



ORIGINAL

## Quality of life at work of the prison agent in Ceará

Qualidade de vida no trabalho do agente penitenciário cearense  
Calidad de vida en el trabajo del agente penitenciario del Estado de Ceará

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to evaluate the Quality of Life at Work of prison agents in Ceará. **Methodology:** cross-sectional and descriptive study, with a quantitative approach. The data collection took place in August and September 2018, using an electronic questionnaire with sociodemographic variables and the Quality of Life at Work Questionnaire (QWQL-Bref). The sampling considered the snowball technique and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee from the Centro Universitário Católico de Quixadá, under protocol number 2.719.401. **Results:** 57 prison officers participated, predominantly men, aged between 31 and 43 years, married, with complete higher education, who worked in the profession from one to five years, with 40 to 48 hours of work per week. The quality of life at work was classified as neutral, with the personal domain being the only one with a satisfactory mean and the professional domain with the lowest neutral average obtained. **Conclusion:** the quality of life at work was considered neutral, but the warning signals for the decrease in the quality of life at work cannot be underestimated. The importance of promoting actions to improve working conditions and their implications for the physical and mental health of these individuals is highlighted.

**Descriptors:** Prisons. Quality of life. Work. Nursing.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** avaliar a Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho dos agentes penitenciários cearenses. **Metodologia:** estudo transversal e descritivo, com análise quantitativa. A coleta ocorreu nos meses de agosto e setembro de 2018, utilizando-se um questionário eletrônico com dados sociodemográficos e o instrumento *Quality of Working Life Questionnaire* (QWQL-Bref). A amostragem ocorreu por bola de neve e os dados foram analisados por estatística descritiva. A pesquisa foi aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa do Centro Universitário Católica de Quixadá, sob parecer 2.719.401. **Resultados:** participaram 57 agentes penitenciários, predominando homens, com faixa etária de 31 a 43 anos de idade, casados, com ensino superior completo, que atuam na profissão de um a cinco anos, com jornada trabalhista de 40 a 48 horas semanais. A qualidade de vida no trabalho foi classificada como neutra, sendo o domínio pessoal o único com média satisfatória e o domínio profissional com menor média neutra obtida. **Conclusão:** a qualidade de vida no trabalho foi considerada neutra, mas os fatores de alerta para a diminuição da qualidade de vida no trabalho não podem ser subestimados. Destaca-se a importância de se promover ações para melhorar as condições de trabalho e suas implicações na saúde física e mental destes indivíduos.

**Descritores:** Prisões. Qualidade de Vida. Trabalho. Enfermagem.

### RESUMÉN

**Objetivo:** evaluar la Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo de los agentes penitenciarios del Estado de Ceará. **Metodología:** estudio descriptivo transversal, con análisis cuantitativo. La recolección se realizó en agosto y septiembre de 2018, mediante un cuestionario electrónico con datos sociodemográficos y a través del *Quality of Working Life Questionnaire* (QWQL-Bref). El muestreo se realizó mediante bola de nieve y para el análisis de datos se utilizó la estadística descriptiva. La investigación obtuvo la aprobación del Comité de Ética en Investigación del Centro Universitario Católica de Quixadá, bajo el dictamen 2.719.401. **Resultados:** participaron 57 agentes penitenciarios y se detectó el predominio de hombres, con edades entre 31 y 43 años, casados, con estudios superiores completos, uno a cinco años de ejercicio profesional, jornada laboral de 40 a 48 horas semanales. La calidad de vida en el trabajo se clasificó como neutral, siendo el dominio personal el único con promedio satisfactorio mientras que el dominio profesional arrojó el promedio neutral más bajo. **Conclusión:** la calidad de vida en el trabajo se consideró neutra, sin embargo, no deben subestimarse los factores de alerta para la disminución de la calidad de vida en el trabajo. Se destaca la importancia de impulsar acciones para mejorar las condiciones de trabajo y sus implicaciones para la salud física y mental de estos sujetos.

