

Teaching work of nursing and the impact on the health-disease process

Trabalho docente de enfermagem e as repercussões no processo saúde-doença

Enseñanza de trabajo de enfermería y repercusiones en la enfermedad de salud proceso

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ABSTRACT

Goals: to identify the advantages and the difficulties present in the teaching work of nursing; and analyze the impact of the work context of the nursing school in the health-disease process of these workers.

Methods: this is a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory research that was developed in a public university of Rio de Janeiro. The subjects were 16 teachers of nursing. The data collection occurred from July to August 2014 by semi-structured interview. The data were analyzed by means of thematic content analysis technique.

Results: there are more situations that hinder the work than that favor it, and those complicating situations are closely linked to a neo-liberal policy. **Conclusion:** It was learned that the configuration of the teaching work negatively affects health, resulting in stress, fatigue and physical and emotional overload. It is necessary that the worker's health services develop actions that neutralize the negative effects on the health-disease process of teachers.

Descriptors: Occupational Health, Occupational Health Nursing, Faculty.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar as facilidades e as dificuldades presentes no trabalho docente de enfermagem; e analisar as repercussões do contexto de trabalho do docente de enfermagem no processo saúde-doença destes trabalhadores.

Métodos: pesquisa qualitativa, descritiva e exploratória, desenvolvida numa faculdade pública do Rio de Janeiro. Os sujeitos foram 16 docentes de enfermagem. A coleta dos dados ocorreu de julho a agosto de 2014, utilizando a entrevista semiestruturada. Os dados foram analisados por meio da técnica de análise de conteúdo temática.

Resultados: evidenciou-se que há mais situações que dificultam o trabalho docente do que o favorece, e que tais situações complicadoras estão intimamente ligadas a uma política neoliberal.

Conclusão: a configuração do trabalho docente repercute negativamente na saúde, resultando em estresse, cansaço e sobrecarga emocional e física. Faz-se necessário que os serviços de saúde do trabalhador desenvolvam ações que neutralizem os efeitos negativos no processo saúde-doença dos docentes.

Descritores: Saúde do Trabalhador, Enfermagem do Trabalho, Docentes.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: identificar las ventajas y las dificultades presentes en la obra de enseñanza de enfermería; y analizar el impacto del contexto de trabajo de la Facultad de enfermería en el proceso salud-enfermedad.

Métodos: investigación cualitativa, descriptiva y exploratoria, ocurrida en una escuela pública de Río de Janeiro. Los sujetos fueron 16 maestros de enfermería. La recolección de datos ocurrido desde julio a agosto de 2014, utilizando la entrevista semiestruturada. Datos se analizaron mediante la técnica de análisis de contenido temático.

Resultados: tiene más situaciones que dificultan el trabajo de los favores, y que tales situaciones están relacionadas con la política neoliberal.

Conclusión: la actual configuración del trabajo docente afecta negativamente en la salud, lo que resulta en estrés, fatiga y sobrecarga física y emocional. Es necesario que los servicios de salud de los trabajadores desarrollen acciones que neutralicen los efectos negativos sobre la salud de los maestros.

Descritores: Salud Laboral, Enfermería del Trabajo, Docentes.

INTRODUCTION

The object of this study are the advantages and the difficulties felt by teachers of nursing to exercise their work, as well as the impact of this labor on the health-disease process of these workers.

The will to investigate this object is linked to an interest in work situations that cause pleasure and/or suffering to the workers, especially of nursing. These feeling may ensure or deteriorate health and, as we map and understand situations in the work process and organization that trace back to pleasure, it is possible to strengthen then to promote or retrieve health. On the other hand, if we understand the genesis of suffering in the work environment, this favors the elaboration of strategies and actions that aim to transform suffering into something productive and creative, helping the workers that suffer to not fall ill due to their labor.¹

Thus, work, at the same time that it can generate suffering, also results in pleasure, in a dynamic and dialectic perspective. Pleasure and suffering are tied to factors internal and external to the individuals, which involve the psychophysical and

social characteristics of the workers, but also relate to the work conditions, to the specificity of the work process, and to the configuration of work organization. Therefore, feeling pleasure and/or suffering at work is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, which lacks continuous and detailed investigation.²

However, it is verified that the configuration of the contemporary working world traces back much more to the feeling of suffering and illness of the workers than to the opposite. Hence, we watch a neo-liberal logic impregnating the various contexts of work, even those that should not be guided by the neo-liberal precepts of productivity and unbridled profit, such as health and education. This model of production aims at the minimum for the workers and the maximum for the capital.^{3,4}

