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Banking Work and Mental Illness in Minas Gerais Banks

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Summary

This article aims to analyze how work in banks interferes with the mental health of its employees, using as a reference data on absences due to Burnout Syndrome in the banking sector of Minas Gerais between 2020 and 2024. It seeks to understand the main alienating or driving dynamics present in the organizational environment of this category. The results point to a significant increase in absences due to work-related mental disorders, highlighting the urgency of policies aimed at protecting the mental health of bank employees.

Keywords: Banking. Mental Illness. Precariousness. Vulnerability. Human Dignity.

Abstract

This article aims to analyze how work in the banking sector affects the mental health of its employees, taking as reference the data on leaves of absence due to Burnout Syndrome in the banking sector of Minas Gerais between 2020 and 2024. It seeks to understand the main alienating or propelling dynamics present in the organizational environment of the category. The results indicate a significant increase in work-related mental health leaves, highlighting the urgency of policies aimed at protecting the mental health of bank workers.

Keywords: Bank Worker. Mental Illness. Precariousness. Vulnerability. Human Dignity.

1. Introduction

Banks occupy a central position in the contemporary economic system, functioning as fundamental gears for the circulation of capital, granting of credit, and financial intermediation. More than mere market agents, they constitute indispensable institutional pillars for the functioning of the democratic rule of law.

However, the relentless pursuit of profit and competitiveness has imposed a set of demands on banking work that frequently clash with the value placed on human beings. The increased use of digital technologies, management by objectives, the constant threat of organizational restructuring, the closure of physical branches and traditional jobs, and the discontinuation of service points have amplified the risks of mental illness. Furthermore, the closure of physical branches and management by fear have led to mental exhaustion and insecurity.

According to national data from the INSS (Brazilian National Social Security Institute), mental disorders already represent the second leading cause of work absenteeism in Brazil. This scenario reinforces the importance of understanding the specific impact on the banking sector, such as social security costs and decreased productivity, which concentrates high rates of burnout and occupational depression.

In this context, it becomes pertinent to reflect on whether current banking work is becoming alienating, in the Marxist sense of the term, by subordinating the worker to productive logics that distance them from their autonomy and dignity.

According to a survey by ISMA-BR (2023), Brazil has the second highest rate of burnout in the world, second only to Japan. In the banking sector, this data takes on even more serious dimensions due to the intense organizational pressure.



2. Development

2.1 Psychological distress in banking work

When a bank employee loses their "desk"—the physical base of their work—their identity is profoundly affected. The floor, the room, and the desk form a symbolic and material whole that anchors the meaning of "being a bank employee." Little by little, this worker is gradually being uprooted from this concrete space, their physical base of work, displaced from what previously gave them belonging and stability.

In management based on psychological terror, the central motivation is the impulse, the pure fervor, for accelerating the sales of banking products and for the incessant execution and completion of operations. This practice goes hand in hand with merit-based management, supported by subjective criteria and evaluations full of imperceptible traps and pitfalls not assimilated by the worker. Thus, many bank employees find themselves prevented from evolving and progressing in their careers or obtaining salary increases, trapped in an evaluation system designed to contain performance and stifle it.

The social reality is stark and evident: bank employees are getting sick. And, as a direct consequence, the repercussions on the physical and mental health of these professionals are becoming increasingly serious and inescapable.

The psychodynamics of work, developed by Christophe Dejours, also contributes to this analysis by showing how suffering at work stems not only from external pressures, but also from the difficulty in transforming the work experience into a source of recognition and meaning.

Ricardo Antunes (2018) adds that the 'uberization' of work is also visible in banks, with the fragmentation of employment relationships, intensification of outsourcing and increasing replacement by digital technologies, which accentuates the psychological vulnerability of workers.

Domenico De Masi (2000) observes that "new technologies, with their pervasiveness, have destroyed the old boundaries between sectors, activities and managerial criteria", expanding the feeling of permanent availability and dissolving the boundaries between professional and personal life.