**Descritores:** Prisiones. Calidad de vida. Trabajo. Enfermería.

## INTRODUCTION

Penitentiary agents are responsible for maintaining the surveillance, custody and discipline of people in prisons, as well as for keeping the environment organized and peaceful. In addition, they perform external actions such as armed escorts that transport prisoners to hearings and hospital care.<sup>(1)</sup> Although, this profession is involved in the preservation of public order, the stigma associated with the work institution and the high level of stress to which they are submitted undermine the social interaction of these individuals, which can lead to the development of diseases.<sup>(2)</sup>

Penitentiary agent is considered the second most dangerous profession in the world, as it simultaneously presents the risks of unhealthy and dangerous situations.<sup>(3)</sup> Still, the professionals live with high loads of stress and risks, in addition to presenting a complex routine with many responsibilities. The interaction of all these factors can compromise the physical and mental health of these individuals.<sup>(4)</sup>

Furthermore, these professionals are seen by inmates as responsible for their state of confinement, as they are the institutional representation of what oppresses them.<sup>(2)</sup> This sometimes creates situations of conflict between the two groups, placing agents under constant risk, especially in the state of Ceará, where the public security problems associated with criminal organizations are disturbing and frequently reported in the media. .

In this context, the quality of life of the professional at work would have the aim of guaranteeing the improvement of working conditions, seeking to promote the individual's safety, health and well-being, both at the institutional level, as well as at the personal and social level. This quality of life refers to the self-perception of individuals regarding the satisfaction or not of their daily life needs, considering the opportunities for achieving happiness and self-realization, which are made available through independence, whether physical, economic or social.<sup>(5)</sup>

Quality of life has been studied in several areas of knowledge, including health sciences. The holistic view of man as a biopsychosocial being became much more visible with the expanded concept of health, and in view of that, quality of life and health are terms that are continuously connected. Thus, the assessment of quality of life, in different contexts, such as at work, becomes important for promoting the health of individuals and as an instrument for the study of nursing.<sup>(6)</sup>

The identification of the possible factors that may compromise the quality of life at work for prison officers is relevant to subsidize measures for protection, prevention, and health promotion. In addition, it is the responsibility of health professionals, including the nurse, to analyze the factors that may interfere in the health of workers. Nurses, using health education actions, become agents of transformation, by providing an improvement in the quality of life at work for

correctional officers, acting in the prevention of damages resulting from exposure to occupational risks and in health promotion.<sup>(7)</sup>

Considering the importance of these professionals within the prison environment, it is necessary to analyze the reflexes of their work in their quality of life and health. Thus, this study aimed to assess the quality of life at work of prison agents in Ceará.

## METODOLOGIA

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive study with quantitative analysis, carried out within the penitentiary system from Ceará, with penitentiary agents, from August to September 2018.

According to data from 2018, from the Ceará State Department of Justice and Citizenship (SEJUS), during the period of data collection, there were a total of 2.155 prison officers, operating in 148 prison units.<sup>(8)</sup> As a criteria for inclusion in the research, the participant should be a correctional officer linked to the State of Ceará and have the *WhatsApp* application installed to access the survey questionnaire. Exclusion criteria were not applied.

The non-probabilistic snowball sampling method was used, where one participant indicates the next. This method was chosen due to the difficult access and fear of the population to participate in scientific researches. Thus, the invitation to participate and the Free and Informed Consent Term (TCLE) were passed on by *WhatsApp* application groups, after the necessary ethical and legal authorizations. Therefore, participation was voluntary by adherence, since all prison officers in the State of Ceará, who were given the link to access the electronic form, were invited to participate in the survey. However, only 2.6% of the total population adhered to participation in this study, signing the consent form.

