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Self-esteem, common mental disorders and lifestyle of workers at a public university

Autoestima, transtornos mentais comuns e estilo de vida de trabalhadores de uma universidade pública

Autoestima, trastornos mentales comunes y estilo de vida de los trabajadores de una universidad pública

Fernanda Jorge Guimarães[1], Nayra Neres Silva[1], Juliana Lourenço de Araújo Veras[1], Jaqueline Galdino Albuquerque Perrelli[2], Zailde Carvalho dos Santos[1]

Corresponding author:
Fernanda Jorge Guimarães
E-mail: fernanda.guimaraes@ufpe.br

[1]Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. Vitória de Santo Antão, Pernambuco, Brasil.
[2]Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. Recife, Pernambuco, Brasil.

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Abstract

Objective: to analyze the working conditions, self-esteem, suggestive symptoms of Common Mental Disorders (CMD), and lifestyle of workers at a public university. **Methods:** a cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach was conducted with faculty members and administrative staff working at a federal public university. **Results:** regarding self-esteem, participants showed a high average (34.36%). In relation to lifestyle, 46.3% presented a very good lifestyle, 33.1% a good lifestyle, 17.4% an excellent lifestyle, and only 3.3% were classified as having a regular lifestyle. Suggestive symptoms of CMD were present in 32.2% of the professionals. **Conclusion:** the faculty members and administrative staff of the institution presented good levels of self-esteem and lifestyle, which positively influenced the results related to the participants' mental health.

Descriptors:
Lifestyle. Mental health. Occupational groups. Universities.

Whats is already known on this?
Mental disorders are one of the main causes of absenteeism from work, both in the public and private sectors. There are few studies investigating the correlation between mental disorders, lifestyle, and self-esteem.

What this study adds?
The study identified patterns suggestive of common mental disorders among the participants, although they presented high self-esteem and a lifestyle classified as very good.

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar as condições de trabalho, a autoestima, os quadros sugestivos de Transtornos Mentais Comuns (TMC) e o estilo de vida de trabalhadores de uma universidade pública. **Métodos:** estudo transversal, com abordagem quantitativa, realizado com docentes e técnicos administrativos que atuam em uma universidade pública federal. **Resultados:** quanto à avaliação da autoestima, observou-se que os participantes apresentaram média elevada (34,36%). Em relação ao estilo de vida, verificou-se que 46,3% apresentaram estilo de vida muito bom, 33,1% apresentaram estilo bom, 17,4% estilo excelente, e apenas 3,3% foram classificados com estilo regular. Os quadros sugestivos de TMC estiveram presentes em 32,2% dos profissionais. **Conclusão:** os

docentes e técnicos administrativos da instituição apresentaram bons níveis de autoestima e de estilo de vida, o que influenciou positivamente nos resultados relacionados à saúde mental dos participantes.
Descritores:
Estilo de vida. Saúde mental. Categorias de trabalhadores. Universidades.

Resumen
Objetivo: analizar las condiciones laborales, la autoestima, los síntomas sugestivos de Trastornos Mentales Comunes (TMC) y el estilo de vida de los trabajadores de una universidad pública. **Método:** se realizó un estudio transversal con un enfoque cuantitativo con personal docente y administrativo de una universidad pública federal. **Resultados:** en cuanto a la autoestima, los participantes mostraron un promedio alto (34,36%). En cuanto al estilo de vida, el 46,3% presentó un estilo de vida muy bueno, el 33,1% un estilo de vida bueno, el 17,4% un estilo de vida excelente y solo el 3,3% se clasificó como con un estilo de vida regular. El 32,2% de los profesionales presentó síntomas sugestivos de TMC. **Conclusión:** el personal docente y administrativo de la institución presentó buenos niveles de autoestima y estilo de vida, lo que influyó positivamente en los resultados relacionados con la salud mental de los participantes.
Descriptores:
Estilo de vida. Salud mental. Grupos profesionales. Universidades.

