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Experiences of pleasure and suffering among workers in federal educational institutions in Northeast Brazil: an integrative review

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Summary

This study investigates the experiences of pleasure and suffering among workers in Federal Educational Institutions in Northeast Brazil through a documentary review of the scientific literature. An integrative review methodology was used, searching academic databases, including institutional repositories, scientific journals, and digital libraries, covering the period from 2010 to 2017. Fourteen studies addressing different professional categories were selected and analyzed: tenured faculty, substitute teachers, technical-administrative staff in education, and outsourced workers. The analysis revealed that suffering related to burnout represents the most frequent category (33 occurrences), followed by problems in work organization (28 occurrences) and inadequate working conditions (26 occurrences). Technical-administrative staff in education presented a higher concentration of reports of suffering, especially related to working conditions and socio-professional relationships. Job satisfaction manifested itself mainly through professional fulfillment, although with a significantly lower frequency than experiences of suffering. The results indicate that organizational transformations, work intensification, and productivity pressures in federal educational institutions have generated significant negative impacts on the mental health and well-being of workers, highlighting the need for institutional policies aimed at promoting occupational health.

Keywords: Pleasure and suffering at work. Psychodynamics of work. Federal educational institutions.

Abstract

This study investigates the experiences of pleasure and suffering among workers at Federal Educational Institutions in Northeast Brazil through documentary review of scientific literature. An integrative review methodology was employed with systematic searches across academic databases, including institutional repositories, scientific journals, and digital libraries, covering the period from 2010 to 2017. Fourteen studies were selected and analyzed, addressing different professional categories: tenured faculty, substitute teachers, technical-administrative staff in education, and outsourced workers. The analysis revealed that suffering related to exhaustion represents the most frequent category (33 occurrences), followed by problems in work organization (28 occurrences) and inadequate working conditions (26 occurrences). Technical-administrative staff in education showed the highest concentration of suffering reports, particularly related to working conditions and socioprofessional relationships. Workplace pleasure manifested primarily through professional fulfillment, although with significantly lower frequency than suffering experiences. The results indicate that organizational transformations, work intensification, and productivity pressures in federal educational institutions have generated significant negative impacts on workers' mental health and well-being, highlighting the need for institutional policies aimed at promoting occupational health.

Keywords: Pleasure and suffering at work. Psychodynamics of work. Federal educational institutions.

1. Introduction

The Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFEs), which include federal universities and institutes



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Federal institutions of education, science, and technology occupy a structuring position in the educational system.

Brazilian, articulating teaching, research and outreach. Recent literature highlights the role of technicians-administrative aspects of education and the institutional framework of federal higher education institutions as pillars of this delivery (Basso dos Kings; Passion, 2022).

Following this, the expansion that began in the 2000s, with REUNI and the creation/interiorization of Federal Institutes expanded their reach and redesigned the organization of work (Siqueira et al., 2015), but under budgetary constraints and the spread of managerial models, producing tensions between efficiency agendas and critiques of the “operational university” (Motta, 2013; Chauí, 1999; Ribeiro; Mancebo, 2013; Mancebo, 2010).

This scenario coincides with an intensification of demands and a deterioration of labor relations, especially among teachers subjected to productivity metrics and rigid deadlines, in a context of commodification of higher education and fiscal adjustment, with effects on working conditions, Funding and stability of teams (Antunes; Praun, 2015; Druck; Filgueiras, 2007).

Consequently, among tenured teachers, there is increasing pressure for results and expansion of... burdens and time conflicts between teaching, research, outreach, and management; temporary employment contracts of Substitutes mitigate staff shortages, but create insecurity and limitations to academic integration. (Ribeiro; Leda, 2016; Mancebo, 2010).

In turn, the technical and administrative staff support the day-to-day operations, however. They face devaluation, staff shortages, lengthy bureaucratic routines, and technological demands without adequate support (Basso dos Reis; Paixão, 2022; Calado; Marques, 2018). Workers Outsourced workers experience greater job insecurity, characterized by low wages, instability, and less... access to decisions, reinforcing internal segmentations and impacting cohesion and well-being (Antunes; Druck, 2013; Druck; Filgueiras, 2007; Antunes; Praun, 2015).

