

BURNOUT AND ASSOCIATED PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Burnout e riscos psicossociais associados em docentes do ensino superior privado: um estudo quantitativo

Burnout y riesgos psicosociales asociados en docente de la educación superior privada: un estudio cuantitativo

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the association between burnout and psychosocial occupational risk factors among faculty members from private higher education institutions in Espírito Santo, Brazil. A cross-sectional quantitative study was conducted with 114 faculty members who completed a questionnaire including sociodemographic and occupational data, the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, the Work-Related Suffering Indicators Scale, and the Work Organization Scale. High levels of disengagement (78.07%) and exhaustion (71.93%) were identified, along with a highly deteriorated perception of work organization and moderate levels of lack of meaning at work, mental exhaustion, and lack of recognition. Exhaustion was associated with perceived low institutional quality, insufficient time for planning activities, and mental exhaustion. Disengagement was associated with perceived low institutional quality, inadequate remuneration, lack of recognition, lack of meaning at work, and mental exhaustion. These findings indicate deteriorated mental health among faculty members and reinforce the need for mental health promotion initiatives in higher education institutions.

Keywords: Burnout, Psychological. Universities. Faculty.

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RESUMO

Este estudo investiga a associação entre burnout de docentes de instituições privadas de ensino superior do Espírito Santo (ES) e fatores laborais de riscos psicossociais. Trata-se de pesquisa transversal, quantitativa, com participação de 114 docentes que responderam ao questionário composto por informações sociodemográfica-laborais, Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, Escala de Indicadores de Sofrimento no Trabalho e Escala de Organização do Trabalho. Verificou-se níveis elevados dos fatores desengajamento (78,07%) e exaustão (71,93%), percepção altamente deteriorada da organização do trabalho docente e níveis intermediários de falta de sentido no trabalho, esgotamento mental e falta de reconhecimento. Associou-se ao fator exaustão: percepção de baixa qualidade institucional, insuficiência de tempo para planejamento e esgotamento mental; associou-se ao fator desengajamento: percepção de baixa qualidade institucional, remuneração inadequada, falta de reconhecimento, falta de sentido e esgotamento mental. Esses dados sugerem deterioração da saúde mental de docentes e demandam ações para promoção de saúde mental nas IES.

Palavras-chave: Esgotamento Psicológico. Universidades. Docentes.

RESUMEN

Este estudio investigó la asociación entre síndrome de burnout y factores de riesgo psicosocial en docentes de instituciones privadas de educación superior del estado de Espírito Santo, Brasil. Se realizó estudio transversal cuantitativo con 114 docentes que respondieron cuestionario con datos sociodemográficos-laborales, Oldenburg Burnout Inventory, Escala de Indicadores de Sufrimiento en el Trabajo y Escala de Organización del Trabajo. Se identificaron niveles elevados de desvinculación (78,07%) y agotamiento (71,93%), percepción deteriorada de la organización del trabajo y niveles moderados de falta de sentido del trabajo, agotamiento mental y falta de reconocimiento. El agotamiento se asoció con percepción de baja calidad institucional, insuficiencia de tiempo para planificación y agotamiento mental. La desvinculación se asoció con baja calidad institucional, remuneración inadecuada, falta de reconocimiento, falta de sentido del trabajo y agotamiento mental. Se evidencia deterioro de la salud docente y la necesidad de promover la salud mental en instituciones de educación superior.

Palabras clave: Agotamiento Psicológico. Universidades. Docentes.

INTRODUCTION

Burnout syndrome has been considered an occupational disease since January 1, 2022, following its inclusion in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) of the World Health Organization (WHO)¹. It is a chronic stress linked to work-related factors that has a high level of disability and suffering for the individual and can even lead to death².

The increase in workers who become mentally ill due to working conditions is significant in Brazil. As demonstrated by the Brazilian Ministry of Health, disability benefits associated with mental health at work doubled in the last two years, going from 209,000 in 2022³ to 546,000 in 2025⁴, representing a 261% increase between those years. Among these cases, absences due to other anxiety disorders (30.5%), depressive episodes (23.2%), bipolar disorder (11.1%), and recurrent depression (11.1%) stand out.