INTRODUCTION

The National Policy on Workers' Health (*Política Nacional de Saúde do Trabalhador e da Trabalhadora* - PNSTT) recognizes work as one of the main determinants of the health-disease process and aims to ensure comprehensive health care for the working population, focusing on the promotion, protection, and reduction of morbidity and mortality resulting from production models, through worker health surveillance actions[1]. In light of the principle of comprehensiveness foreseen in the PNSTT, understanding the concepts of lifestyle, self-esteem and mental health becomes essential for the analysis of this process[1].

Lifestyle is understood as the set of behavioral patterns adopted by individuals, which may represent a threat or protection to health and directly influence the risk of chronic diseases. This concept is linked to the Social Determinants of Health (SDH), since individual choices and behaviors are shaped by the structural, political, economic, and labor conditions that configure the life context[2]. Recent evidence also demonstrates that work-related factors, such as workload, occupational demands, and institutional context, are associated with health behaviors and can affect workers' ability to maintain healthy habits[3].

When these relationships result in psychological distress, workers may present symptoms characteristic of Common Mental Disorders (CMD), including persistent sadness, anxiety, difficulties concentrating and remembering, loss of focus, insomnia, fatigue, irritability, and somatic complaints. Although considered less severe when compared to other mental disorders, CMD have become increasingly frequent, constituting a significant public health problem[4-5].

Among university professors, a survey conducted with professors of Nursing, Medicine, and Physical Education identified that, although no participant was in the severe phase of Burnout Syndrome, most were in initial or moderate phases, highlighting a scenario that requires preventive and institutional attention[6]. Another study with professors from public universities showed that about half did not rate their quality of life as satisfactory, a result associated with low self-esteem, insufficient social support, and fragile interpersonal relationships[7].

In the case of administrative staff, the prevalence of anxious and depressive symptoms, stress, insomnia, inadequate diet, difficulty concentrating, suicidal ideation, alcohol abuse, emotional lability, frequent fatigue, and difficulties in performing work activities was observed. Some studies have also

pointed to high rates of mental disorders in this population, related to both personal and occupational factors, with negative impacts on self-esteem, quality of life, efficiency, and job satisfaction[8–9].

Given this scenario, the importance of analyzing working conditions, self-esteem, suggestive symptoms of CMD, and the lifestyle of public university workers becomes evident. The scarcity of national studies that address these aspects in an integrated way among professors and administrative staff reinforces the need to deepen this research agenda. Producing evidence on mental health in the university context contributes to the identification of potential work-related illnesses, to improving the understanding of the health-disease process, and to the development of prevention and health promotion policies capable of improving the quality of life in the academic environment. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the working conditions, self-esteem, suggestive symptoms of CMD, and lifestyle of workers at a public university.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach, guided by the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) strategy. The research was conducted online using Google Forms. Data collection took place from September 2020 to February 2022.

The study participants were workers - faculty members and administrative staff, working at one of the campuses of a federal public university in the interior of the state of Pernambuco. The inclusion criteria were: workers of both sexes with a permanent or substitute employment relationship with the university; the exclusion criteria were: visiting employees, postdoctoral fellows, and employees on leave from their activities.

For the sample size calculation, the formula for a finite population was used, with the following parameters: confidence coefficient (Zα) = 95%; sampling error (e) = 6.8%; event estimate (p) = 50%. As for the total number of the population, there were 294 professionals; therefore, a sample of n=121 participants was estimated. The convenience sampling process was adopted.

For data collection, the following instruments were used: identification questionnaire, "Fantastic Lifestyle" questionnaire, "Rosenberg Self-Esteem Assessment Scale" questionnaire; and Self Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20). The identification questionnaire has a semi-structured format and addressed the following variables: sociodemographic data (age, sex, monthly family income, education, religion, marital status), and work information (function, institutional affiliation, work schedule, shift, sector of activity, activities performed, other employment, absence from work due to illness).