The electronic data collection form was created on Google forms containing a sociodemographic questionnaire created by the authors, with the variables: age group, gender, marital status, education, number of children, weekly work hours, period in which they work as agents, and whether they had another job. The Quality of Working Life Questionnaire (QWQL-Bref), derived from the QWLQ-78, was also used. Its reliability is higher than the original scale (Cronbach's alpha of 0.9035) to assess quality of life at work. The QWQL-Bref is composed of 20 questions, four of which address the physical / health domain, three the psychological domain, four the personal domain, and nine the professional domain. Each question has a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (most negative answer) to 5 (most positive answer).<sup>(9)</sup>

To evaluate the results of the QWLQ-bref, the classification presented in Chart 1 was used. This classification is used to assess both the individual issues and the domains and the overall quality of life at work index.

After data collection, the variables were displayed in the Excel program, where the absolute and relative frequencies were checked. To calculate the QWLQ-bref scores, algorithms were applied to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, according to the

**Chart 1 - Classification proposed for the QWLQ-bref and for the means of each item and domain.**

Very unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Neutral	Satisfactory	Very satisfactory
0 - 22.5	22.5 - 45	45 - 55	55 - 77.5	77.5 - 100
1	2	3	4	5

Source: Reis Junior, Pilatti and Pedrozo.<sup>(10)</sup>

## RESULTS

57 prison officers participated in the research. They were predominantly men (86%), from 31 to 43 years (63.3%), married (52.6%). Regarding education, 21.1% completed high school, which is the minimum criterion for entering the career, and 56.1% completed college education. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic description of the participants.

Regarding the professional characteristics of the participants, 89.4% of the interviewed agents worked 40 to 48 hours/week, calling it a “24x72” day, where they work 24 hours followed by a break of 72 hours. Although this workload allows for another job, the majority (93%) did not have it. Regarding the period in which they work as agents, periods of 1 to 5 years (48.3%) and 6 to 10 years (24.9%) were prevalent.

As for the results referring to quality of life at work, the averages obtained in each domain indicate that the Personal one had the highest average (3.34), while the Professional domain had the lowest average (2.91). Considering the questions in each

domain, the ones that obtained the most negative responses the in Physical / Health domain, were the comfort in the work environment (2.82) and problems with sleep that impair work (2.68); in Psychological, the worst was the freedom of expression (3.0); in the Personal domain, the family assessment (3.0); and in the Professional, the freedom to create new things at work (2.77) and the level of participation in company decisions (2.47). The data are shown in Table 2.

Graph 1 shows the comparison of the classification obtained in each domain investigated and in the QWLQ-bref in its entirety. Only the Personal domain was considered satisfactory by the participants, while the total classification and the other domains were classified as neutral. It is noteworthy that the professional domain is at the lower limit of the neutral classification (47 points), while the total value of the questionnaire is near the upper limit (54.12 points).

**Table 1 - Sociodemographic characteristics of prison agents. Quixadá, CE, Brazil, 2018.**

VARIABLE	n	%
<b>AGE GROUP</b>		
18 to 30 years	15	26.8
31 to 43 years	36	63.3
44 years or more	6	9.9
<b>GENDER</b>		
Female	8	14.0
Male	49	86.0
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>		
Married	30	52.6
Divorced	5	8.8
Single	12	21.1
Stable union	10	17.5
<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</b>		
0	19	33.4
1	15	26.3
2	13	22.9
3 or more	10	17.4
<b>EDUCATION</b>		
Complete high school	12	21.1
Incomplete higher education	13	22.8
Complete higher education	32	56.1