In the field of education – and more specifically higher education – these numbers are alarming, both for students at various levels of schooling⁵ and for teachers⁶. In the specific case of the latter, teaching is considered one of the high-risk professions⁷. The International Labour Organization (ILO) itself recognizes teaching as one of the most stressful professions on the planet and points to the psychosocial risks in its work².

In this sense, the high prevalence of burnout in the teaching profession has been the subject of national and international research^{6, 8-15}. A large part of these studies has linked burnout to work-related factors such as: work overload, pressure for results and lack of institutional recognition¹²⁻¹⁴.

Despite these studies, there is still a scarcity of research reporting the prevalence of burnout associated with psychosocial risk factors in private higher education⁶. Some of the existing research refers to the mental health of teachers in public universities¹⁶⁻¹⁷ and another part refers to the mental illness of teachers in basic education^{8-11,18-20}, which leads to the question: what is the mental health status of teachers in private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Brazil and what psychosocial risk factors are associated with this condition?

Thus, filling this gap and contributing to expanding studies on burnout and associated psychosocial risks constitutes the relevance of this research. Another relevant factor is that, regionally, according to the Teachers' Union (Sinpro/ES), there are still no statistical data or research that survey this issue in the state of Espírito Santo (ES). Therefore, the objective of this study was to describe and analyze the prevalence of burnout among teachers in private higher education institutions in Espírito Santo and its association with work-related factors and psychosocial risks.

According to the WHO and ILO², psychosocial risks are dangers related to poor conception, organization, and management of work, as well as the social context, that affect the mental, physical, and social health of the worker. To understand the work-related factors involved in these psychosocial risks, this research was anchored in the theoretical framework of DeJour's Psychodynamics of Work²¹. It is worth noting that although Dejours does not use the expression "psychosocial risks", his work contributed to the understanding of "phenomena in the world of work that impact intrapsychic dynamics"²² and that cause suffering to the worker and, consequently, mental illness.

Dejours²³ highlights that suffering at work can be debilitating when working conditions and organization block the worker's transformative potential and, simultaneously, defensive strategies fail to protect against the psychic suffering arising from such blockages, leading to the inscription of this suffering in the body. Thus, pathogenic suffering occurs through anguish, feelings of powerlessness, lack of recognition, and the inability to cope with work demands, even when the worker uses all the resources at their disposal²⁴.

In accordance with this perspective of the PdT, the present study aimed to evaluate the psychosocial risks at work that can lead to burnout, based on two scales from the Psychosocial Risk Assessment Protocol (PROART). PROART is a tool designed to understand occupational psychosocial risks, having been developed by Facas², and widely used in Brazil.

METHOD

The research had a quantitative focus with a descriptive and analytical cross-sectional design²⁵.

Sample drawing

The study included 114 professors from private higher education institutions in Espírito Santo, all currently employed. The inclusion criterion was professors working at one or more educational institutions and with a professional affiliation during the study period. The exclusion criterion was the exclusion of professors working at public higher education institutions or those working in other states of Brazil. Participant recruitment was conducted through invitations sent by the Espírito Santo State Teachers' Union (Sinpro) to the email addresses of professors in its database, as well as through dissemination of the research on the Union's social media. Invitations were sent between March and June 2025, and the questionnaire closed for participation on June 30, 2025.

Approximately 1,350 invitations were sent out, forming the basis of Sinpro's outreach and communication efforts, with a response from 114 teachers, corresponding to an 8.4% participation rate in the study. To calculate the sample size, a 90% sensitivity test was used, with a significance level of 5%, a sample size of 114, and a constant proportion of teachers who wished to participate in the study of 8%. Based on these parameters, an effect size of 0.28 (Cohen's *h*) was found, which is considered a small effect²⁶, but above the limit of 0.20²⁷. This means that 114 teachers are sufficient to detect a practical effect and represent the total number of teachers

that constitute Sinpro's outreach base. For this sample size calculation, the statistical program G*Power version 3.1.9.2²⁸ was used. This research received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Higher School of Sciences of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Vitória, under opinion number: 7.565.835.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was created using a Google® Forms file and consists of the following parts:

1. Sociodemographic/Work Questionnaire: To collect sociodemographic variables (sex, age, marital status, children, physical activity, leisure, use of psychiatric medications, etc.) and work-related variables (weekly working hours, years of professional experience, area of academic training, level of education, additional academic activities, number of professional positions, commuting time, etc.), a questionnaire specifically developed for this study was used to broaden the understanding of factors contributing to the illness in the studied population. The sociodemographic and work-related questions were objective (multiple choice) and were treated as independent variables included in the tested models.
2. The *Oldenburg Burnout Inventory* (OLBI) was used to assess the suggestive level of *burnout* in the investigated population. The OLBI, created and validated by Evangelia Demerouti in Germany, consists of 16 items²⁹. It was translated, adapted, and validated for Brazil³⁰, whose version has thirteen items that proved to be more adjusted to the Brazilian population. Both the Brazilian and German versions have two subscales to assess *burnout*: one for exhaustion, which identifies feelings of physical, affective, and cognitive fatigue, including aspects of tiredness and the need for rest; and another for disengagement, which assesses the degree of detachment from one's work, encompassing negative attitudes and behaviors towards it. The items are answered on a *Likert-type scale* ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), and assesses two dimensions: (1) exhaustion and (2) disengagement from work. Scores are calculated as the mean of each subscale and are interpreted as follows: mean scores ≥ 2.5 indicate a high level of exhaustion, while mean scores ≥ 2.3 indicate a high level of work disengagement.
3. The Work-Related Distress Indicators Scale was used to identify and monitor signs of work-related suffering experiences. This scale is part of the Protocol for Psychosocial Risk Assessment at Work (PROART)²⁴. The Work-Related Distress Indicators Scale consists of 28 questions divided into three factors: meaning at work, psychological exhaustion, and recognition at work. These factors are assessed based on the average response for each item, recorded using a 5-point Likert frequency scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Frequently; 5 = Always²⁴. The score for each factor was calculated using the average scores for each item. From the average obtained, the results can be interpreted based on the following parameters: a) values between 3.70 and 5.00 indicate a negative result representing a high psychosocial risk; b) Values between 2.30 and 3.69 indicate an average result, representing a state of alert/borderline situation (medium risk) for psychosocial risk at work; c) Values between 1.00 and 2.29 indicate a positive result, representing low psychosocial risk²⁴.
4. The Work Organization Scale (WOS) was used to measure perceptions of aspects of work organization that comprise some of the psychosocial risk factors at work. This scale is also part of PROART. It consists of 19 questions divided into two factors: Division of Tasks and Social Division of Labor²⁴. These factors are evaluated based on the average response on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Frequently; 5 = Always. The score for each factor was calculated from the averages of the scores for each item. The averages obtained can be interpreted from the following parameters: a) values between 1.00 and 2.29 – indicate a negative result representing high psychosocial risk; b) values between 2.30 and 3.69 indicate an average result, representing a state of alert/borderline situation (medium risk) for psychosocial risk at work; c) Values between 3.70 and 5.00 indicate a positive result, representing low psychosocial risk²⁴.

Data analysis procedures

After descriptive analysis of the data, with its characterization in the form of observed frequency, percentage, minimum and maximum values, measures of central tendency and variability, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

was performed to assess the probability of normal distribution in the EOT, EIST, and OLBI scores. Given the finding that the data did not present a normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney test was used to compare the medians of the EOT (division of tasks x social division of labor) and EIST (meaningfulness in work, psychological exhaustion, and recognition in work) scores with the OLBI factors (disengagement and exhaustion).

After identifying a bivariate association between the EOT and EIST scales and the burnout outcome (OLBI), two multiple linear regression models were designed using a forward variable selection method. Both models included, as independent variables, those selected by the forward method, among which were the EOT and EIST factors, and sociodemographic and work-related variables. As an independent variable, the first model included the exhaustion factor score from the OLBI scale, and the second model included the disengagement factor score. Linear regression was chosen using the Newey-West procedure, which is robust to heteroscedasticity and serial autocorrelation; therefore, the absence of heteroscedasticity was not evaluated, as the Newey-West standard error is robust to this assumption. The assumptions required for maintaining linear regression were evaluated using the following procedures: chi-square test, which assessed the assumption that there is at least one independent predictive variable in the outcome; *deviance test*, which evaluated the model fit; The *pseudo* -R test, which measured the percentage variation of the independent variables in the outcome; the variance inflation factor (VIF), which assessed the assumption of absence of multicollinearity; the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which in this case of regression assessed the normality of the residuals; and the Durbin-Watson test, which assessed the absence of autocorrelation. The significance level used in all analyses was 5%. The program used in the analyses was STATA version 14.0.0.

