).

The main factor that generates stress is the excessive responsibility that we teachers have. As we are teachers at a Federal University, this responsibility becomes even greater. With this, stress is inevitable (E7).

We teachers should be more valued. We have an extensive teaching load, not to mention that we often have to work from home to get everything done (E14).

It is observed that teaching work involves a series of demands and responsibilities that contribute significantly to teachers' occupational stress. The responses of the teachers interviewed show that work overload is a central issue that negatively impacts the emotional and physical health of these professionals. The teaching routine goes beyond classroom lessons, encompassing several activities that often occur outside formal working hours. The need to balance the preparation of classes, the correction of assignments and tests, the involvement in research and projects, as well as participation in academic meetings, creates a scenario where the pressure is constant and the demands never seem to cease.

Lack of time is a recurring complaint, and this shortage of hours available to fulfill all professional responsibilities ends up affecting other aspects of the teacher's life. The intense dedication to work can lead to a decrease in the time dedicated to family, friends and leisure activities, compromising the balance between professional and personal life. The pressure for academic results, especially in renowned institutions such as a Federal University, can create a competitive and stressful environment. Professors feel obliged to produce quality research, maintain a high standard of teaching and achieve stringent performance targets, further increasing stress levels.

In addition to work overload, four of the teachers emphasized that the stressors come from relationship difficulties with students and even with the head. As reported by the respondents, relationship difficulties with students and management are additional factors that contribute significantly to occupational stress. These aspects highlight the complexity of interpersonal relationships within the educational environment and how they can affect the well-being of teachers. The statements transcribed below show the teachers' reports.

Dealing with the students, who are mostly young, creates a lot of stress. Most are not interested in the class, and only come to mess around on their cell phones or chat. It is exhausting, discouraging and stressful (E10).

What generates stress is the management. It is difficult to deal with them, there is always a divergence of ideas and some conflicts, which is normal, but ends up generating stress (E11).

In view of the above, it is notorious that relationship difficulties with students and management are crucial issues that directly affect teachers' professional lives, causing occupational stress. Teaching is a profession that requires a high degree of interpersonal interaction, and the quality of these relationships directly influences the emotional well-being and job satisfaction of educators.

Regarding students, teachers expressed concern about disinterest and inappropriate behavior in the classroom. The lack of engagement on the part of students generates demotivation for teachers, who strive to create interesting and educational classes. Student disinterest is a challenging factor, as teachers wish to arouse

interest in learning and provide a stimulating teaching environment. When students show apathy or inappropriate behavior in the classroom, teachers feel frustrated and discouraged, and question whether their efforts are being appreciated.

In addition to generating stress, a lack of student engagement can affect the pace of the lesson, compromising the progress of the content and the effectiveness of the educational process. This dynamic can generate a cycle of demotivation, where students' lack of interest negatively influences teachers' motivation, resulting in less inspiring lessons and, in turn, further fueling students' disinterest.

On the other hand, the relationship with the manager is also highlighted as a significant source of occupational stress. The conflicts and divergences of ideas mentioned by teachers reveal the complexity of hierarchical relationships and the importance of effective communication in this context. It is natural that differences of opinion exist in any professional environment, including educational institutions, where different perspectives and approaches can enrich the decision-making process and enhance the quality of education. However, when these disagreements are not well managed or not adequately resolved, they can lead to a tense and stressful work environment, as was evidenced in the case of this research.

The lack of clear and open communication between teachers and management can result in misunderstandings, lack of transparency in decisions or even a perceived lack of recognition and appreciation of the work done by teachers. Furthermore, when conflicts are not dealt with constructively, resentment and feelings of animosity can arise between the parties involved, compromising collaboration and teamwork. Teachers who feel undervalued or disregarded by their managers may feel demotivated and less committed to their role, which can negatively impact their performance and the quality of teaching.

It should also be noted that two teachers emphasized that the main stressor is the lack of appreciation, a crucial aspect that negatively affects the emotional well-being and motivation of these professionals, as evidenced by the statements below.

It is the devaluation of the class. Imagine living from a job that is not valued by people (E2).

The lack of recognition gives me a lot of stress. I end up dedicating myself a lot, but there is not much recognition of my work (E8).

The results obtained from the teachers' statements reveal a shared view of devaluation and lack of recognition in their careers. Both teachers reported a constant feeling of discouragement and demotivation in the face of the lack of appreciation of the class. The lack of appreciation of teachers' work can be seen as a reflection of a series of challenges and structural problems present in the educational system and in society as a whole. The devaluation of teachers' work is a complex and multifaceted problem that requires careful analysis to identify its main causes and consequences.