The Psychodynamics of Work (PDT) offers a crucial framework by emphasizing the centrality of work organization, the tension between prescribed and actual work, and the role of collective mediations in the transformation of effort into health (Dejours, 2012; Dejours; Abdoucheli; Jayet, 2014; Lancman; Sznelwar, 2011). Recognition and autonomy are considered conditions of protection, while productivism and lack of recognition intensify suffering, encouraging costly defensive strategies and restricting spaces for deliberation (Mendes; (Ferreira, 2007; Ribeiro; Leda, 2016; Bernardo, 2014). This framework allows us to capture differences in Intensity and form of pleasure/suffering among teachers, administrative and technical staff, and outsourced workers.

In the Northeast, a robust public network, composed of 20 federal universities and 11 Institutes Federal institutions make the topic particularly relevant. Even so, there is a scarcity of psychodynamic studies that simultaneously integrate the four professional categories and regional scope, predominantly localized investigations by institution, category, or state. This mismatch between



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The breadth of the system and the low density of regional research constitute the scientific gap that

This study forms the basis for this research.

In this context, the research seeks to answer the following research question: *How The experiences of pleasure and suffering of workers in Federal Institutions are characterized by Teaching (Federal Institutions of Higher Education) in the Northeast (permanent faculty, substitute professors, technical-administrative staff and What are the implications of outsourcing (when analyzed in light of the Psychodynamics of Work)?*

In order to guide the conduct of the research, the following general objective was defined: To analyze, in scientific literature, the experiences of pleasure and suffering of these three professional categories in IFEs From the Northeast, using the framework of Psychodynamics of Work. And the following objectives Specifics:

- a) Map organizational factors associated with pleasure and suffering by professional category.
- b) Identify institutional mediations (recognition, autonomy, and spaces for deliberation) related to the protection or risk to mental health.
- c) Systematize individual and collective coping strategies and their limitations in the context of

Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology of the Northeast.

The article is structured in five sections described below: the first deals with the part The first section is introductory; the second contains the theoretical framework; the third presents the methodology adopted; the fourth The first section refers to the results and discussions, and the fifth section concerns the final considerations and conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

Experiences of pleasure and suffering at work are central to understanding... The articulation between work organization and mental health in the federal public service. The set of 14 studies (2015–2024) conducted in federal educational institutions in the Northeast region show that The complexity of this phenomenon, spanning different professional categories and arrangements. Institutional relationships. The organization of work emerges as a structuring variable: in higher education institutions, relationships intersubjective relationships marked by rigid hierarchies, limited cooperation, and emotional distance. They appear as obstacles to teaching (Siqueira, 2015), while, among technical-administrative staff, the Organizational design and task flows are directly associated with suffering (Calado; Marques, 2018; Silva, 2017).

Studies converge on the identification of multiple vectors of suffering: problems in Work organization, professional devaluation, lack of spaces for dialogue and support. institutional, in addition to difficulties in the relationship with students (Siqueira, 2015). In groups In specific cases, vulnerabilities are exacerbated: substitute teachers face precarious employment contracts. and limited institutional insertion, shaping a unique dynamic of pleasure-suffering (Rates;



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Leda, 2018; Rates; Léda, 2016), while technical-administrative staff exhibit a high prevalence of common mental disorders, with repercussions on quality of life and socio-professional relationships. (Borges; Coelho; Ribeiro, 2023).

The precariousness of teaching work, especially among substitute teachers, is reiterated as critical dimension of work experiences (Silva et al., 2024; Rates; Léda, 2016). Such conditions are They are linked to outcomes of mental illness: stress, burnout, depression, panic, and manifestations. Psychosomatic disorders are described among teachers (Siqueira, 2015), whereas, among technical staff... administrative factors, links between unfavorable conditions and mental disorders are also pointed out (Campelo; Rego, 2015), a framework discussed through analyses of mental health in the public service. (France; Falcão, 2016).

Conversely, sources of pleasure emerge that are capable of restoring meaning to the act of doing. Professional: recognition, belonging, and defensive strategies that underpin teacher identity. amidst institutional constraints (Rates; Leda, 2018). Among administrative assistants, The production of positive meanings about work appears as the core of pleasure (Gomes, 2023). And, more broadly, the same work activities can be a source of pleasure or of... suffering, as mediated by the organizational context (Silva Barroso et al., 2019). These Ambivalences highlight the dialectical nature of experiences in higher education institutions.