RESULTS

Of the teachers interviewed, 50.88% are women and have an average age of 43.4 years (standard deviation (SD) = 9.3 years). The majority (71.05%) have a partner, and 61.98% have children. Regarding education, 24.56% have a postgraduate specialization, 39.47% have a master's degree, 27.19% have a doctorate, and 8.78% have a postdoctoral degree. The average time they have been teaching in higher education was 12.9 years (SD = 8.6 years).

Of the total respondents, 60.53% have teaching as their main source of income, and combine teaching with another paid activity (68.42%). Furthermore, 55.26% of teachers work more than 40 hours per week considering all their work activities. Also noteworthy is the significant number of responses regarding compromised mental health (39%) and the use of psychiatric medication (42%).

Regarding mental health, the levels of the factors measured by the OLBI were high among respondents, both in the disengagement and exhaustion factors, as shown in Table 1, indicating symptoms suggestive of burnout among a considerable portion of teachers:

Table 1 - Severity levels of symptoms of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI) factors.

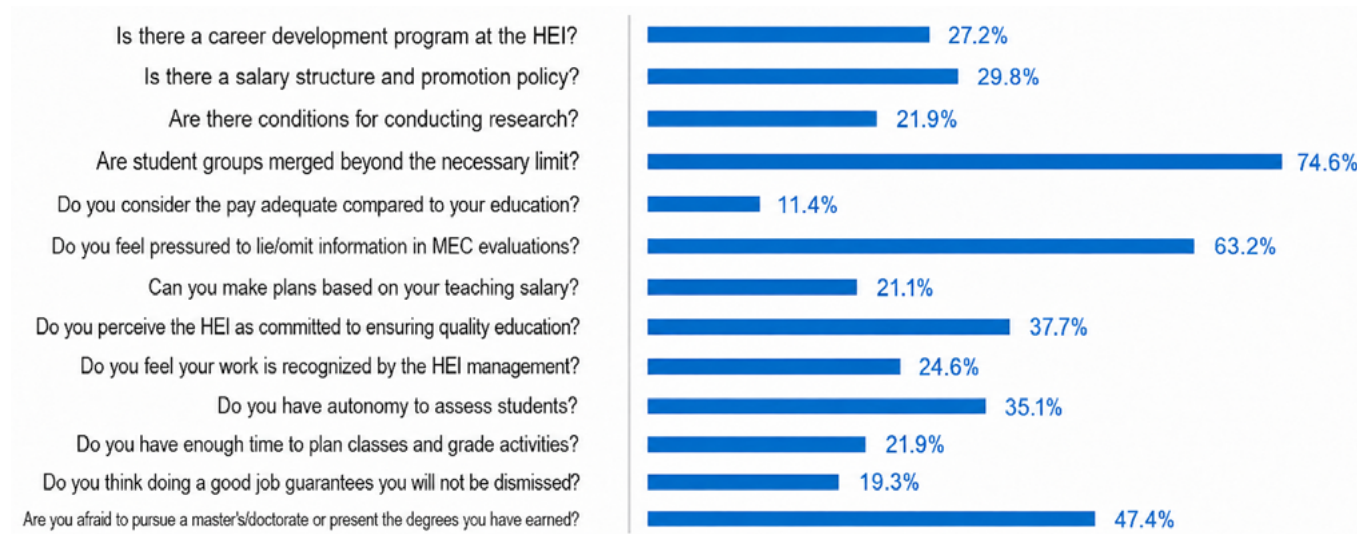
Disengagement classification	It does not have	13.16%
	Upward trend	8.77%
	High level of disengagement	78.07%
Exhaustion classification	It does not have	21.05%
	Upward trend	7.02%
	High level of exhaust	71.93%

Source: the authors

The OLBI classification for disengagement was predominantly at the high level (78.07%) with a mean of 2.9 (SD=0.7). The OLBI classification for burnout was also predominantly at the high level (71.93%) with a mean of 2.9 (SD=0.8).