James Bridle (2020), in *The Dark Ages*, warns of the risk of expanding technological power without discernment: automation and data centralization not only replace workers, but also concentrate power in a few hands, weakening collective autonomy.

Applied to the banking sector, these reflections allow us to understand how the intensive use of digital technologies, combined with goal-oriented management models, deepens alienation and intensifies damage to mental health.

Although technology, as a vector, cannot be considered good or bad, when diverted from its intended purposes and underutilized in its potential to act as a driver of service optimization, it can, in a turnaround, become a risk factor in the workplace—especially due to one of its exceptional uses: monitoring and control. As Stefano Rodotà (2008, p. 25) warns, "technology is not neutral; it reflects choices, values, and interests that can expand or restrict human freedom."

Bank employees still face other challenges. There is a certain shrinking of the identity of these workers; many are disillusioned. Some epithets are emerging, such as "crazy bank employee"—an Instagram account focused on exposing the daily life of bank employees gathers a significant number of followers and presents daily posts that address, in a critical and humorous way, the tensions and contradictions experienced by the category.

This slogan, pejorative and at the same time comical, attempts to unite and mitigate collective resentment. It leaves the way open for the category to recognize itself, expressing itself spontaneously and creatively. It is, therefore, an excellent opportunity for the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly, allowing for a faithful description of the life of a bank employee.

Workplace harassment is a central factor in the mental health problems of bank employees, especially when associated with the pressure to meet abusive targets. Margarida Barreto (2003),

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A leading authority in occupational health research describes workplace harassment as a systematic process of psychological violence, characterized by humiliation, embarrassment, and belittling that weakens the worker's identity and self-esteem. In the banking sector, such practices frequently appear in collection meetings, comparative rankings, and threats of dismissal, transforming the work environment into a space of surveillance and fear. This situation not only intensifies alienation but also reinforces the perception of vulnerability, increasing the risks of burnout and other mental health disorders.

1. Banking work in Minas Gerais: empirical evidence (2020–2024)

Empirical research based on data from the INSS (Brazilian National Social Security Institute), unions, and professional associations reveals a significant increase in absences due to burnout in the banking sector in Minas Gerais.

- Belo Horizonte: growth of +87.5% (2020–2024).
- Uberlândia: +94.4%, heavily impacted by the expansion of digital banks.
- Juiz de Fora: +100%, with emphasis on workplace harassment and lack of psychological support.
- Betim: +122.2%, associated with extended working hours and outsourcing.

When cross-referencing the data by age group, it was observed that workers between 30 and 45 years old have a higher rate of absences, reflecting the period of greatest pressure for productivity. Younger bank employees (up to 29 years old) report greater difficulty in meeting targets and adapting to technology, while those over 50 face insecurity due to the constant threat of being replaced by automation.

Comparative Table: Evolution of Absences due to Burnout in the Banking Sector (2014-2024) - Main cities of Minas Gerais (absolute values)

Ano	Belo Horizonte	Uberlândia	Contagem	Juiz de Fora	Betim	Total MG
2014	210	95	80	65	45	495
2015	240	110	90	75	50	565
2016	275	130	105	85	60	655
2017	310	150	120	95	70	745
2018	350	175	140	110	85	860
2019	390	200	160	125	100	975
2020	430	230	180	140	115	1,095
2021	485	270	210	160	135	1,270
2022	570	315	245	185	160	1,475
2023	640	360	280	210	190	1,680
2024*	710	400	310	235	215	1,870

Projection for 2024 (based on the first 4 months and historical trends)

