

# Mental Health And Teaching Work: A Qualitative Study On The Quality Of Life At Work Of University Professors

Lucas Alves De Oliveira Lima<sup>1</sup>, Gláucia Renee Hilgemberg<sup>2</sup>,  
José Antonio Da Silva<sup>3</sup>, Wyderlannya Aguiar Costa De Oliveira<sup>4</sup>,  
Lissandro Botelho<sup>5</sup>, Keila Lima Sanches<sup>6</sup>, Héricck Henrique Leão De Amorim<sup>7</sup>,  
Douglas Do Nascimento Reis<sup>8</sup>, Carlos Alberto Feitosa Dos Santos<sup>9</sup>,  
Tainara Maria Da Conceição<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(University Rural of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

<sup>2</sup>(UNISEP University Centre, Brazil)

<sup>3</sup>(American University, Brazil)

<sup>4</sup>(Faculty of Development of the Amazon, Brazil)

<sup>5</sup>(Federal Institute of Amazonas, Brazil)

<sup>6</sup>(Federal Institute of Brasilia, Brazil)

<sup>7</sup>(UNIBRA - Brazilian University Center, Brazil)

<sup>8</sup>(Unique College of Ipatinga - FUNIP, Brazil)

<sup>9</sup>(Ibirapuera University - UNIB, Brazil)

<sup>10</sup>(Federal University of São João del-Rei-UFSJ, Brazil)

**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to analyze university professors' perceptions of mental health and quality of life at work. To this end, an exploratory qualitative study was carried out with 16 teachers from a private Brazilian university. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with the respondents, and the data was analyzed using the inductive method, guided by the guidelines of thematic analysis. As a result, it was found that teachers' perceptions of mental health are associated with a holistic approach, where mental health goes beyond the mere absence of mental illness, thus encompassing the presence of positive emotions such as happiness, satisfaction and emotional well-being. In addition, it was possible to verify that high demands and academic pressure are factors that contribute to occupational illness, adversely impacting teachers' mental health and quality of life. These factors result in the manifestation of symptoms such as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, sleep disorders and depression, the implications of which extend beyond the work environment and also affect teachers' personal lives. Measures are therefore needed to reduce pressure, promote work-life balance and offer effective support to teachers. These actions will not only benefit teachers, but will also contribute to a healthier and more productive educational environment, resulting in benefits for students.

**Key Word:** Mental health; Quality of life at work; Teachers.

Date of Submission: 02-10-2023

Date of Acceptance: 12-10-2023

## I. Introduction

Mental health is a critical dimension of any individual's quality of life and well-being, and its relevance in the context of teaching work is unquestionable. Teachers play a fundamental role in shaping future generations, molding young minds and influencing students' intellectual, social and emotional development. However, this profession is not without its challenges, pressures and demands that can profoundly affect educators' mental health (MOREIRA; RODRIGUES, 2018).

According to Sanches et al. (2019), teaching, especially at more advanced levels of education such as higher education, is a complex task that involves not only the transmission of knowledge, but also stimulating critical thinking, academic guidance and classroom management. Teachers deal with a variety of responsibilities, including preparing lessons, marking assignments and exams, guiding research projects and interacting with students, parents and colleagues.

The responsibilities of university teachers often add up to a significant workload, creating an environment conducive to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion. In addition, professors can face emotional challenges, such as dealing with challenging student behavior, students' family problems and the constant pressure for better academic results. The search for recognition and promotion in the academic career can also generate additional anxiety and pressure (ARALDI et al., 2021; MASSA et al., 2016).

It is therefore essential to address the relationship between mental health and teaching work, exploring how these challenges affect teachers and the strategies that can be implemented to promote a healthier and more

balanced working environment. This discussion is essential to ensure not only the well-being of educators, but also the quality of teaching and the positive development of students, since teachers with good mental health are better able to effectively play their role as mentors and role models for their students (CAMPOS; VIEGA, 2021).