In this sense, workers are subject to intense working time, more flexible employment contracts with loss of working rights, unworthy salaries, automation and bureaucratization of the work process, loss of autonomy, and creativity discouragement. Such conditions contribute heavily for the feeling of suffering and for illness of professional collectives.^{3,4}

Specifically in the scope of teaching, besides the abovementioned impact, the accumulation of several activities is verified, what attributes, to the worker, multi-skilling and multi-functionality, high productivity, necessity of continuous mastery of the new teaching technologies and obligation of constant academic and technical improvement.^{5,6}

After the consolidation of the neo-liberal model, the reduction of the public machine occurred, affecting the public education institutions negatively.⁷ In this perspective, the reduction of public tenders was observed, and consequently, the decrease in human resources was noticed, as well as the scarcity of material supplies for the work development. All of these situations have influenced in the health-disease process of teachers, causing an increase in absenteeism and medical leaves due to occupational stress, burnout, musculoskeletal diseases, depression, suicide attempts, among other manifestations and diseases.^{8,9}

In the face of this adverse context that settled in the world of work, it was considered relevant to investigate the previously indicated object of study, elaborating the following guiding questions: I) What are the advantages and difficulties felt by teachers of nursing in the development of their work?; and II) What impact is observed by these teachers in their health-disease process, considering the possibility of falling ill?

The objectives traced for the apprehension of the object were: I) Identify the advantages and the difficulties present in the teaching work of nursing; II) Analyze the impact of the work context of the teacher of nursing in the health-disease process of these workers.

We consider that this research is relevant, because pleasure and suffering at and due to work can influence the health of workers directly, as well as interfere in teacher productivity, in the quality of teaching, and *a posteriori* in the quality of nursing care, since it is essential in the qualification and capacitation of new nurses.

This study can bring contributions to the field of Worker Health, because it gives opportunity to the creation of policies that privilege the health of the nursing teachers. In addition, it aims to favor new ways of proceeding for managers, which may become aware and implement better work conditions and more humanized work processes, thus optimizing the feeling of pleasure and, consequently, promoting health. Moreover, this study aims to contribute to the scientific production in the area of worker health and nursing qualification.

METHODS

This is a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory research. The setting was a nursing faculty belonging to a public university, localized in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro.

The referred faculty is organized in four departments: Nursing Fundamentals, Nursing in Public Health, Medical-Surgical Nursing and Maternal-Infant Nursing. For the development of the teaching-learning process, it utilizes a health complex that encompasses a school hospital and a specialized ambulatory unit belonging to the university, besides health units of the municipality and of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Thus, the teachers also develop teaching, extension and research activities in these care units.

The participants of the study were nursing teachers with statutory employment bonds, in effective exercise of their activity, that is, they were not on vacation or on leave of any nature and were exercising their functions for more than a year. This last inclusion criterion in the research was based on the fact that one year is a reasonable period for the workers to speak more appropriately about the work process and organization, as well as of their experiences in the work environment.²

The faculty had a quantitative of 82 nursing teachers in the collection period, and 17 of them were away due to medical leaves, had been transferred to other health or teaching services, were on vacation or, in some way, were involved with the research. Thus, after considering the previously indicated criteria, the data were collected with 16 teachers, 4 of each department. The criterion of information recurrence was also considered, that is to say, when the collected information began to repeat itself, it was the moment to end the interviews.¹⁰

This study followed the ethical requirement for research involving human beings, having been approved by the research ethics committee of the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro under protocol 799.908. To ensure the undertaking of the study according to the ethical precepts,

each participant was informed about the positive statement of the ethics committee, about the object and objective of the study, as well as about their rights as participants of the study. The teachers that accepted to take part were oriented also about the guarantee of anonymity and asked to sign the free and informed consent form.¹¹

The phase of data collection occurred between July and August 2014. Because the object of this study is of subjective character, we opted for the semi-structured interview, which gives room to dialogue, what facilitates the apprehension of what we wish to investigate.¹²

The treatment of data was carried out through the thematic content analysis technique, which is characterized by the organization of information in phases or stages, leading to a structured and organized result of the content. In this sense, this analysis is a process through which the empirical material is transformed, in a systematic way, and is codified in units, which allow for an exact description of the characteristics pertinent to the content of the statements.¹²