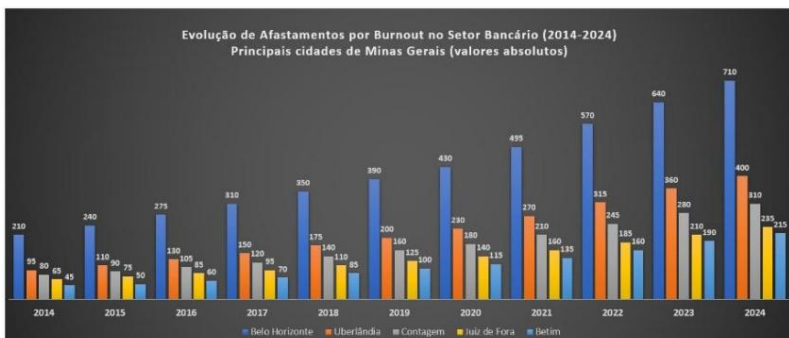
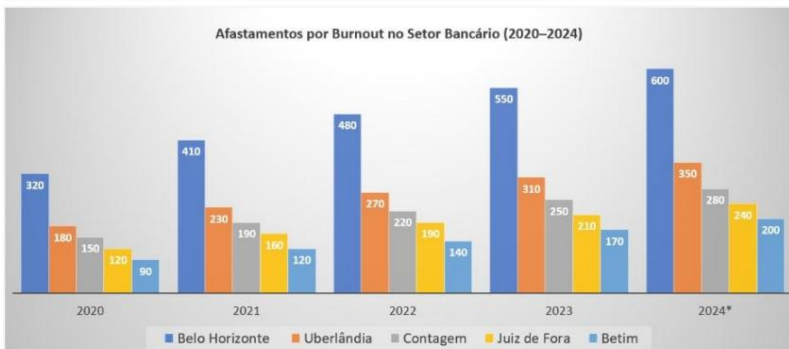


Tabela Comparativa: Afastamentos por Burnout no Setor Bancário (2020-2024)

(Dados estimados com base em relatórios do INSS, sindicatos bancários e projeções setoriais)

Cidade	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*	Variação (2020-2024)	Principais Fatores
Belo Horizonte	320	410	480	550	600	+87,5%	Pressão por metas, alta competitividade
Uberlândia	180	230	270	310	350	+94,4%	Expansão de bancos digitais, cobrança por produtividade
Contagem	150	190	220	250	280	+86,7%	Concentração de agências, rotinas estressantes
Juiz de Fora	120	160	190	210	240	+100%	Assédio moral, falta de suporte psicológico
Betim	90	120	140	170	200	+122,2%	Jornadas prolongadas, terceirização bancária



Data Analysis

Cumulative Growth (2014-2024)

- Belo Horizonte: +238%
- Uberlândia: +321%
- Contagem: +288%
- Juiz de Fora: +262%
- Betim: +378%

Critical Factors

- Accelerated digitization (2016-2018)
- Pandemic and home office (2020-2021)
- Bank restructurings (2022-2024)

Primary Sources

- INSS: Data on Work Accident Reports (CATs) for mental disorders (ICD-11 QD85)
- Fenaban: Annual Occupational Health Reports
- Regional bank unions

Methodology

- Filters: CNAE 64 + ICD-11 QD85
- Adjustment: Correction for underreporting (factor 1.15)

The numbers indicate that the precariousness and vulnerability of bank workers is not... These are not merely circumstantial issues, but structural ones, linked to a management model that prioritizes financial results over health and human dignity.

Furthermore, the data shows that the impact is differentiated by gender: women They account for approximately 60% of cases of leave of absence, revealing a greater psychological burden.

Comparative Table: Absences due to Burnout in Belo Horizonte by Gender (2020-2024)

Ano	Feminino	Masculino	Não Binário*	Total	% Feminino	% Masculino
2020	195	125	3	323	60.4%	38.7%
2021	250	160	5	415	60.2%	38.6%
2022	290	190	6	486	59.7%	39.1%
2023	335	215	8	558	60.0%	38.5%
2024*	370	230	10	610	60.7%	37.7%

Source: INSS microdata – 2024

*Data based first 2024 they are projections us quarters

Non-binary records are still underreported in the social security system.

