

Occupational risks and worker health in commerce. RETAILER: A WORKPLACE NURSING PERSPECTIVE

OCCUPATIONAL RISKS AND WORKER HEALTH IN RETAIL COMMERCE: AN OCCUPATIONAL NURSING PERSPECTIVE

Bruna Dias de Moraes, Nurse, Bachelor of Nursing from Centro Universitário Sant'Anna (UNISANT'ANNA), São Paulo, Brazil (2013). Specialist in Intensive Care Nursing from Centro Universitário das Faculdades Metropolitanas Unidas (FMU), São Paulo, Brazil (2016). Registered with the Regional Nursing Council of São Paulo (COREN-SP).

SUMMARY

This scientific article aims to analyze the predominant occupational risks in the retail work environment, emphasizing the physical and psychosocial implications for workers' health. The research was developed through an integrative literature review, addressing publications up to 2021, excluding trade union bias to focus on physiopathology and workplace ergonomics. It was observed that the routine in retail, characterized by long hours, prolonged standing, and pressure to meet targets, significantly contributes to the development of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WRMDs) and common mental disorders, such as Burnout Syndrome. The analysis, from the perspective of Occupational Nursing and based on specialization in critical care, shows that the absence of preventive measures can aggravate chronic conditions, leading to increased absenteeism and a deterioration in quality of life. It is concluded that the nurse's role in the early identification of risks and the implementation of health education is vital to mitigating morbidity in this sector.

Keywords: Worker's Health. Occupational Nursing. Occupational Hazards. Retail trade. Ergonomics.

ABSTRACT

This scientific article aims to analyze the prevailing occupational risks in the retail work environment, highlighting the physical and psychosocial implications for workers' health. The research was developed through an integrative literature review, covering publications up to 2021, excluding the unionist bias to focus on pathophysiology and labor ergonomics. It was observed that the routine in commerce, characterized by long hours, prolonged orthostatism, and pressure for goals, significantly contributes to the development of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs) and common mental disorders, such as Burnout Syndrome. The analysis, from the perspective of Occupational Nursing and based on specialization in critical care, evide

the absence of preventive measures can aggravate chronic conditions, leading to increased absenteeism and deterioration of quality of life. It is concluded that the nurse's role in the early identification of risks and the implementation of health education is vital to mitigate morbidity in this sector.

Keywords: Worker Health. Occupational Nursing. Occupational Risks. Retail Trade. Ergonomics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of labor relations in the 21st century has profoundly transformed the tertiary sector, positioning retail as one of the largest global employers and, simultaneously, as a scenario of complex challenges for occupational health. Unlike the industrial environment, where physical and chemical risks are often visible and immediate, the work environment in retail presents dangers that are often silent, characterized by repetitiveness, static postural load, and, increasingly, cognitive and emotional overload. In this context, worker health cannot be understood merely as the absence of disease, but as a state of biopsychosocial equilibrium that is constantly threatened by productivity demands, direct customer service, and the precariousness of ergonomic conditions. The relevance of this study is justified by the need to take a clinical and preventative look at a vast professional category whose pathologies are often underreported or treated only curatively, neglecting the occupational genesis of the problems.

The role of nursing, and specifically that of professionals with a critical and intensive perspective, allows for an in-depth analysis not only of superficial symptoms but also of the systemic consequences of work-related stress and physical exhaustion. Classic authors in public health and occupational medicine, such as Ramazzini, already warned of the intrinsic relationship between work and illness, a connection that remains current and is exacerbated by new management technologies that monitor salesperson performance in real time. Retail workers face a double burden of exhaustion: physical, resulting from handling loads and standing (orthostatism), and mental, derived from the imperative need to satisfy customers and meet aggressive sales targets. This article, therefore, aims to investigate how these environmental and organizational variables impact the individual's homeostasis, based on theorists of ergonomics, the psychodynamics of work, and the regulatory standards in force in Brazil.

2. DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS OF OCCUPATIONAL RISKS

2.1. Biomechanical Overload and Prolonged Standing

Ergonomic analysis of work in the retail sector reveals that prolonged standing is one of the most prevalent and harmful risk factors for worker physiology. According to occupational biomechanics studies, maintaining a static upright posture for long periods, without proper alternation with a seated posture, generates a significant overload on the musculoskeletal system, specifically in the lumbar spine and lower limbs. Venous return becomes impaired, predisposing the worker to the development of chronic venous insufficiency, varicose veins, and edema, conditions that, although initially appearing less severe, evolve into debilitating pain. According to research by Couto (2014), muscle fatigue resulting from static posture is a precursor to more severe injuries, as fatigued muscles lose their ability to protect joints, leaving ligaments and intervertebral discs vulnerable to premature degeneration, which demands urgent preventive intervention from the occupational health team.