The "Fantastic Lifestyle" questionnaire aims to relate lifestyle to the participant's health conditions in the last month. The form follows the Likert scale model, with 25 questions, 23 of which have five alternatives (0 to 4 points) and two dichotomous questions (0 and 4 points), distributed across nine domains: “family and friends”, “physical activity”, “nutrition”, “cigarettes and drugs”, “alcohol”, “sleep, seat belts, stress and safe sex”, “type of behavior”, “introspection”, “work”. In analyzing the instrument's results, it is possible to classify the individual's lifestyle as: “excellent” (85-100 points), “very good” (70-84 points), “good” (55-69 points), “fair” (35-54 points) and “needs improvement” (0-34 points). The reliability of the instrument was 0.69[10].

The “Rosenberg Self-Esteem Rating Scale” is an instrument that aims to assess the participant's self-esteem. It has 10 questions with phrases that refer to self-esteem and self-acceptance. Each question contains four Likert-type alternatives, totaling up to four points per question, with the following options: “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “agree”, and “strongly agree”. The total score can range from 10 to 40 points. Regarding the interpretation of the results, it is known that the lower the score, the greater the chances of having low self-esteem. For this scale, no standardization was established regarding the score values to distinguish high self-esteem and low self-esteem. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.90 for this instrument[11].

The SRQ-20 investigates the detection of possible non-psychotic mental disorders among participants. The instrument has 20 items with the possibility of a “yes” or “no” response. “Yes” responses receive one point, and “no” scores zero[12]. A cutoff point of eight or more was adopted to be considered indicative of CMD[13] cases. The overall internal consistency coefficient, defined by Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.80(12). It is worth noting that the questionnaires used as instruments for data collection are validated for the Brazilian reality.

A text containing information about the research and the link to access the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICT) and the form was sent to the institutional emails of the workers and to the emails of the university sectors.

For data analysis, an electronic spreadsheet was generated using Google Forms. *A priori*. Initially, a review of the database was carried out to identify participants with double entry in the study or with invalid responses. Then, the data was coded with two data entry operators. Subsequently, statistical software was used to perform the statistical analysis, adopting measures of central tendency, standard deviation, relative and absolute frequencies, in addition to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to verify the normality of the data. A statistical significance level of 5% was adopted.

This research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines of Resolution No. 466/2012 of the Brazilian National Health Council (CNS). The research project is an excerpt from the project entitled PEER-CAV: V: Validation of a health promotion model in a university context, which was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE) (CAAE: 09213619.6.0000.5208, opinion no. 4.158.102).

RESULTS

The study included 121 workers, with a mean age of 40.8 years (±9.0). Ages ranged from 19 to 64 years, with the highest frequency of participants in the 30-39 age group (n=49; 40.5%). A higher frequency of women (n=79; 65.3%), married women (n=71; 58.7%), women with children (n=70; 57.9%), family income between five and eight minimum wages (n=65; 53.7%), religious affiliation (n=100; 82.6%), and doctoral degrees (n=62; 51.2%) were observed. Further details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the professionals. Vitória de Santo Antão (PE), Brazil, 2022.

Variable	n	%	Descriptive statistics
Sex			
Male	42	34.7	
Female	79	65.3	
Age range			
19 to 24 years	2	1.7	
25 to 29 years	8	6.6	
30 to 39 years	49	40.5	
40 to 49 years	38	31.4	
50 to 59 years	21	17.4	
60 to 64 years	3	2.5	
Family income			
<1 minimum wage	6	5.0	
1 to 3 minimum wages	18	14.9	
>3 to 5 minimum wages	32	26.4	
>5 to 8 minimum wages	65	53.7	
Education			Mean = 40.8 years SD = ±9.0
Completed High School	2	1.7	
Completed Higher Education	8	6.6	
Specialization	20	16.5	
Master's Degree	29	24.0	
Doctorate	62	51.2	
Religion			
No	21	17.4	
Yes	100	82.6	
Marital status			
Single/widowed/divorced	48	39.7	
Married	71	58.7	
Other	2	1.7	
Children			
No	51	42.1	
Yes	70	57.9	

Source: Survey data.