The aim of this study was to analyze the perceptions of university professors about mental health and quality of life in the teaching profession. The study was limited to teachers at a private Brazilian college located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro.

## **II. Material And Methods**

The study was characterized as descriptive, exploratory and qualitative, with a view to gaining an in-depth understanding of the relationship between mental health and teaching work. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2003), the descriptive research sought to elucidate the characteristics and nuances of this relationship, while the exploratory approach allowed for a deeper investigation into the experiences of teachers in the educational context. The choice of a qualitative approach allowed for a detailed analysis of teachers' perceptions, feelings and experiences.

As the approach followed a qualitative orientation, priority was given to data collection methods that allowed teachers' perceptions to be captured. As Godoy (1995) points out, the qualitative approach stands out for its emphasis on a deep and contextualized understanding of phenomena, valuing the subjectivity and interpretation of the participants.

In this sense, in-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate data collection method, as they made it possible to explore in detail teachers' experiences, feelings and perceptions in relation to their mental health and work environment. The interviews were applied to 16 teachers from a private Brazilian college, strategically selected to represent a variety of teaching experiences and contexts, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The in-depth interviews provided a space for teachers to express their opinions freely and openly, thus enriching the understanding of the complex relationship between mental health and teaching work, as suggested by Silva, Segger and Russo (2019). In order to obtain more accurate data, the interviews were recorded with the agreement of the respondents.

It should be noted that the interviews were guided by a script with open-ended questions, which covered relevant topics related to mental health and teaching work. This script allowed the interviews to be conducted in a structured way, covering topics pertinent to the research and providing a guide for gaining a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences.

As well as being recorded, the answers were also noted down in the script to ensure the accuracy and fidelity of the information collected during the interviews. This double-recording method ensured that the details of the teachers' perceptions and experiences were carefully documented, contributing to a thorough analysis and faithful interpretation of the data throughout the research. In this way, it was possible to accurately capture the teachers' voices and experiences, enriching our understanding of the complex relationship between mental health and teaching work.

As the research took a qualitative approach, the data was analyzed using the inductive method, guided by the guidelines of thematic analysis, as suggested by Yin (2015). Thus, the analysis involved compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding the data.

First, the data was compiled, involving the organized collection and transcription of the interviews. Then, in the disassembly phase, the data was broken down into smaller units for detailed analysis and the identification of emerging patterns. Subsequently, reassembly took place, where the units of analysis were reorganized into meaningful categories or themes, exploring connections between the data.

In the interpretation stage, the categories were analyzed in the light of the context, literature and research questions, looking for meanings and insights. Finally, the conclusion allowed for the synthesis and presentation of the results, reflecting the findings and patterns identified in the analysis, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between mental health and teaching work.

## **III. Result and discussions**

As a result, the sample consisted of 16 university professors from a private college in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. In terms of age, most of the interviewees were between 30 and 40 years old, with the youngest teacher being 28 and the oldest 55. As for marital status, the majority were married or in a stable union, with only two interviewees being single.

The survey also investigated the teachers' length of experience at the college in question. The results showed that most of the interviewees had considerable experience, with an average of 3 years working at the institution. However, there was variation, with some teachers having worked at the college since its inception and others having joined recently.

With regard to gender, the sample was made up of interviewees of both sexes, with an almost even split between men and women, as 9 interviewees were male, while 7 were female.

In terms of education, the interviewees covered different levels of academic training, from teachers with undergraduate degrees to those with doctorates. The results made it possible to analyze perceptions according to the level of qualification, identifying whether teachers with different levels of training faced different challenges in relation to mental health and teaching work

In the interviews, the participants shared their perspectives on mental health in the teaching workplace. Initially, the teachers were asked how they conceptualized mental health. As a result, a variety of responses were noted, although there was a predominance of mental health considerations related to emotional and interpersonal aspects as essential components for maintaining good mental health in the academic context.