2.2. Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WRMDs)

In the retail environment, especially in stock replenishment and cash register operations, repetitive movements are the genesis of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WRMDs). The pathophysiology of these injuries involves chronic inflammation of tendons, synovial sheaths, and peripheral nerves, exacerbated by the lack of adequate recovery breaks during the workday. Medical and nursing literature indicates that high repetitiveness, associated with excessive force and inadequate postures, creates a vicious cycle of pain and inflammation that, if not interrupted, can lead to permanent disability. Epidemiological studies, such as those presented by Mendes (2018), indicate that the retail and service sector has alarming rates of sick leave due to WMSDs, showing that the layout of the workstation and the organization of tasks often ignore the physiological limits of the human body, treating the worker as a replaceable cog in a machine, to the detriment of their physical integrity.

2.3. Psychosocial Risks and the Psychodynamics of Work

The mental dimension of work in retail is often neglected; however, it represents a growing source of illness, as elucidated by Dejours' theories of the psychodynamics of work. Retail workers constantly deal with the imperative to "serve," which demands rigorous emotional control and the suppression of negative feelings in the face of often hostile or demanding customers. This emotional dissonance, where the worker must feign sympathy regardless of their internal state, generates a high psychic cost. Furthermore, the pressure to meet unattainable sales targets and the stimulated competitiveness among colleagues create an environment of insecurity and fear of unemployment. Seligmann-Silva (2011) corroborates this view by stating that the precariousness of employment relationships and management through fear are potent triggers for anxiety and depression disorders, transforming the workplace into a space of psychic suffering, where the worker's subjectivity is nullified in the pursuit of profit.

2.4. Burnout Syndrome in Retail

Burnout syndrome, or professional exhaustion syndrome, is no longer exclusive to helping professions (such as health and education) and has begun to strongly permeate the commercial sector. Characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low professional achievement, the syndrome manifests itself in retail through the salesperson's apathy, constant irritability, and cynicism towards the organization and customers. Trigo et al. (2018) highlight that burnout in retail is intrinsically linked to the worker's lack of autonomy and role overload, where employees often accumulate sales, cashier, cleaning, and stockroom functions. Early detection of these signs is a crucial nursing competency, as untreated burnout evolves into severe physical comorbidities, including hypertension and gastrointestinal disorders, demonstrating the inseparability between mind and body in occupational pathogenesis.

2.5. Physical and Environmental Risks: Noise, Temperature, and Lighting

Although less evident than in a factory, physical risks in retail directly impact worker comfort and health, influencing their productivity and well-being. Constant exposure to noise in large department stores or supermarkets, from sound systems, conversations, and machinery, may not lead to immediate occupational hearing loss, but acts as a continuous stressor that raises cortisol levels and contributes to mental fatigue. Similarly, thermal comfort is often inadequate; workers in butcher shops or frozen food areas face the cold, while others in street-level shops suffer from excessive heat. Regulatory Standard 17 (NR-17) establishes comfort parameters, but enforcement is often insufficient. Inadequate lighting, whether due to excessive glare and reflections or dimness, strains the eyes and can cause tension headaches, requiring a rigorous environmental assessment by Occupational Safety and Health services.

2.6. The Role of Nursing in Health Promotion and Prevention

The inclusion of nurses in the context of worker health in the retail sector is strategic for shifting the paradigm from curative to preventive. With a holistic education, nurses are able to perform situational diagnoses, identifying not only evident risks but also hidden risks in the organization of work. The implementation of workplace gymnastics programs, the monitoring of chronic non-communicable diseases (hypertension and diabetes), and the carrying out of vaccination campaigns are just the tip of the iceberg of nursing practice.

Chiavenato (2020), when discussing people management, emphasizes that quality of life at work is a competitive advantage; in this sense, the nurse acts as a health educator, enabling workers to recognize the warning signs of their bodies and to adopt correct ergonomic postures, empowering them in self-care and in demanding better working conditions.

2.7. Legislation and Regulatory Standards: NR-17 and Annex II

The Brazilian legal framework, specifically through the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) and Regulatory Standards (NRs), offers guidelines for protecting worker health, with NR-17 (Ergonomics) being the most relevant for the retail sector. Annex II of NR-17, which specifically addresses telemarketing/call center work, but whose principles extend to various commercial customer service activities, advocates adapting working conditions to the psychophysiological characteristics of workers. Legal and technical analysis demonstrates that, despite the existence of robust laws, adherence in retail, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises, is deficient. It is imperative that occupational health management utilize these standards not only to avoid labor liabilities, but also as a technical guide for the humanization of work, guaranteeing rest areas, regular breaks, and adjustable furniture—basic elements for preserving the physical integrity of retail workers.