In describing their work activities, respondents highlighted many aspects that can be considered occupational conditions responsible for these high levels of burnout, as can be seen in Graph 1:

Graph 1 - Evaluation of variables related to work (in percentage of teachers who tend to answer yes to the questions).



Source: the authors

Regarding psychosocial risk factors, the EOT score, in the task division item, obtained an average of 1.62 (SD=0.94) and the EOT score, in the social division of labor item, obtained an average of 1.74 (SD=0.90). The data observed from the EOT responses, according to manual²⁴, reveal a deteriorated perception of work organization, considered, at this level, as a high psychosocial risk factor in the work of private higher education teachers, in both items evaluated.

The EOT and EIST scores are shown in Table 2:

Table 2 - Description of the scale of indicators of suffering at work (EIST) and its scores.

Scale / Factors	Minimum-maximum	Median	Average
EOT			
Division of tasks	0.0-3.7	1.57	1.6 (0.9)
Social division of labor	0.0-3.5	1.58	1.7 (0.9)
EIST			
Lack of meaning in work	1.0-5.0	2.7	2.8 (1.3)
Mental exhaustion	1.0-5.0	3.5	3.5 (1.1)
Lack of recognition	1.0-5.0	3	2.8 (1.3)

Source: the authors

The overall average of the EIST indicates a partially deteriorated perception for the three factors evaluated (lack of meaning in work, mental exhaustion, and lack of recognition), being considered, at this level, as an intermediate factor of psychosocial risk at work²⁴. The questions with the highest prevalence of "always" responses observed in the "mental exhaustion" subscale were: "My work is exhausting"; "My work is tiring"; "My work overwhelms me"; "My work discourages me"; "My work frustrates me"; "Submitting my work

to political decisions is a source of revolt". The questions with the highest prevalence of "always" responses in the "lack of recognition" subscale were: "My work is undervalued by the organization".

In the first model tested, among the work-related variables, the EOT and EIS scales and the disengagement factor, measured using the OLBI, a significant association was found between disengagement and the following variables (Table 3):

Table 03 - Association of the OLBI score (disengagement) with influencing factors.

Work variables		B	SE**	p*	IC(95%)	Trend
Does the higher education institution perceive itself as committed to ensuring quality education?	I tend to say no	0	-	-	-	-
	I tend to say yes	-0.29	0.09	0.002	[-0.48;-0.11]	Decrease
Do you consider the remuneration adequate compared to the training?	I tend to say no	0	-	-	-	-
	I tend to say yes	-0.35	0.13	0.011	[-0.61; -0.08]	Decrease
Do you feel your work is recognized by the institution?	I tend to say no	0	-	-	-	-
	I tend to say yes	-0.29	0.10	0.003	[-0.48; -0.10]	Decrease
EIST score for meaningfulness at work	Low risk	0	-	-	-	-
	Medium risk	0.40	0.11	< 0.001	[0.19; 0.61]	Additional
	High risk	0.78	0.13	< 0.001	[0.53; 1.04]	Additional
EIST score for mental exhaustion	Low risk	0	-	-	-	-
	Medium risk	0.04	0.10	0.667	[-0.15; 0.24]	NS
	High risk	0.38	0.12	0.002	[0.14; 0.61]	Additional

Note: *Multiple linear regression with *forward method*; where $p < 0.001$; $FIV < 10$; Durbin and Watson = 1.95; (Kolmogorov and Smirnov (p) = 0.199); **=robust standard error (absence of heteroscedasticity); adjusted R^2 = 0.371.

The model data indicate that faculty members who perceive the HEI as committed to ensuring quality teaching tend to show a reduction in the OLBI disengagement score, while faculty members who assess that their remuneration is inadequate compared to their professional training and who do not perceive their work as being recognized by the HEI's management tend to show more signs of disengagement at work. Faculty members who have a high risk for the EIST score of lack of meaning in work also tend to have an increased score in the disengagement score. Finally, faculty members with a high risk of mental burnout tend to have an increased disengagement score. The adjustment indices (adjusted R^2) indicate that 37.1% of the average variation in the disengagement score can be explained by the model variables, which can be considered a moderate effect size²⁶.