Regarding work characteristics, the participants were mostly faculty members (n=75; 62.0%), with permanent contracts (n=107; 88.4%), a 40-hour work week (n=103; 85.1%), and daytime work (n=103; 85.1%). As for the work sector, the category "other" predominated (n=81; 66.9%), related to the professional category of faculty members, who do not work in a specific sector within the institution. Concerning the activities performed at the institution, teaching was the predominant activity (n=82; 67.8%). The majority stated that they did not have another job (n=97; 80.2%) and had not been absent from work due to illness (n=107; 88.4%). More details are in Table 2.

Table 2. Job characteristics of the professionals. Vitória de Santo Antão (PE), Brazil, 2022.

Variable	n	%
Job Title		
Faculty member	75	62.0
Administrative staff	46	38.0
Employment Status		
Permanent	107	88.4
Temporary	14	11.6
Work Schedule		
20 hours per week	4	3.3
30 hours per week	14	11.6
40 hours per week	103	85.1
Work Shift		
Daytime	103	85.1
Nighttime	18	14.9
Work Sector		
Administrative office	7	5.8
NATI (Information Technology and Technology Department)	1	0.8
Administration	6	5.0
Library	7	5.8
Laboratory	19	15.7
Other	81	66.9
Do you have another job?		
No	97	80.2
Yes	24	19.8
Have you had to take leave from work due to illness?		
No	107	88.4
Yes	14	11.6
Activities performed at the institution		
Teaching	82	67.8
Research	70	57.9
Extension	63	52.1
Administrative	63	52.1
Support	19	15.7

*Other: the faculty members are not allocated to a specific sector.
Source: Survey data.

Regarding the assessment of self-esteem, it was observed that the participants presented a high average of 34.36 (SD+ 4.262), with a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 40. The score did not present a normal distribution (p=0.008).

In relation to lifestyle, it was observed that 46.3% of the participants presented a very good lifestyle. Only 3.3% showed a regular lifestyle. The total score ranged from 47 to 94 points, with an average of 73.6. Other details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Lifestyle assessment of professionals. Vitória de Santo Antão (PE), Brazil, 2022.

Lifestyle	n	%	Descriptive statistics	p-value
Excellent	21	17.4		
Very good	56	46.3	Mean = 73.6	0.167
Good	40	33.1	SD = ±10.7	
Average	4	3.3		

*Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test.
Source: Survey data.

Symptoms suggestive of CMD were present in 32.2% (n=39) of faculty members and administrative staff. The total score ranged from 0 to 15 points, with a mean of 5.4 and SD ≥4.4. When analyzing the association between sociodemographic variables, work-related variables, lifestyle, self-esteem, and CMD, it was observed that the variable absenteeism from work showed a statistically significant association with symptoms suggestive of common mental disorders, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Association between absence from work and symptoms suggestive of Common Mental Disorder. Vitória de Santo Antão (PE), Brazil, 2022

Variables		CMD		OR*	95% CI		p-value**
		No	Yes				
Absence from work	No	77	30	4.620	1.431	14.912	0.006
	Yes	5	9				

*OR: Odds ratio; **: Chi-square test.
Source: Survey data.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the participation of women predominated (65.3%), mostly in the age range between 30 and 39 years (40.5%). This profile is similar to that observed in research conducted with faculty members from Brazilian public universities, which also identified greater female participation among respondents[4,14]. The prevalence of this profile may reflect the current composition of the teaching staff of public Higher Education institutions in the country, especially in areas traditionally more occupied by women.

Regarding marital status, 58.7% of participants self-identified as married, which differs from a study conducted in the Southern Region, which showed 65.0% of participants with a marital status of married[14]. A survey conducted with technical-administrative staff of a federal education institution in the Northeastern Region showed, in its results, 64.0% of respondents were married[15].

