

## Psychosocial factors at work and the implications for the quality of life of health professionals

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this study was to analyze the implications of psychosocial factors at work on the quality of life of health professionals. To this end, an exploratory study with a qualitative approach was carried out with 16 health professionals from a private Brazilian hospital located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with the interviewees, and the data was analyzed using the discourse analysis technique. As a result, it was found that the main psychosocial factors impacting on professionals' quality of life are work overload, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, safety at work, professional recognition and appreciation, as well as the balance between personal and professional life. These factors have implications for employees' mental health, such as anxiety, chronic stress and exhaustion, as well as physical health problems such as high blood pressure and gastrointestinal disorders. Thus, psychosocial factors are capable of affecting the quality of life of professionals, and it is therefore necessary to implement mental health support and stress management strategies to mitigate the negative impacts on the occupational health of these workers.*

**Key Word:** *Psychosocial factors; quality of life at work; health professionals.*

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### I. Introduction

Psychosocial work factors play a crucial role in the lives of workers, directly influencing their quality of life and well-being. As Pellegrini et al. (2010) point out, psychosocial work factors refer to elements that have a direct or indirect influence on workers' mental health, well-being and performance. These factors represent an intersection between psychological and social aspects that shape the individual's experience in the professional context.

The main psychosocial factors in the workplace include interpersonal relationships, autonomy at work, work-life balance, workload, recognition and reward for effort. In addition, job security, clarity of expectations and roles, workers' participation in decisions affecting their work and the possibility of professional development also play a key role. These factors have a direct or indirect influence on workers' mental health, well-being and performance, shaping their experience in the professional context and highlighting the importance of a holistic approach to managing and promoting health at work (FISCHER, 2012).

In the context of healthcare, psychosocial factors take on even greater importance, as professionals deal with intense emotional, physical and cognitive demands on a daily basis. The nature of healthcare work is intrinsically challenging, as professionals often deal with life and death situations, time pressures, long working hours and a high degree of responsibility. This can result in significant levels of occupational stress, which in turn affects the mental and physical health of healthcare professionals. Chronic stress can lead to a range of problems, such as burnout, anxiety, depression and exhaustion, negatively impacting the quality of life of these workers (CUNHA; NETO, 2019).

In addition to stress, excessive workload, lack of adequate resources, lack of recognition and relationships with colleagues and superiors are also psychosocial factors that affect healthcare professionals. When these elements are out of balance, job satisfaction can decrease, leading to demotivation and, ultimately, a reduction in the quality of patient care. Relationships with colleagues and superiors play a fundamental role in building a healthy working environment, and conflicts or a lack of social support can aggravate stress and damage quality of life in the health sector (MARCELINO FILHO; ARAÚJO, 2015).

In this sense, the psychosocial factors of work play a fundamental role in the quality of life of health professionals, given the challenging and often stressful nature of this field. The interaction between the psychological and social aspects of work can have significant impacts on the well-being of these professionals, affecting their mental and physical health, job satisfaction and, consequently, the quality of care provided to patients (CAMELO; ANGERAMI, 2008).

Faced with this problem, it is essential to understand how these psychological and social aspects affect the health and performance of healthcare professionals, as well as the implications they can have on the quality of care provided to patients. The aim of this study was therefore to analyze the implications of psychosocial factors at work on the quality of healthcare professionals. The study was limited to health professionals working in a private Brazilian hospital located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

## **II. Material And Methods**

As far as methodology is concerned, this research was characterized as exploratory, since the aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of psychosocial factors and their impact on the quality of life of health professionals in a private Brazilian hospital. As for the approach, this was a qualitative study, given the need to explore the perceptions, experiences and narratives of health professionals in a detailed and contextualized way.

As recommended by Godoy (1995), the qualitative study involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews with healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses and other team members, in order to capture their experiences and perspectives related to psychosocial factors in the workplace. In this case, the sample consisted of 16 professionals, who were selected on the basis of convenience, i.e. based on their availability and willingness to take part in the research.