Coping strategies constitute another relevant analytical axis, revealing agency. Individual and collective approaches to adversity: psychotherapy, medication, practices Physical activities (yoga, Pilates), leisure, and professional development are being used as means of preservation. of health and reconfiguration of the meanings of work (Siqueira, 2015). Such tactics function as protective barriers and, at times, ways of reframing suffering.

The specificities of each professional category reinforce the need for approaches. Distinctive challenges: teachers grapple with intensified work, precarious employment, and interpersonal relationships. complex (Siqueira, 2015; Rates; Leda, 2018; Silva et al., 2024); technical-administrative staff face constraints related to work organization and consistent impacts on mental health (Borges; (Coelho; Ribeiro, 2023; Campelo; Rego, 2015; Lemos; Castelo Branco, 2023). Workers Outsourced workers present their own vulnerabilities, with effects on subjectivity and experience. labor (Brandão Junior, 2017). Finally, the temporal dimension of the career also appears: The meanings of work among retired teachers reveal reconfigurations of pleasure and suffering. throughout the professional cycle (Dos Santos Carvalho; Dourado, 2022).

In summary, the reviewed literature indicates that (i) the organization of work in HEIs is the main operator of experiences, (ii) precariousness (especially among substitutes) and conditions (iii) adverse institutional conditions are linked to illness outcomes, (iii) pleasure stems from Recognition, belonging, and meaning in work, but it remains conditioned by context.



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organizational, and (iv) individual and collective coping strategies mitigate harm and

They reconstruct meanings. Attention to the differences between faculty, administrative and technical staff, and outsourced workers.

and retirees is, therefore, an analytical condition for properly interpreting the pleasure map-

suffering in federal educational institutions in the Northeast (Siqueira, 2015; Rates; Leda, 2018;

Borges; Coelho; Ribeiro, 2023; Silva et al., 2024).

3. Method

This integrative review article constitutes a qualitative study and descriptive. The main objective is to systematize and analyze the knowledge produced about the experiences.

of pleasure and suffering of workers in Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFEs) in the Region

Northeast, as defined in the Introduction and specific objectives. The qualitative approach is

This proved essential for deepening the understanding of the meanings attributed to work experiences.

capturing the complexity of psychosocial phenomena at work.

3.1. Search Strategy and *Corpus* Definition

The analysis period for scientific production was limited to the last 10 years, covering The documents were published between 2015 and 2024. The chosen time frame aims to ensure relevance and...

the relevance of the documentary *corpus*, reflecting work experiences during a period of intense

Transformations in Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFEs). Data collection was carried out on the Google Scholar platform.

recognized for its breadth in the scientific field.

To ensure the traceability and accuracy of the research, the search protocol was structured.

with terms concatenated by the Boolean operator AND, involving the theoretical dimensions, the public

and the geographical context. The following search terms were used: (*pleasure OR suffering*) AND

(*teachers OR teaching staff OR substitute teachers OR administrative technicians in education OR*

Outsourced Workers) AND (*federal educational institutions OR universities OR institutes*)

federal) AND *northeast*.

The initial search resulted in a total of 314 documents. For the final selection of the *corpus*,

Strict exclusion criteria were applied. The following were discarded: works published before 2015;

studies conducted in institutions outside the Northeast Region; those that did not address the

professional categories that are the focus of the study; and documents that did not directly investigate pleasure and

suffering at work or that were not related to the central theme.

After applying the filtering criteria, the final *corpus* of the research consisted of 14

studies. The collection of documents included 6 scientific articles, 6 master's dissertations, and 1 doctoral thesis.



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one doctoral thesis and one specialization monograph. The final total, 14 studies, compared to the vast network.

of nine federal universities and dozens of *campuses* of Federal Institutes in the Northeast Region,

This highlights a considerable research gap, given the size of the Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFEs) and the diversity of... professionals who work in them.

The target audience for this review encompasses a heterogeneous professional group, but one united by location. of work. The categories included were: Permanent Faculty, Substitute Professors, Technicians Administrative staff in Education (TAEs) and outsourced workers. This scope is justified. due to the need to capture both unique experiences and moments of pleasure and suffering that is common to different employment relationships in the academic environment.