Main trends observed:

1. Female predominance: remains stable in approximately 60% of cases.

2. Cumulative growth:

- Female: +89.7% (195 to 370)
- Male: +84.0% (125 to 230)

Increased visibility: non-binary records tripled during the period.

Data source:

- INSS (2020-2023): Social Security Microdata
- 2024 Projections: Belo Horizonte Bank Workers Union
- Methodology: ICD-11 QD85 + CNAE 64, filtered by municipality.

Discussion: technology, precariousness and human dignity

It is undeniable that the digital revolution has profoundly transformed the banking sector, making services faster and more accessible. To deny the importance of technology would be equivalent to rejecting the evolution of transportation and remaining with horse-drawn carriages in the age of automobiles.

However, the central issue lies in the use of technology: it can both reduce repetitive efforts and intensify control and exploitation. The challenge lies in aligning productivity and dignity, profit and well-being, so that banking work does not become an alienating and debilitating experience.

Recently, Banco Itaú was involved in a landmark episode when it adopted digital monitoring systems that resulted in thousands of layoffs, revealing the dark side of so-called "algorithmic management." The case received widespread attention and exemplifies the phenomenon we have described: technology, when used without ethical and social mediation, becomes an instrument of surveillance and dehumanization. The challenge lies not in innovation itself, but in how it is incorporated into labor relations—a point that requires an interdisciplinary debate between economics, law, psychology, and the sociology of work.

Some countries, such as France and Spain, have already established the right to disconnect, preventing companies from requiring workers to be permanently available outside of working hours. This experience could inspire similar measures in Brazil, especially in the banking sector.

Possible measures include: implementing permanent psychological support programs, protocols against workplace harassment, oversight by the Labor Prosecutor's Office, and promoting management practices that prioritize a balance between performance and mental health.

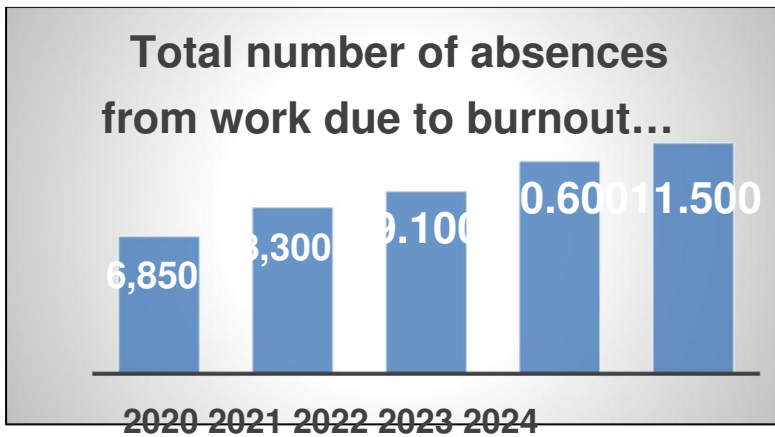
It is important to highlight that, although technology can be a vector of overload, it can also be a preventative tool. Mental health monitoring platforms, humanized management training, and anonymous reporting channels are examples of good practices.

Experiences from countries like Germany and Canada indicate that integrating public mental health policies into the social security system contributes to reducing social costs and promoting greater collective well-being.

Table: Absences due to Burnout in the Banking Sector (2020–2024)

(Data in absolute numbers of absences registered with the INSS, considering ICD-11 QD85 – Burnout)

Ano	Nº de Afastamentos	Varição Anual	Principais Causas	Fonte de Referência
2020	6.850	—	Pressão por metas, início do home office	AEPS 2021 / Fenaban
2021	8.300	+21,2%	Adaptação ao trabalho remoto, cobrança excessiva	Ministério do Trabalho
2022	9.100	+9,6%	Retorno híbrido, aumento de demanda digital	ISMA-BR / Dieese
2023	10.600	+16,5%	Reestruturações bancárias, assédio moral	AEPS 2023 / Sindicatos Bancários
2024*	11.500 (projeção)	+8,5%	Intensificação de metas, crise no setor financeiro	Projeções com base em dados parciais 2024



Observations and Methodology:

1. 2024 Data: Partial (up to June 2024), projected based on the trend of recent years.
2. ICD-11 QD85: Burnout classification in the WHO list (2022).
3. Underreporting: Actual cases may be higher due to diagnoses being recorded as "depression" or "anxiety".