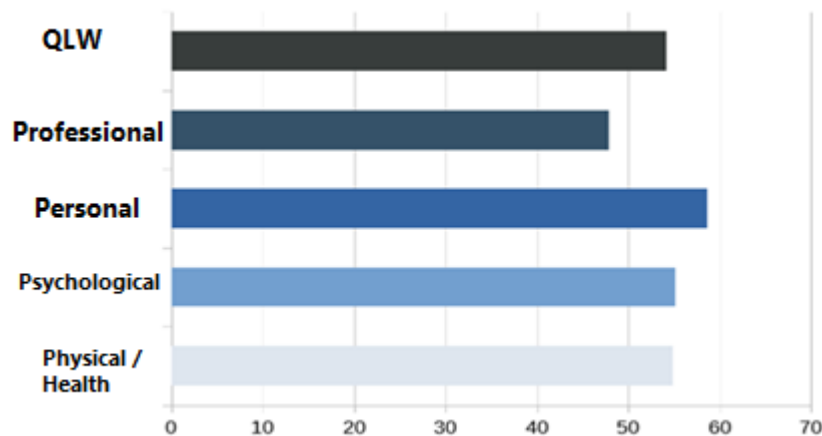
Source: Research data.

**Table 2 - Means obtained by each domain and in the respective questions of the QWLQ-bref. Quixadá, CE, Brazil, 2018.**

Question by domain	Average
<b>Physical/Health</b>	<b>3.19</b>
Q4- How do you assess your sleep?	3.26
Q8- To what extent does a problem with sleep affect your work?	2.68
Q17- Are your basic physiological needs adequately met?	3.36
Q19- How comfortable are you in the work environment?	2.82
<b>Psychological</b>	<b>3.20</b>
Q2- To what extent do you assess your motivation to work?	3.15
Q5- How do you evaluate your freedom of expression in your work?	3.00
Q9- How do you evaluate pride in your profession?	3.45
<b>Personal</b>	<b>3.34</b>
Q6- Do you feel fulfilled with the work you do?	3.31
Q10- How do you assess the quality of your relationship with your superiors and / or subordinates?	3.31
Q15- To what extent are you respected by your superior colleagues?	3.71
Q11 - How does your family evaluate your work?	3.03
<b>Professional</b>	<b>2.91</b>
Q1- How do you assess your freedom to create new things at work?	2.77
Q7- To what extent are you proud of the organization in which you work?	3.15
Q12- How satisfied are you with your level of participation in the company's decisions?	2.47
Q13- Are you satisfied with your level of responsibility at work?	3.21
Q14- Are you satisfied with the training given by your organization?	3.17
Q16- Are you satisfied with the variety of tasks you perform?	3.21
Q18 - How do you evaluate the spirit of camaraderie in your work?	3.50
Q3 - How do you assess the equal treatment of employees?	3.03
Q20 - How satisfied are you with your quality of life at work?	3.70

Source: Research data.

**Graph 1** - Classification of domains and total score for Quality of Life at Work (QWL). Quixadá, CE, Brazil, 2018.



Source: Research data.

## DISCUSSION

Measuring the quality of life at work of the penitentiary agent in Ceará still represents a challenge, since there was little adherence to the research and many opted for neutral responses, which may indicate a tendency to not take a position, which caused a neutral classification of the phenomenon evaluated. Only the personal domain was considered satisfactory, while the professional domain had the lowest average. This reinforces the complexity of carrying out scientific research with this audience and the scarcity of studies with approaches directed at the peculiarities and developments of this profession, especially in the field of health.

A literature review that sought to analyze scientific productions in the nursing field, regarding the health situation of prison staff in the Brazilian context, presented sociodemographic characteristics similar to those found in the present study, and the negative impact of work on the health of these

professionals, with a greater probability of disease development.<sup>(11)</sup>

The predominance of males in the field of security is an important characteristic. There are penitentiary agents of both sexes, and the gender of the inmates is what determines the number of agents of each gender who will work within a certain prison institution.<sup>(3)</sup> The number of women in professions previously considered to be male has grown depending on social development and the acquisition of equal rights.<sup>(12)</sup>

Regarding family composition, most participants were married and had children. This configuration favors the individual's permanence at work, due to the need to provide for the family. In addition, the family is an important factor for the perception of support, as the individual feels welcomed in the face of worrying situations, even though, according with literature, family members report negative feelings about the participants' professional choice.<sup>(13)</sup>