In the second model tested, with variables related to work and factors from the EOT and EIST scales, including the exhaustion factor, a significant association was found between exhaustion and the following factors (Table 4):

Table 4 - Association of OLBI score (exhaustion) with influencing factors.

Work variables		B	SE**	p*	IC(95%)	Trend
Do you have children?	No	0	-	-	-	-
	One	0.05	0.13	0.704	[-0.20; 0.30]	NS
	Two	0.15	0.11	0.164	[-0.06; 0.37]	NS
	Three or more	0.36	0.11	0.001	[0.14; 0.57]	Additional
Does the higher education institution perceive itself as committed to ensuring quality education?	I tend to say no	0	-	-	-	-
	I tend to say yes	-0.31	0.14	0.032	[-0.59; -0.03]	Decrease
Do you have enough time for lesson and activity planning?	I tend to say no	0	-	-	-	-
	I tend to say yes	-0.36	0.15	0.015	[-0.65; -0.07]	Decrease
EIST score for mental exhaustion	Low risk	0	-	-	-	-
	Medium risk	0.33	0.16	0.043	[0.01; 0.65]	Additional
	High risk	1.03	0.20	< 0.001	[0.62; 1.43]	Additional

Note: *Multiple linear regression with *forward method*; where $p < 0.001$; $FIV < 10$; Durbin and Watson=1.99; (Kolmogorov and Smirnov (p) = 0.199); **=robust standard error (absence of heteroscedasticity); adjusted $R^2 = 0.641$.

Based on the model, it can be seen that teachers who have three or more children tend to score higher on the exhaustion factor. Conversely, teachers who perceive that the higher education institution they work for is committed to ensuring quality education tend to show less exhaustion, and, in the opposite direction, teachers who claim they do not have enough time for lesson planning and grading assignments tend to increase their exhaustion score. There is also a greater chance of presenting higher average exhaustion scores among teachers who have a medium or high risk for the EIST score of mental burnout. The adjustment indices (adjusted R^2) indicate that 64.1% of the average variation in the exhaustion score can be explained by the model variables, indicating a strong effect size for the model²⁶.

DISCUSSION

The results regarding evidence of burnout among faculty members at private higher education institutions in Espírito Santo were high in both factors evaluated: disengagement (78.07%) and exhaustion (71.93%), suggesting that the majority of the sample experiences mental distress with symptoms of burnout. This condition manifests itself both in emotional exhaustion, related to high work demands and the perception of a lack of organizational commitment to the quality of work performed, and in disengagement from work (whether due to cynicism or lack of identification), which is related to a lack of meaning, the experience of fatigue, and the perception of a lack of social and salary recognition.

International and national research corroborates these results and indicates a high prevalence of burnout in the category of private higher education teaching^{6,8-15}. Teaching is permeated by situations that can lead to exhaustion, both physical and emotional, and disengagement from the profession due to working conditions that present psychosocial risks to mental health.

In this research, the investigation of work organization – assessed by the EOT – revealed high psychosocial risks in the work of private higher education teachers, both in terms of task division and the social division of labor, which is normally reflected in work overload and lack of time to perform tasks. Studies on private Brazilian higher education also associate the high prevalence of burnout with work organization: work overload, lack of time, overcrowded classes, pressure for results and scientific productivity^{12-14,31}. This form of work organization has been linked, in the literature, to the commodification of education and the privatization of HEIs in Brazil³²⁻³³ where the pursuit of efficiency and, at the same time, cost reduction in private HEIs leads to work overload and massification of processes³⁴.

In addition to the psychosocial risks associated with work organization, this research also verified – using the EIST scale – the experience of suffering in teaching work with regard to lack of meaning in work, mental exhaustion, and lack of recognition. A significant association was also demonstrated between the disengagement factor and the subscales of "lack of meaning in work" and "mental exhaustion," and between the latter and the exhaustion factor. Therefore, a relationship was found between the perception of work experiences with work-related suffering and the manifestation of symptoms suggestive of burnout.