For data collection, in-depth interviews were applied, which is a type of qualitative interview that aims to deepen the understanding of a specific topic through more extensive and detailed dialogues with the participants (DUARTE, 2004).

Before the interviews began, the interviewees were informed that the information they provided would remain anonymous and that their identities would be preserved. In this context, pseudonyms or fictitious names were created for the respondents, ensuring that their real identities were kept confidential.

The interviews took place on a one-to-one basis, ensuring an environment in which the interviewees felt comfortable sharing their experiences, perceptions and emotions in an open and confidential manner. Each interview was scheduled in advance with the participants, taking into account their availability and time preferences, in order to minimize any interference in their professional activities.

The interviews were conducted using a script of open questions. The script covered aspects such as experiences in the workplace, interactions with colleagues and patients, the psychosocial challenges faced and perceptions of the impact of these factors on the respondents' quality of life. The choice of open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to freely share their experiences and perspectives.

After data collection, the data was analyzed using the technique of discourse analysis, which according to Llombart (1993) is a method of data analysis that aims to prioritize the discourse of the subjects, thus valuing the content captured in the messages. In this context, discourse analysis was used to deepen the understanding of the content of the in-depth interviews, identifying patterns, underlying meanings and linguistic constructions of the respondents.

## **III. Result**

After collecting data from 16 professionals at a private Brazilian hospital located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, it was possible to ascertain the main implications of psychosocial factors on the quality of life of these workers. Initially, the interviewees were asked about the main psychosocial factors that contribute to affecting their quality of life at work. In response, it was observed that the majority of respondents, a total of six individuals, reported that work overload is the main psychosocial factor affecting quality of life at work.

The respondents pointed out that work overload involves aspects such as long working hours, high demand for services, tight deadlines and the need to deal with high-pressure situations constantly, as shown by some of the reports below.

My routine is a constant rush. I work long hours, often without a break. Patients keep coming in and deadlines for records are tight (E2).

What impacts on my quality of life is not just the number of hours, but the intensity of the work. I deal with critical situations all the time, and that wears me down a lot. The pressure to make quick and precise decisions is enormous (E11).

The high demand from patients is incredible. We can't give each one enough attention, and that frustrates me. The deadlines are so tight that I barely have time to breathe between appointments. The pressure is constant, and this affects my quality of life (E7).

The analysis of health professionals' reports reveals a challenging reality in terms of work overload. The descriptions emphasize the persistent high working hours, revealing that many of these professionals face long working hours, often without the opportunity for necessary rest breaks. This points to an imbalance in the relationship between personal and professional life, with a potential impact on health and well-being.

Another notable aspect is the intensity of the work, where these professionals are constantly exposed to critical situations and significant pressures. This constant need to make quick and precise decisions is a source of additional stress, which can lead to emotional and physical exhaustion. The continuous pressure becomes an additional emotional burden, which negatively affects the quality of life of these professionals.

The extraordinary demand for patients is also a critical point. Professionals report difficulty in giving proper attention to each patient due to the high demand, which leads to frustration. In addition, the pressure of tight deadlines for care and documentation results in a working environment that offers little breathing space between tasks. This constant dynamic contributes to a feeling of overload and impairs quality of life.

In addition to work overload, another psychosocial factor that affects the quality of life of professionals is interpersonal relationships in the workplace, both with colleagues and with patients. Factors linked to interpersonal relationships were mentioned by four professionals.

Sometimes dealing with professional colleagues can be a challenge. There isn't always the necessary support, and this can lead to conflict situations. I once had a disagreement with a colleague about a diagnosis, and this led to a tense working environment for some time. This tension affected my quality of life at work (E8).

Dealing with patients is a fundamental part of our work, but it can also be emotionally draining. I remember a case in which I had to break difficult news to a patient and his family. The emotion in the room was overwhelming, and it affected me deeply. Dealing with situations like this requires empathy and compassion, but it can also leave emotional scars and affect my quality of life at work (E5).

The analysis of the health professionals' reports highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, both with professional colleagues and with patients, as a relevant psychosocial factor in the quality of life of these workers. This dimension reflects the complexity of the hospital environment and the impact that interpersonal interactions can have on professionals' experiences.