In relation to the level of education, 51.2% of the participating professionals held a doctorate. This result is consistent with a study that identified that 50.3% of university professors held a doctorate[16]. On the other hand, a study carried out in the State of Rio Grande do Sul showed that 75.0% of participants had this qualification[14]. In a survey conducted with administrative staff from a federal education institute in the Northeast Region, 42.9% of respondents had a specialization qualification, with only 2.7% of participants holding a doctorate[15].

The differences in the results may be related to the participation of faculty members and administrative staff in the study. It is also noteworthy that the administrative staff participating in the research held a doctorate.

Regarding employment status, the vast majority had permanent positions, totaling 88.4%, while in the study with faculty members from the state university of Bahia, the number of participants who declared having permanent positions was 99.2%, with very similar numbers[16].

It is noteworthy that 85.1% of professionals reported having a 40-hour work week, and 80.2% stated that they did not have another job. In agreement, a study by the northeastern federal institution had 83.0% of respondents working exclusively at the institute[15]. This is explained by the fact that a large part of the professionals have an extensive workload within the institution. Moreover, universities have contracts with an Exclusive Dedication regime for faculty members, which limits them from engaging in other paid activities.

Regarding self-esteem, the average obtained was 34.36. In general, participants had self-esteem considered high. It is known that self-esteem is considered an important factor for maintaining mental health or even for illness, depending on the perceptions, feelings, and thoughts - positive or negative - that the individual develops about themselves, which can interfere with the social and psychological relationships of workers. Given this, satisfactory self-esteem can be considered a protective factor against the development of CMD[17].

In this study, it was found that 46.3% of participants had a very good lifestyle, 33.1% a good lifestyle, 17.4% an excellent lifestyle, and only 3.3% were classified as having a regular lifestyle. Research conducted at a college in Peru identified that 42% of faculty members have an adequate lifestyle and 24.1% a regular lifestyle[18]. Comparatively, there are differences between the results found in the two studies; however, regarding the very good lifestyle, the results did not show discrepancies, considering that the

group of university faculty members, in general, has a income that favors the adoption of healthier behavior patterns.

In this study, 32.2% of participants presented suggestive symptoms of CMD, a percentage slightly higher than that found in another investigation[4]. A study conducted at a public university in Bahia found a prevalence of 44.6% of cases suggestive of CMD. This same study presented results demonstrating how lifestyle can influence the onset of CMD, with a higher prevalence of suggestive cases among those who did not engage in physical activity and leisure activities, compared to those who did, and a higher prevalence of suggestive cases of CMD among those who slept less than six hours a night, compared to those who slept six hours or more[16].

The results presented differ from those found in research conducted with administrative staff at a federal institute, which showed a prevalence of suggestive cases of CMD of 37.0%, and in research conducted in the interior of the state of Ceará, in which 29% of faculty members showed indications of CMD[15,19].

This study's limitations included the convenience sampling process and the fact that data collection was carried out at a single educational institution.

The research results provide support for programs aimed at promoting, preventing, and monitoring the health of workers in the university context, as well as improving and implementing existing programs.

CONCLUSION

The study results revealed that the faculty members and administrative staff of the institution presented good levels of self-esteem and lifestyle, which influenced the positive results related to the mental health of these workers. However, the percentage of cases suggestive of CMD and their relationship with absences from work should be taken into consideration.

CONTRIBUITIONS

Study conception or design: Guimarães FJ, Silva NN, Perrelli JGA. Data collection: Guimarães FJ, Silva NN. Data analysis and interpretation: Guimarães FJ, Silva NN, Perrelli JGA. Manuscript writing or critical revision: Guimarães FJ, Silva NN, Perrelli JGA, Veras JLA, Santos ZC. Final approval of the version to be published: Guimarães FJ, Veras JLA, Santos ZC.

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