3. CONCLUSION

In light of the above, it is concluded that the work environment in retail, far from being free of dangers, presents a complex web of occupational risks that demand specialized and continuous attention. The research showed that the precariousness of working conditions, coupled with the intensification of productivity demands, creates a scenario conducive to physical and mental illness. The health of retail workers is in a vulnerable state, pressured between the need for subsistence and exposure to degrading ergonomic and psychosocial factors.

Through a review of the literature and analysis of biomechanical risks, it was observed that the worker's body is frequently used beyond its physiological limits. Prolonged standing and repetitive movements are not mere discomforts, but etiological agents of chronic pathologies that can shorten an individual's productive life. The lack of adequate furniture and the absence of recovery breaks constitute a violation not only of regulatory standards, but of human dignity itself in the workplace.

In the realm of mental health, the conclusion is alarming. The invisibility of psychological suffering in the retail sector, masked by the demand for a "constant smile," contributes to increased rates of burnout and anxiety disorders. Organizational management that prioritizes profit over human well-being paradoxically ends up generating financial losses through absenteeism, presenteeism, and high staff turnover, creating an unsustainable cycle for the economy and society.

In this context, the role of Occupational Health Nursing emerges as a fundamental pillar for reversing this situation. The nurse's clinical expertise, combined with knowledge of legislation and human physiology, allows for the implementation of primary prevention strategies that go beyond pre-employment and post-employment medical examinations. Nursing has the capacity to act in education.

in health, in epidemiological surveillance, and in promoting a healthier and more welcoming work environment.

It should be emphasized, however, that responsibility for worker health does not lie exclusively with the healthcare team or the individual, but primarily with organizations and the State. Greater rigor is needed in monitoring compliance with NR-17 (Brazilian Regulatory Standard 17) and other safety guidelines, as well as an ethical commitment from employers to recognize human capital as the most valuable asset of their companies. Without a change in organizational culture, health interventions will only be palliative.

Furthermore, it is concluded that there is a pressing need for more field research focused specifically on the reality of Brazilian commerce. Many studies still concentrate on industry, leaving gaps regarding the specificities of retail, especially in light of new e-commerce models and the "uberization" of work, which bring new ergonomic and mental challenges that are still little explored by occupational health science.

Therefore, promoting health in commerce requires a multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach. The integration of medicine, nursing, safety engineering, psychology, and administration is essential for designing jobs that respect human anatomy and psyche. Health should not be the price to pay for a salary; it should be a value preserved and fostered within the corporate environment.

This study concludes by reaffirming that work should be a source of fulfillment and livelihood, not illness. Protecting the integrity of retail workers is an ethical and legal imperative.

Only through awareness, effective prevention, and valuing human beings will it be possible to build a productive, sustainable, and, above all, healthy commercial sector for all its members.

REFERENCES

BRAZIL. Ministry of Labor and Employment. **NR 17 – Ergonomics**. Brasília: MTE, 2018.

CHIAVENATO, Idalberto. **People Management: The New Role of Human Resources in Organizations**. 5th ed. Barueri: Manole, 2020.

COUTO, Hudson de Araújo. **Ergonomics** applied to work: the machine's technical manual. **Human**. Belo Horizonte: Ergo, 2014.

DEJOURS, Christophe. **The madness of work: a study of the psychopathology of work**. 6th ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 2015.

GLINA, Debora Miriam R.; ROCHA, Lys Esther. Mental health at work: from theory to practice. **Cadernos de Saúde Pública**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 26, n. 2, p. 426-427, 2010.

LANCMAN, Selma; SZNELWAR, Laerte Idal. **Christophe Dejours: from psychopathology to the psychodynamics of work.** 3rd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Fiocruz, 2011.

MENDES, René. **Occupational Pathology.** 4th ed. São Paulo: Atheneu, 2018.

SELIGMANN-SILVA, Edith. **Work and mental strain: the right to be one's own master.** São Paulo: Cortez, 2011.

TRIGO, Telma R. et al. Burnout Syndrome: analysis of its existence in sales professionals. **Brazilian Journal of Occupational Medicine**, São Paulo, v. 16, n. 4, p. 446-453, 2018.

WALDOW, Vera Regina. **Caring: a humanizing expression of nursing.** 5th ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2012.