The option for a single job may be related to the stability conferred by public service, considered a positive factor for the quality of life at work.<sup>(14)</sup>

Regarding the length of the service, the longer the time of exposure to risk factors, being work itself a risk factor in this case, the greater the negative consequences, due to cumulative damages.<sup>(11)</sup>

In the Physical / Health domain, the questions that presented the lowest satisfaction referred to the aspects of sleep and comfort. The literature points out that prison units are in precarious conditions due to the lack of structure, weaponry and protective materials, overcrowding and insufficient staff.<sup>(1)</sup> As for sleep, a study carried out with correctional officers found a correlation between the number of hours slept and the Physical / Health, Social Relationships, Psychological domains and the Self-assessment of quality of life.<sup>(15)</sup>

The personal domain presented a satisfactory mean for Quality of Life at Work, with the question regarding respect in the work environment being the one with the best evaluation. Penitentiary agents resocialize inmates, and their conduct must respect the convicted person,<sup>(7)</sup> in order to change society's perception of their profession and favor the resocialization of individuals.

Family assessment was the personal domain element with the lowest mean, reinforcing the negative impact of the profession on family life. Feelings such as fear and anxiety for the prison agent's physical integrity are often reported by family members, in addition to limitations on social leisure activities and the presence of conflicts.<sup>(13)</sup>

The Professional domain presented the lowest average in the sample when compared to the other domains, the result is similar to the investigation carried out with prison agents in Paraná.<sup>(10)</sup> The classification of the domain was neutral, but the questions about the freedom to propose innovations and the level of participation in the company's decisions were evaluated in a more negative way. The limited power of decision is recognized in the prison environment,<sup>(16)</sup> as well as the negligence of official bodies and society itself to offer better working conditions for prison officers.<sup>(17)</sup> In an environment where individuality is not valued or remarked upon, the proposition of innovations for work is compromised.

Psychological symptoms are frequent in prison agents due to the various stressors arising from the profession.<sup>(2)</sup> In the Psychological domain, the question with the most negative evaluation refers to freedom of expression at work, differing from a study conducted with prison agents in Rio Grande do Norte and Paraíba, in which this issue was considered satisfactory.<sup>(18, 19)</sup> The environment of tension and the fear of retaliation from the inmates or the lack of appreciation for the profession may favor this difficulty of freedom of expression in the work of prison officers from Ceará.

According to the results from the research, considering the total results obtained by applying the QWQL-Bref, the quality of life at work of the prison agents from Ceará, participating in the study was classified as neutral. The results corroborate the literature, considering that the concept of quality of life at work encompasses complex interrelated objective and subjective factors, indicating that even if there are not such satisfactory conditions, from an

objective point of view, in relation to quality of life in the workplace and organizational conditions, the personal (subjective) assessment of each individual has a special influence on their quality of life at work.<sup>(20)</sup>

Among the limitations of the present study, the method of collecting cross-sectional data by using an online questionnaire can be cited, which may have discouraged the participation of the prison officers invited, not allowing an inferential analysis to be carried out between the investigated variables. Despite this, the results identified corroborate important risk factors that should be discussed by health professionals to promote health and quality of life for these individuals in their work environment.

## CONCLUSÃO

The quality of life at work was classified as neutral. The personal domain obtained a satisfactory mean while the professional domain had the lowest average. It is noteworthy that the factors presented here, which reveal the quality of life at work for the prison agent, cannot be underestimated, and must be seen as warning signs.

The data indicate the importance of promoting studies on working conditions and their implications for the physical and mental health of these workers. With regard to health and safety at work, it is necessary to develop policies to protect workers, especially in the field of health prevention.

The actions aimed at these professionals may have repercussions within prisons and in the actions of resocialization of the population deprived of liberty, also having the potential to raise the interest for other studies on this theme, thus collaborating for the recognition of the particular needs of this category.

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