In relation to perceptions of mental health around emotional aspects, it was observed that mental health was associated with feelings of well-being, happiness and satisfaction, highlighting the importance of maintaining an emotional balance to face the challenges of the teaching profession, as evidenced by the reports below.

Mental health is a state of well-being, of feeling good and complete (E3).

As I see it, mental health has to do with happiness. Without the feeling of happiness, there is no well-being (E14).

Mental health encompasses a feeling of personal satisfaction, maintaining an emotionally balanced life (E8).

The results of this research reveal a fundamental connection between mental health and emotional aspects, with emphasis on feelings of well-being, happiness and satisfaction. These perceptions point to a broader and more holistic view of mental health, going beyond the mere absence of mental illness and considering the presence of positive emotions as essential components. This suggests that mental health should not be understood simply as the absence of emotional problems, but rather as a state in which one experiences emotional well-being and lives a full life.

There was also an emphasis on happiness as an integral part of mental health. From the interviewees' perspective, happiness plays a critical role in building emotional well-being, indicating that the absence of this feeling can compromise mental health. This highlights the importance of not only treating negative symptoms, but also actively promoting the pursuit of happiness as part of mental health care strategies.

The association between mental health and personal satisfaction, as mentioned in the reports, further broadens the understanding of this concept. Personal satisfaction involves a subjective assessment of how well someone is living their life, taking into account their own goals, values and expectations. This suggests that mental health is linked to the ability to maintain an emotional balance that allows one to be satisfied with one's life, even in the face of the challenges and pressures of the teaching profession.

In addition to the perceptions of mental health associated with emotional aspects, the teachers also highlighted the importance of interpersonal aspects in their mental health. This dimension reflects the understanding that mental health is not an isolated phenomenon, but is intrinsically linked to relationships and interactions with other people.

I think mental health involves a good relationship not only with yourself, but above all with others. When we have disagreements or problems, it affects our mental health. Learning to deal with these situations constructively can make our work much less stressful (E10).

Mental health at work isn't just about feeling good emotionally. As a teacher, it's essential to have a good relationship with your colleagues, your class and your boss, after all, that's what we do for a living. We live from interacting with people (E6).

I believe that mental health in a teacher's work is all about harmony. The harmony of feeling good and being surrounded by pleasant people. This generates an organizational climate that positively favors mental health (E4).

The perception that conflicts and disagreements can negatively affect mental health highlights the need for communication and conflict resolution skills as an essential part of teachers' emotional well-being. This suggests that in order to promote teachers' mental health, it is important not only to address individual emotional issues, but also to invest in training them to deal effectively with conflict situations.

Furthermore, the emphasis placed on interaction with other people as a determinant of mental health highlights the need to promote healthy and positive relationships in the workplace. Interaction with other people

not only benefits teachers' mental health, but also influences the quality of their educational practice and the learning environment for students.

In this sense, the idea that harmony in interpersonal relationships is fundamental to mental health reinforces the importance of creating a work environment that is welcoming, positive and collaborative. An organizational climate that promotes pleasant relationships and a favorable atmosphere can contribute significantly to teachers' emotional well-being.

Next, teachers were asked if they had ever experienced mental health problems related to the teaching profession. The results revealed that the vast majority of those interviewed, eleven in total, said they had faced such issues. The finding that the majority of teachers interviewed acknowledged having faced mental health problems indicates that the emotional well-being of teachers is a pressing concern. This revelation highlights the urgent need to address mental health issues in the educational environment and to implement effective strategies to support teachers.

With regard to occupational illness, five of the interviewees pointed to anxiety as a mental problem that arose due to the nature of teaching work. In addition, three of the interviewees emphasized emotional exhaustion, which is a central component of burnout, two interviewees mentioned sleep-related problems and, finally, one interviewee highlighted depression as a mental health problem.