In other words, in addition to the relationship between working conditions, work organization, and the psychological suffering of private higher education teachers, the way they perceive and make sense of their experiences, through lack of recognition, perception of loss of autonomy, lack of prestige, and powerlessness to perform quality work, is also related to their mental health. These aspects can be interpreted in light of Dejours's Pathological Theory. Based on this theory, it can be seen that psychological illness emerges when suffering at work becomes pathological, that is, when work produces conditions and demands that exceed the individual's capacity to perform dignified work, find meaning and recognition in what they do²¹. Without meaning and recognition at work, the individual ends up in a state of mental exhaustion.

For Dejours²² **The lack of meaning** in work is not merely personal dissatisfaction, but a central factor in mental illness. This lack of meaning results from work that is merely technical, repetitive, alienating, or devoid of "living work" – that is, the capacity to use intelligence to overcome difficulties. This is because work is not limited to the execution of prescribed tasks: practical intelligence and an affective investment are necessary in the face of the demands of work organization, so that the worker can transform prescribed work into real work without meaning, the worker finds themselves emptied of the potential to transform the suffering inherent in work into pleasure and fulfillment²².

The **lack of recognition** is expressed in the feeling that teachers are devalued despite the effort and quality of their work, whether because the HEI is not committed to quality teaching, or because of low salaries, or because of the symbolic devaluation experienced. The absence of recognition can lower self-esteem and the meaning of work²¹. "Symbolic reward", "recognition"²³, is fundamental for the workers, although the results suggest that teachers in private HEIs do not seem to feel sufficiently recognized and valued by the HEIs, hindering the psychic mobilization to face the demands of the real work.

The **mental exhaustion** found in EIST is not merely a passing fatigue, but the result of chronic psychological suffering that may be associated with work organization. Work lacking recognition, meaning, and excessive pressure affects the worker's sense of identity. As a consequence, work ceases to be a factor in health and begins to generate suffering, destroying the individual's professional identity. It is worth noting that mental exhaustion results not only from work overload, but also, and perhaps above all, when the workers is prevented from using their intelligence, creativity, and skills to solve problems²². This can generate frustration and lead to the emergence of chronic pathologies that manifest in the body, such as burnout.

Finally, it is concluded that there are indications of burnout among some teachers in private higher education institutions in Espírito Santo, and that this disorder is associated with how work organization is perceived and experienced. It is suggested that these working conditions are linked to the transformation, in Brazil, of higher education into a marketable commodity, driven by neoliberal logics, which makes work and the service provided more precarious and creates a constant conflict between market demands and the commitment to quality higher education^{32-33,35}. This conflict restricts the autonomy of teachers, limits their creativity, and makes it difficult for them to feel that their work has meaning and recognition²¹, giving rise to pathological suffering.

CONCLUSIONS

Burnout levels (both disengagement and exhaustion) among private higher education teachers are high and are explained, in part, by the way work is organized and experienced in this profession, both in terms of the division of tasks and social relationships, the lack of meaning in work, mental exhaustion resulting from daily activities, and the lack of professional recognition and appreciation. It is suggested that teachers have difficulty mobilizing their energy to transform prescribed work into living work and to reframe the contradictions and demands of the job.

The relevance of this research, therefore, lies in highlighting the high prevalence of burnout among teachers in private higher education and the work practices associated with this illness among these workers. In doing so, it is hoped to contribute to the understanding that burnout is, in fact, a syndrome related to work organization, and not a pathology related to the worker.

In light of these results, higher education institutions (HEIs) should review their management practices and focus more on the quality of faculty work and valuing their contributions, as well as ensuring adequate working conditions. They should also implement organizational policies for identifying and preventing psychosocial risks for faculty, especially with measures focused on transforming work through the assessment and control of psychosocial risks by companies, to guarantee a safe and healthy work environment.

One of the limitations of this study relates to the sample size. Although the sample size is significant for the population investigated, it is possible that many professors from private higher education institutions are not registered in the database used. Furthermore, many professors who received the survey did not respond, perhaps due to work overload. Future research could explore other strategies, including contributions from private higher education institutions, to broaden the scope of the research, and also campaigns aimed at increasing professor participation.

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