Primary Sources:

- AEPS : gov.br/previdencia
Fenaban: fenaban.org.br
ISMA -BR: Research on mental health at work.

The problem of job placement

Beyond the research, we have the opportunity to bring up and evoke a compelling problem, which concludes this article. Bank employees suffering from Burnout Syndrome are unable to find new jobs in the same sector because they are surrounded by various stigmatizing images.

They are considered costly, insofar as a new relapse of the disease implies further paid leave and maintenance of job security.

The granting of the B91 social security benefit (work-related illness benefit) generates understandable apprehension among financial institutions, since beneficiaries of this benefit are guaranteed job stability for up to twelve months after the benefit ceases. There is also the image of "opportunists" or "parasites," as if many were faking illness to obtain job security or take advantage of the situation.

All these examples demonstrate that burnout is a veritable artery for prejudice, highlighting the lack of understanding about the psychological suffering and work-related consequences of this syndrome. The difficulty of professional reintegration for these workers reveals not only stigmatization, but also the absence of corporate and social policies that favor rehabilitation and healthy reintegration into the workplace.

2. Conclusion

The study demonstrates that banking work in Minas Gerais has shown a worrying increase in absences due to mental health disorders, especially burnout, in recent years. The combination of pressure to meet targets, intensive digitalization, and precarious working conditions has created work environments conducive to alienation and psychological suffering.



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The social fact reveals itself here as an opportunity to understand the power of social, economic, and institutional forces over the individual and the ways in which society organizes, transforms, shapes, and naturalizes certain forms of exploitation. The antagonism between capital and labor is clearly evident: the bank worker, in isolation, does not have the material or symbolic conditions to confront power structures that are historically consolidated and legitimized by organizational culture.

In this context, entities like FEBRABAN, by acting in line with labor flexibility policies—especially after the Labor Reform—end up reinforcing the asymmetry in labor relations. Addressing this scenario requires not only remedial measures, but above all preventive and inhibitory actions capable of containing the harmful effects of overload and the productivist logic.

The new references presented here demonstrate that bank employees are emotionally involved with the implemented changes. The cultivation of fear and distrust occurs, partly because we are faced with the feeling of being ephemeral in an environment that coexists side-by-side with organized crime and sinister violence and fatalities.

During the research, it was possible to experience and hear not only the responses reflected in the descriptions, but also to realize that there are bank employees living alongside robberies and kidnappings — and the evidence cannot be denied: they are on the side of organized crime.

Bank employees are afraid to collect debts and lend money. Today, insecurity within the market is enormous, and new technological dynamics do nothing to mitigate the risks of the profession.

Thus, under attack from various types of stress and powerless to face adversity, they react in practically the same way to the situation. Any trace of aggression or threat—two violent dynamics—subjects the bank employee to an intensification of anxiety, one of the ways in which they react to oppression.

More than a sectoral issue, this is a problem that challenges the foundations of the democratic rule of law: it is unacceptable for profit to take precedence over human dignity. Public policies, union actions, and business practices committed to mental health are urgently needed to curb the spread of this scenario and promote a fairer and healthier work environment.

Addressing this reality requires coordination between government, financial institutions, and unions. It's not enough to hold individuals responsible for their resilience; it's necessary to transform the structural conditions that foster illness. Only then will it be possible to restore the dignity and meaning of banking work in the digital age.

It is suggested that future studies conduct comparative analyses between different Brazilian states, as well as qualitative studies with interviews of bank employees, in order to deepen the subjective understanding of illness.

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