Nevertheless, two teachers pointed out that the main stress factor is poor pay. In this case, it was found that poor pay is a pressing and worrying issue that directly affects teachers' well-being and motivation. The lack of adequate remuneration led to a feeling of discontent and devaluation on the part of teachers. In this case, educators perceived that their efforts and dedication are not properly rewarded in the financial aspect, which contributed to compromising motivation and engagement in the profession. Consequently, this has led to dissatisfaction with pay and additional stress, as many teachers face the need for higher pay to make ends meet.

The remuneration of teachers in Brazil is something that demotivates me. This demotivation ends up generating stress on a daily basis (E1).

The financial issue weighs heavily on occupational stress. I am not from the city, and I end up having additional costs for transportation. It is interesting to know that, many times, the money I receive for my work is not able to cover all my expenses (E3).

The analysis of the statements of the teachers interviewed reinforces the relevance of the issue of poor remuneration in the context of teaching work and how this aspect directly affects the well-being and motivation of these professionals. The perceptions shared by the teachers show that the lack of adequate remuneration is a pressing and worrying factor that negatively impacts the quality of education and the school environment as a whole. Poor remuneration is one of the stress factors faced by teachers, generating a feeling of discontent and dissatisfaction with their financial conditions.

Finally, one teacher highlighted that the stressor is the inadequate infrastructure of the University, as the rooms of the institution have cracks and problems in electrical installations. These circumstances create a stressful and demotivating work environment and compromise the quality of education offered to students. Inadequate physical infrastructure has a significant impact on the experience of professionals working in a given environment, especially in educational institutions such as universities. In this context, occupational stress emerges as a direct consequence of poor facilities and classroom conditions. Cracks and problems in electrical installations pose safety risks to teachers and students. The constant concern for physical safety creates a tense and uncomfortable work environment where professionals are constantly on alert, damaging their psychological well-being.

IV. Conclusion

Based on this exploratory research with a qualitative approach, it was possible to observe a male predominance in the sample and an age range from younger professionals to those with extensive career experience. In addition, teachers have a high level of qualification, with the majority holding a master's degree, doctorate or post-doctorate. The results and analysis of the data obtained in this research revealed the presence of several factors that contribute to the occupational stress of teachers, the main stressors being linked to work overload, relationship difficulties, lack of appreciation, poor remuneration and inadequate work infrastructure.

Occupational stress in teaching work arises as a result of the overload of responsibilities, which encompasses the extensive workload of teaching, conducting research, attending meetings and planning activities at home. This overload leads to a lack of time to fulfill all professional demands, generating an exhausting cycle that affects both teachers' emotional and physical health. The pressure for academic results, especially in prestigious institutions such as a Federal University, further amplifies this stressful scenario.

In addition to work overload, relationship difficulties with students and management were also shown to be relevant stressors. Students' disinterest and inappropriate behavior in the classroom generate frustration and demotivation in teachers, negatively affecting the educational process. In turn, conflicts and disagreements with management create a tense working environment, which can hinder collaboration and teacher satisfaction.

Another factor that contributed significantly to occupational stress was the lack of appreciation and recognition of the teaching profession. The devaluation of teachers' work resulted in demotivation and dissatisfaction with the career, negatively impacting dedication and professional performance. Poor remuneration also stands out as an aspect that causes stress, since it does not meet teachers' basic financial needs. In addition to these factors, the inadequate infrastructure of educational institutions is also pointed out as a source of occupational stress. Problems in the physical facilities of universities have contributed to compromising the safety and well-being of teachers, generating an uncomfortable and tense work environment.

In view of these findings, the importance of addressing the challenges of occupational stress in teaching work becomes evident. Educational institutions, managers and educational policies should act proactively to mitigate stressors, promoting the valorization of the teaching career, offering adequate working conditions, and encouraging a culture of recognition and respect for teachers. In addition, it is essential to seek strategies to balance the burden of teachers' responsibilities and promote a healthy and motivating work environment that favors the quality of education offered to students.

To address these challenges, it is critical that educational institutions prioritize teachers' well-being and provide adequate support. This may include implementing training programs to deal with stress, fostering a collaborative and supportive work environment, as well as reviewing institutional policies to ensure a reasonable and balanced workload. Similarly, teachers themselves can adopt individual strategies to manage stress, such as setting clear priorities, learning to delegate tasks when possible, and seeking activities that promote relaxation and physical and mental recovery.

By taking steps to address the causes of occupational stress and promote a healthier working environment, educational institutions can contribute significantly to the well-being of teachers and, consequently, to the quality of education offered to students. Teachers' work is essential to society, and ensuring that teachers are well supported and empowered is a key investment for the future of education. Therefore, it is crucial that education managers and society at large are aware of the physical consequences

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