Relationships with professional colleagues are essential for effective collaboration and a healthy working environment. However, the reports highlight that the dynamics are not always harmonious, and conflicts and lack of support can occur. These tense situations can create a challenging working environment, affecting professionals' quality of life and potentially compromising the quality of care.

Relationships with patients are also crucial, but can be emotionally challenging. Professionals need to show empathy and compassion in delicate situations, such as breaking difficult news or dealing with patients in complex states of health. These situations can be stressful, generating significant emotional impacts and affecting professionals' well-being.

It should also be noted that three professionals pointed out that the main psychosocial factors affecting quality of life are associated with safety at work, involving elements such as infrastructure, occupational risks and safety-related concerns. This dimension of safety at work is highly relevant, as it directly influences the well-being of professionals and their perception of quality of life in the hospital environment.

Without a doubt, it's the lack of safety at work. Working in health involves dealing with sick people, sharp objects, chemical and biological risks. This creates a lot of apprehension about my mental health, which impacts on my quality of life (E15).

For me, safety at work is a constant concern. Often, the facilities are not properly maintained, which creates an environment conducive to accidents, and this concern is reflected in my quality of life, as I can't completely detach myself from these concerns, even outside the work environment (E6).

The results show that safety at work is an extremely important psychosocial factor for health professionals' quality of life. Three interviewees highlighted safety in the workplace as a critical element in their

experiences. This concern covers a variety of aspects, including infrastructure, occupational risks and safety-related anxiety.

The lack of safety in the hospital environment is perceived as a significant source of apprehension, which has direct implications for the mental health of professionals. Constant exposure to occupational risks, such as handling sharp objects and exposure to chemical and biological products, creates an emotional burden that affects quality of life at work. This apprehension is not just limited to working hours, as it has an impact on professionals' daily lives, making it difficult to disconnect from safety-related concerns.

The overall analysis of these results highlights the need to prioritize workplace safety in the health sector. Improvements in infrastructure, safety training and effective policies can play a key role in promoting a safer and healthier working environment for professionals. This, in turn, can contribute to improving the quality of life of healthcare workers, reducing the impact of safety-related apprehension and promoting a more balanced and favorable environment in which to perform their duties.

However, two professionals highlighted lack of recognition and devaluation as the main psychosocial factors affecting quality of life. This dimension of recognition and appreciation plays a significant role in the experiences of health professionals, as it directly influences their satisfaction in the workplace and their psychological well-being.

Lack of recognition refers to the feeling that hard, dedicated work is not properly valued or rewarded. This can include the absence of adequate salary recognition, promotions, praise or positive feedback for a job well done. This lack of recognition can result in demotivation, frustration and professional dissatisfaction, thus affecting quality of life at work.

Devaluation, in turn, refers to the perception that the work carried out in the health sector is not properly respected or considered important. Professionals may feel that their efforts and contributions are undervalued, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and personal devaluation. This, in turn, affects self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Finally, one individual cited the lack of balance between personal and professional life as a psychosocial factor affecting their quality of life in the workplace. This dimension reflects the difficulty of reconciling the demands of professional life in the health sector with personal needs and obligations, such as time for family, leisure and self-care.

With regard to the main implications of psychosocial factors on the quality of life of health professionals, the majority of respondents, 14 in total, reported that these factors have significant implications for workers' mental health. Working conditions directly influence psychological well-being, and the dimensions of job security, recognition and appreciation, as well as the balance between personal and professional life, have profound effects on the mental health of these professionals.

Without a doubt, it's the impact on my mental health. There are days when the stress is beyond normal, and that affects me a lot psychologically (E8).

These factors give me anxiety, which results in insomnia and overeating. This contributes to affecting my quality of life (E3).

The feeling of exhaustion is the main consequence of these factors on my quality of life. Some days I'm exhausted, I don't know how I manage (E11).