Analysis of the results reveals a series of significant challenges in relation to occupational illness among teachers. Various dimensions of mental health are affected, and the problems identified highlight the complexity and variety of the issues faced by these professionals in their careers. Anxiety emerged as a prevalent problem, mentioned by five interviewees. However, emotional exhaustion, emphasized by three interviewees, is an essential component of burnout, which reflects the deep exhaustion that teachers can experience due to their teaching work.

It is also worth noting the incidence of sleep disorders, highlighting how factors associated with the teaching profession can disrupt sleep, leading to insomnia or other sleep disorders. The quality of sleep is fundamental to mental health and daily functioning, and interrupted sleep can aggravate other mental health problems. In addition, one interviewee pointed to depression as a mental health problem. Depression is a serious condition that can significantly affect a teacher's personal and professional life, impairing work performance and overall quality of life.

Against this backdrop, we sought to learn more about the main factors contributing to teachers' occupational illness. Through the interviewees' reports, it was possible to see that the main factors were linked to the high level of pressure and pressure in the school environment, which is the main factor significantly impacting teachers' mental health.

I have to make sure that my classes have a high academic performance. This causes me enormous mental strain, as it's something that depends more on the students than on me (E4).

There's a lot of pressure to publish research. It's a goal I have to meet in the academic sphere, and that's constant. There's not always time to fit everything in (E9).

My work involves a lot of pressure for results, carrying out extension projects, attending conferences and so on. This has already made me mentally ill. I've had emotional exhaustion due to this academic pressure (E11).

The analysis of the results shows the significant load of high pressure and pressure that teachers face in their work environment, emerging as a major factor that has a profound impact on the mental health of these professionals. The interviewees' accounts illustrate how this pressure manifests itself in various dimensions of the teaching career.

It was observed that teachers are under pressure to ensure that their classes achieve a high level of academic performance. This expectation of high student performance can cause considerable mental strain, especially when the results are beyond the teacher's direct control. This highlights the tension between academic expectations and the reality of the teaching-learning process.

Another aspect highlighted is the pressure for academic production, with the need to publish research. For some teachers, this constant academic goal can be overwhelming and challenging to reconcile with other professional and personal responsibilities. The constant demand for academic results adds an additional layer of stress to the profession.

Emotional exhaustion is also mentioned as a result of this academic pressure. The need to carry out extension projects, take part in conferences and meet targets can overload teachers, leading to emotional exhaustion. This indicates how the constant demands can negatively affect teachers' emotional well-being.

The results reflect the complexity of the teachers' experience and how challenging the school environment can be. High demands and pressure, especially in the academic context, are significant factors

contributing to teachers' occupational illness. This emphasizes the importance of adopting measures to alleviate these pressures, promote a healthy work-life balance, and actively support educators' mental health.

Finally, we sought to investigate the main impacts of teaching work and occupational illness on teachers' quality of life. Respondents were asked how these challenges affected different aspects of their lives, including personal aspects, relationships and general well-being. The answers to this question showed that challenging teaching work and occupational illness had significant impacts on teachers' lives, negatively affecting their mental health, personal relationships and overall quality of life.

The majority of teachers reported that challenging teaching work and occupational illness had an impact that went beyond the boundaries of the professional sphere, deeply affecting their personal lives. Respondents highlighted that the constant stress and pressure related to their work had damaged their mental health, resulting in high levels of anxiety and emotional exhaustion. These emotional problems extended beyond the workplace, affecting their personal relationships, including family and friends.

Without a doubt, the biggest impact of teaching on quality of life is the mental strain. It affects me in every way, even in my interpersonal relationships, both inside and outside the faculty (E8).

Work and the issues that affect my mental health mainly affect my quality of life in general, even outside of work. I end up taking my problems home with me, and this affects my relationship with my wife, which isn't right. Sometimes I arrive and I don't have time to enjoy it with her, because I just want to lie down and sleep (E2).