From the application of the thematic content analysis technique, the following category emerged: Complexity of the world of work and the impact on the health of the teacher. The discussion on this category was organized based on three subcategories: I) Impact of the work organization and process on the life of the teachers; II) Situations that favor the teaching work; and III) Circumstances that hinder the teaching work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Complexity of the world of work and impact on the health of the teacher

Through the data analysis, it was made evident that the work organization in which the teachers are inserted is heavily influenced by the neo-liberal model, and it was verified that there is negative impact on the health of these professionals. In this sense, the demands of the work organization required from the workers, such as: multi-skilling, multi-functionality, intensification of the work rhythms and work overload; makes it so that the teachers indicate fatigue, physical and mental exhaustion, besides feeling stressed.

Aiming at describing the complexity of this working world and the impact on the health of the teachers in a better-systematized way, this category was divided in three subcategories, as previously indicated.

Impact of the work organization and process on the life of the teachers.

The organization of teaching work is based on the precepts of neo-liberalism, which seeks a worker that is multi-skilled, multi-functional, highly academic qualified, creative, which masters teaching technologies and technologies of the work process, with empathy and ability for interpersonal relationships, with decision-taking

capability, anyway, a professional with high qualification and action requirements.³ The multi-skilling and multi-functionality required from the teacher encompass the capability of class preparation and provision, student guidance for the development of scientific work, coordination of extension and research projects, elaboration of researches, publication of scientific works, academic management, among other activities.^{5,13}

It was verified that, in order to meet this work demand, the teachers often must use their resting and leisure time, giving up interaction with their family and friends, or choose to abdicate some activity to preserve their health. It was also understood that the use of technology facilitates the development of the work, as it enables attendance of the work tasks at any moment and anywhere.⁵ In other words, the use of technology has brought down the barrier between the personal and the professional world.¹⁴ These situations can be exemplified in the following selected statement:

After 19 o'clock there is the work that I take home, so there is a set of documents that I often have to read. There are the e-mails that don't stop and that I need to send. Occasionally, prepare a class, frequently, solve or prepare some material. (E7).

In spite of making use of technology and their leisure and resting time to handle the high work demand, the teachers cannot respond effectively to the large volume of work activities. This intense work rhythm imputed by the work organization favors physical and psychic suffering, and therefore, falling ill.

"So I work on Saturdays, on Sundays, at night... For me there isn't this thing. I keep producing work on Saturdays, in my leisure time, in the time I have free!" (E14).

Psychically, it must be stressed that the constant feeling of not being able to exceed or even meet expectations in the work organization may generate psychic suffering and even the emergence of mental diseases such as Burnout, voluntary servitude syndrome, depression and pathological anxiety.^{15,16} In the statements of the participants, the greatest impact on the health-disease process was fatigue, physical and mental exhaustion and stress.

"Stress! You have a deadline to deliver a document, to write an article. You have a deadline to give an opinion. So, in some moments you have anxiety and stress." (E1).

"Sometimes I feel tired. I think everyone feels physical fatigue, mental fatigue due to the excess of activities [...], excess of responsibility [...] Sometimes it is a bit exhausting and leaves you stressed." (E13).

In this sense, it is verified that the way by which work organization is configured rebounds negatively on health, on family and social life. Hence, it captures the subjectivity of the worker in favor of a productivity that never ends, in an uninterrupted massification of work.

Situations that favor the teaching work

The participants of the study pointed out that the physical environment, the material and technological resources and good interpersonal relationships are potential facilitators for the development of teaching work.

Thus, the availability of material and technological resources in the work environment favors the exercise of teaching, since such resources optimize the working time and provide differentiated classes that encourage student learning, what can lead to greater satisfaction for both parties.^{14,17}

Moreover, when work relations are positive, highlighting respect, dialogue, companionship and cooperation, pleasure prevails and the subjectivity of the workers is preserved, as well as the health and well-being of the professional collective.⁸ It is possible to note this situation by the statements of the participants.

"I come to work because the people that work with me are very nice, there is a healthy environment, of respect and harmony between us. So, I come to work gladly." (E7).

I think that the classrooms are good, that the resources we have are adequate. [...] There is cleaning, structure and a good library [...] I think that those laboratory rooms in the eighth floor are very good to, very broad [...] It is pleasing to teach there. (E11).

Besides these factors related to the physical work environment and those referring to interpersonal relationship, it was also pointed out that enjoying being a teacher and a nurse are facilitators for the execution of the work activities.