Health workers' accounts emphasize the complex interaction between psychosocial factors and their mental health. Stress, anxiety and burnout are common consequences mentioned, reflecting the substantial emotional burden these workers face. Stress is pointed out as a factor that often exceeds normal levels on certain days, significantly impacting psychological well-being. This excessive tension not only damages the quality of life in the workplace, but also has a direct effect on the mental and emotional health of these professionals.

Anxiety is another critical dimension, with reports that psychosocial factors trigger anxious feelings. This anxiety, in turn, generates problems such as insomnia and excessive eating behaviors. Insomnia, in particular, can have detrimental effects on both quality of life and the ability to perform professional duties effectively, creating a cycle of negative impacts.

In addition, the feeling of exhaustion is pointed out as the main consequence of these factors on the quality of life of health professionals. Some professionals report feeling exhausted on certain days, to the point of questioning how they manage to cope with their responsibilities. Burnout is not limited to the professional sphere, as it can also affect personal life, making it a significant challenge in the search for an adequate balance between these spheres.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing psychosocial factors in the work environment of healthcare professionals. In addition, they highlight the need to implement mental health support and stress management strategies to mitigate the negative impacts on the quality of life of these professionals. In this way,

it is possible to ensure that they can continue to provide high-quality care to patients and maintain their own well-being.

The other two professionals reported that the main implications are physical health problems, such as high blood pressure and gastrointestinal disorders. High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a common physical health problem associated with chronic stress. Constant exposure to stressful situations in the workplace can lead to an increase in blood pressure, which in turn increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, strokes and other health problems related to the heart and circulatory system. Chronic stress can trigger changes in the nervous and hormonal systems, which directly influence blood pressure.

Gastrointestinal disorders are another category of physical health problems often associated with psychosocial factors. Stress and anxiety can negatively affect the digestive system, leading to disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and gastric ulcers. Symptoms include stomach pain, bloating, diarrhea or constipation, as well as general discomfort. These disorders can be aggravated or triggered by stressful and emotional situations in the workplace.

Psychosocial factors therefore have an impact on the mental and physical health of health professionals, creating a wide range of challenges and implications. While mental health problems such as stress, anxiety and burnout directly affect the psychological well-being of professionals and can extend beyond the workplace, compromising quality of life and personal and professional balance, physical health problems such as high blood pressure and gastrointestinal disorders highlight the connection between chronic stress and physical illness.

#### IV. Conclusion

This exploratory, qualitative research made it possible to analyze the implications of psychosocial factors on the quality of life of professionals at a Brazilian private hospital located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. The results show that work overload, interpersonal relationships in the workplace, job security, professional recognition and appreciation, and work-life balance all play critical roles in this context.

Work overload was identified as the predominant psychosocial factor affecting professionals' quality of life, with direct implications for mental and physical health. In this scenario, high demand, tight deadlines and constant pressure contribute to stress, anxiety and exhaustion, generating an imbalance between personal and professional life.

It should also be noted that interpersonal relationships in the workplace revealed challenges associated with collaboration and conflict management, affecting the well-being of professionals and the quality of care. Safety at work also emerged as a worrying factor, influencing professionals' mental health due to constant exposure to occupational risks.

In addition, the lack of professional recognition and appreciation affects motivation and job satisfaction, with negative implications for quality of life. Work-life balance is another significant challenge, reflecting the difficulty of reconciling work demands with personal needs.

All of these dimensions, directly or indirectly, have substantial impacts on the mental and physical health of health professionals. With regard to mental health, the main impacts include chronic stress, anxiety and feelings of professional burnout, while the physical implications include high blood pressure and gastrointestinal disorders.

The findings highlight the pressing need to address psychosocial factors in the working environment of healthcare professionals. The implementation of mental health support and stress management strategies is essential to mitigate the negative impacts on the quality of life of these workers, allowing them to continue providing high-quality care to patients. Thus, it is necessary to recognize the connection between chronic stress and physical health problems, which underscores the importance of promoting a healthy and balanced work environment.

Health institutions should therefore adopt proactive measures to improve working conditions, promote a safer working environment, foster professional development and offer mental health support to professionals. In doing so, not only will healthcare professionals benefit, but also the quality of care provided to patients, contributing to more effective and humanized care.

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