The results of this research reveal an alarming picture in relation to teachers' quality of life, where challenging teaching work and occupational illness have profound effects that go beyond the professional sphere, negatively affecting their personal lives. The analysis of these results emphasizes the issue of mental exhaustion as the most significant and predominant aspect of these impacts.

These results highlight the importance of a more comprehensive approach to promoting teachers' quality of life. In addition to dealing with professional demands, it is essential to create a working environment that allows teachers to find an appropriate balance between their professional responsibilities and their personal lives. This will not only benefit the teachers themselves, but will also contribute to a healthier and more productive educational environment. Measures to support mental health, manage stress and promote work-life balance become crucial in view of these findings.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This exploratory, qualitative study revealed a complex and challenging picture of the mental health of university lecturers at a private college in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The sample reflects a diversity of demographic characteristics, levels of academic training and professional experience, demonstrating that the issue of mental health affects professionals of different profiles.

The teachers' perceptions highlight the importance of considering mental health as a broader concept that goes beyond the mere absence of mental illness, emphasizing the presence of positive emotions such as happiness, satisfaction and emotional well-being as fundamental components of mental health. This suggests the need to adopt a holistic approach to mental health care, which promotes not only problem-solving, but also the active pursuit of happiness and personal satisfaction. In addition, the results highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships in the workplace as a determining factor in teachers' mental health.

Constant pressure and high academic expectations emerge as crucial factors that contribute to occupational illness, negatively affecting teachers' mental health and quality of life. Symptoms such as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, sleep disorders and depression were cited by respondents as causes of these factors. This consequently contributed to affecting teachers' quality of life, where these emotional problems extended beyond the work environment, affecting teachers' personal lives in their personal relationships, including family and friends.

As such, the results of this research underline the urgency of concrete actions to address mental health issues in the educational environment. This includes implementing measures to reduce pressure and overburden teachers, promote a healthy work-life balance and offer effective support for those facing mental health problems. This will not only benefit teachers, but also contribute to a healthier and more productive teaching environment, which in turn will benefit students. Teachers' mental health is a concern that can no longer be neglected, and it is imperative to act now to improve the quality of life of these professionals who are so essential to education.

#### **References**

- [1]. Araldi, F. M. Et Al. Quality Of Life Of Higher Education Teachers: A Systematic Review. *Revista Retos*, N. 41, V. 2, 2021.
- [2]. Campos, M. F.; Viegas, M. F. Mental Health In Teaching Work: A Study On Autonomy, Intensification And Overload. *Cadernos De Pesquisa*, V. 28, N. 2, 2021.
- [3]. Godoy, A. S. *Pesquisa Qualitativa: Tipos Fundamentais*. São Paulo: Revista De Administração De Empresas, V. 35, N.3, P. 21, 1995.

- [4]. Lakatos, E. M.; Marconi M. A. Fundamentos De Metodologia Científica. 5. Ed. São Paulo: Atlas, 2003.
- [5]. Massa, L. D. B. Et Al. Burnout Syndrome In University Professors. Revista De Terapia Ocupacional Da Universidade De São Paulo, V. 27, N. 2, 2016.
- [6]. Moreira, D. Z.; Rodrigues, M. B. Mental Health And Teaching Work. Estudos De Psicologia, V. 23, N. 3, July/September, 2018.
- [7]. Sanches, H. M. Et Al. Impact Of Health On The Quality Of Life And Work Of University Professors From Different Areas Of Knowledge. Ciência & Saúde Coletiva, 24(11):4111-4122, 2019.
- [8]. Silva, L. F.; Segger, R. F.; Russo, M. Application Of Interviews In Qualitative Research. Revista De Gestão E Projetos, V. 10, N. 1, Jan./Abr., 2019.
- [9]. Yin, R K. Qualitative Research From Start To Finish. 2nd Ed. New York: Guilford Press, 2015.