"But actually, deep down, I chose to be here, I am here, I chose to do what I want, I do what I want and I am where I want, with who I want. So, I consider myself happy and fulfilled with what I do." (E13).

It can be seen that the fact of enjoying the profession is intimately linked to the issue of motivation. This motivation prompts the workers to pursue the best performance at work, and makes them feel whole with the result of their labor.^{8,18} It is inferred that the needs of the ego are those related to appreciation, to the feelings of capability and usefulness in the world. In this sense, self-realization is tied to the full realization of the individual, to professional and personal growth, to the return that work provides to the worker, and to personal satisfaction.^{19,20} Another situation pointed out as a facilitator to the teaching work was the support offered by the education institution, about which the participants mentioned the support in micro and macro institutional level, faculty and university, respectively. By the Faculty, were specified: the academic support provided by the direction of the unit, the work organization of the technical-administrative employees and the distribution of the student body in practical classes and supervised internships.

I think that this direction group is a very cohesive group, a group that is in the management and that facilitates

your work, this makes a great difference. Because this is what the manager is for, he is a facilitator of our operation [...] he receives you, he asks what you need, he gives you support and this is very nice. (E2).

"In graduation, I see as a benefit to have all the materials that I request, an adequate and well qualified body of technical-administrative employees." (E4).

"Another facility is the reduced student body [...]. This division of students is very good, because it doesn't overload you [...]. So, I see this as a favor that the faculty provides us so we are able to work in this practical activity." (E5).

In a macro-institutional level, it was stressed that the university in question favors the development of extension activities, offers support for the elaboration of scientific research and encourages the use of creativity and autonomy by its workers.

"I think that these favors are associated to a degree of autonomy that is high here, and from this degree of autonomy we are able to create, research and give good classes." (E3).

Maybe extension is one of the easiest activities to be developed in the university, because as it allows for the flexibility of strategies, and as a good portion of these activities is associated to external spaces, extra-institutional partnerships, this ends up providing malleability in the development of these activities. (E7).

It can be seen that the incentive to autonomy, to creativity, to solidarity in the professional collective, to flexibility in the work process, as well as material resources for the development of the work are elements that favor the labor process and, in its turn, result in pleasure and in promotion of health.²⁰

Circumstances that hinder the teaching work

In the current world of work, proactivity is sought of workers, and that they be ready to respond immediately to the challenges that the work imposes, with creative solutions and, if possible, without additional economic burdens to labor organizations. Moreover, it is desirable that the workers have the ability to perform uncountable functions and activities, in a fast way and with quality, besides the capability to commit to their learning. That is to say, it is sought that learning be autonomous, independent and at the own expense of the worker, preventing the continuous mastery of technical, technological and academic knowledge. These attitudes, abilities and competencies are guided by a productive model that aims to achieve maximum profit: the neo-liberal model.³

In the scope of teaching, such model imputes a series of tasks onto the teacher as well, activities that are inherent to the teaching work, but other have associated to them, which have been largely intensifying the work rhythm. Tasks such as the following have been identified, for instance: planning

theoretical classes and teaching; supervising students in internship fields; orienting scientific works; participating in evaluation boards for monographies, master's and doctoral theses; providing opinions to specialized journals; competing for the notices that foment research and extension; producing research; elaborating articles; contributing to the academic management; taking part in diversified meetings, among others.¹³

It is inferred that the university teaching work assumes commitment to scientific production and socialization of knowledge; however, it is currently imperative that this professional meet deadlines and elaborate a high number of scientific articles, imposed by the research incentive organs. In this perspective, the elaboration and dissemination of scientific production are intensely encouraged by higher education institutions, because through publications the teachers obtain funding for their research, contribute to the maintenance of the physical infrastructure of labor and to inputs for the teaching-learning process, receive research grants and keep themselves in the postgraduate stricto sensu programs.¹¹

Therefore, the way by which work organization is established ends up overloading the teachers, consuming the psychosomatic energy of these workers. The following selected statements illustrate the above:

I do academic management, teach, monitor students in internships, correct works, I orient, I have to read, I have to prepare for the classes, I am invited to participate in boards outside the university. Anyway, I don't even know how I handle so many things. [...] This multiplicity of tasks generates discomfort, and enormous stress. (E5).

"You have a deadline to deliver a certain work, to write an article. You have a deadline to provide an opinion. So, it is suffering and it makes me stressed". (E1).

In education institutions, there is lack of public tenders, which causes a reduced personnel body, consequently, overloading those workers that keep producing.⁷ Besides, with a reduced professional board, the teachers see themselves obligated to accumulate positions, functions and activities, corroborating to multi-skilling and multi-functionality. Such situation was reported by the participants as an obstacle at work.

One of the blatant situations is the reduced personnel body, because you don't even have someone to discuss the tasks with. Our department meetings end up with extra chairs because there are few professor, so this is a hindrance. That is, there are few with whom you can share problems and ideas or develop or grow the department. (E4).

As deputy chief of department, I see as a hindrance the issue of them always keeping me in the headship of the

department. The department is small and we have many transferred teachers. So, I end up being chief and if I'm not chief, I'm deputy chief. [...] Therefore, this has bothered me. It is an administrative service that sometimes you would like to be doing other things. (E3).

Still in relation to the education institution, most of the teachers reported that the physical structure and the disposition of material resources are elements that favor the teaching work. However, some participants highlighted that despite there having the referred resources, many times they are not in adequate conditions or in a sufficient number for the development of the work, a fact that can impact negatively on the health of these professionals.^{21,22}

[...] I have great difficulty because we lack computational structure in the faculty, I think it's not just about having a computer. Even more for those researchers that work with investigation in large databases. You need to have a good informatics tool and our computers aren't good. (E7).

"Sometimes the air-conditioning makes much noise. Then I can't hear the students well and then we have to scream". (E8).

In the assistance services in which the internship fields of the university students occur, the factors that hinder the execution of work are related to the lack of material resources, physical structure and lack of monitoring of technological resources.

[...] this health unit doesn't always offer us benefits and adequate teaching conditions. The physical space, we don't have enough, the rooms are small, sometimes we are with a somewhat bigger number of students, which already hampers the ambience. We don't always have the material necessary for the development of that technical procedure (E4).

Issues related to the interinstitutional relations with other places of practice field was also mentioned as still another hindrance aspect. In this sense, there was allusion to the bureaucratic requirements that delay the entrance of the student in the field, result in expenditure of energy, time and money from the university and from the teachers, impairing the teaching-learning process and distressing these professionals.

We want, for instance, to optimize the practicing fields. We have barriers in the institutions that make a series of requirements, which request documents and more documents. I see then, paper spending and the technical-administrative employee wasting time and work force in something that could be debureaucratized (E1).

It was noted that the difficulties of teachers to develop the work process are strongly linked to the new configuration

in the world of work, which has been guided by the logic of productivity, that captures the subjectivity of the workers in an ingenious way and make them work under intense rhythm to handle a multiplicity of tasks.²³

Moreover, the configuration of labor organization in public health and educational services has deepened even more this intensification of work, because with the lack or scarcity of material and human resources, consequently, there is an increase in the volume of work, either due to the attempt to fill the absence of another professional or in the search for improvised material in the face of the insufficiency of inputs.³

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is concluded that the new configurations of the world of work have influenced heavily the work of teachers of nursing, impelling these workers to multi-skilling, to multi-functionality, to experience the precariousness of the material and human resources in their everyday work.

Consequently, negative repercussions in the health of these professionals were evidenced, expressed through stress, fatigue, emotional overload; manifestations that are part of the subjective dimension. Negative impact in the social dimension of the teacher was also apprehended, such as: loss of leisure and family interaction time and the invasion of the resting time of the worker in order to meet the expectations of the work organization.

In this context, the elements that favor and that hinder the teaching work were verified and it was concluded that there are more elements that hinder the work than that favor it. As facilitators, stand out: good interpersonal relationship, identification with the profession and professional pleasure with teaching, as well as autonomy and flexibility for the development of work conferred by the education institution.

The hindering elements pointed out were the reduced quantity of human resources, the deficiency in quality of the technological and material resources, the intensification of the work rhythms, the demand for multi-skilling and multi-functionality, bureaucratization of the interinstitutional relations with emphasis in the internship fields.

In the face of these results, it is considered necessary to promote and preserve the health of the teachers through organizational measures that require a lower work rhythm and less tasks to be performed, with emphasis for the need to obtain human and material resources of adequate quantity and quality for the good development of the work.

It is necessary that the worker health service develop actions that minimize or neutralize the negative effects of this work organization in the health-disease process of the teachers. This fact will cause positive repercussions not only for this professional collective, but also for the

quality of the teaching provided and consequent quality of care.

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