3.2. Framework for Document Analysis

The analysis of the 14 studies was carried out using Content Analysis, following the method. de Bardin (2016). This approach is suitable for qualitative and descriptive research, as it allows for Systematization of communicational content, enabling inferences and interpretations. The phases of Preliminary analysis and exploration of the material were carried out, culminating in the categorization of the excerpts. Relevant in light of the Psychodynamics of Work (PDT).

The PDT, proposed by Dejours (2011), served as a theoretical framework and tool. methodological for categorization. The theory allows for an understanding of the dialectical relationships between the Work (real and prescribed) and psychic functioning. According to the theory, work acts simultaneously serving as a potential source of fulfillment and illness, depending on the mediations. collective and institutional resources available (Lancman; Sznelwar, 2011).

3.3. Adaptation of the Psychodynamics of Work Tool

To proceed with the coding of the document excerpts, it was necessary to construct and apply a Adapted *codebook*, based on the ten core categories of the PDT. This procedure was Developed to ensure consistency and uniformity in the classification of 155 extracted records. From the 14 studies, transforming qualitative analysis into systematized data.

The adapted codebook is a coding tool that allows you to classify each section of code. text according to the PDT categories, in addition to assigning a Valence on the scale of (strong suffering) a (strong pleasure) and identify the Occupational Group. The result of this procedure was the elaboration from a data spreadsheet, which served as the basis for calculating the frequencies and averages presented. in Section 4.



4. Results and Discussion

This documentary review study, grounded in the Psychodynamics of Work (PDT), sought to systematize the experiences of pleasure and suffering of workers in Federal Institutions of Higher Education Institutions (IFEs) in the Northeast region of Brazil. The data extraction methodology, based on The PDT *codebook* allowed the encoding of 155 excerpts from the textual *corpus*. This Initial systematization is fundamental to outlining the dimensions of the work experience that They appear more or less expressive, as well as varying in intensity.

4.1. The Overall Balance Between Pleasure and Suffering

Analysis of the 155 coded records revealed an overall negative valence balance, with an average of -0.88 on the scale of strong suffering to strong pleasure. This finding indicates that the experiences Suffering and the challenges imposed by work stand out numerically in the discourse of The studies analyzed, in comparison with reports of pleasure. In other words, the effort in enduring the demands and factors that contribute to illness seems to predominate in the scientific narrative about this audience.

Average Valence by Category is particularly revealing in distinguishing the intensity of coded experiences. Note that categories directly linked to suffering, such as Harm, are also included. (M = \bar{y} 2.00), Suffering – lack of recognition (M = \bar{y} 1.80) and Suffering – exhaustion (M = \bar{y} 1.67), are those that carry the greatest negative charge. Such high averages suggest that, when these The topics are addressed, and they are addressed with great intensity and seriousness.

Conversely, experiences of pleasure are reported with the highest positive intensity. The categories Pleasure – autonomy/freedom (M = +1.71) and Pleasure – achievement (M = +1.46) They demonstrate that, although less frequent in the overall count of the segments, the experiences of Freedom to innovate and a sense of purpose in work are powerful sources of gratification. This underscores The dialectic of PDT: pleasure is real, but often overshadowed by factors of suffering.

4.2. Most expressive categories of pleasure and suffering

By analyzing the frequency of the records, it is possible to identify which dimensions of the experience Labor issues have historically been more frequently addressed and considered more salient in studies on IFE workers. Thus, three categories stand out: Suffering – Burnout (21.3%), Work organization (18.1%; average value -1.18) and Conditions of work (16.8%; average valence \bar{y} 1.42).



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The category Suffering – Burnout leads in frequency. This centrality is a strong indicator.

This indicates that overload and emotional and physical exhaustion are becoming a growing concern. This category, combined with its negative average valence, establishes a link between forms of management and suffering.

Next, the Organization of Work points to the conflicts between prescribed work and the In reality, the pressure to meet targets and the fast pace are direct generators of discomfort. The high frequency This category, combined with its negative average valence, establishes a link between forms of management and suffering.

Finally, working conditions reveal aspects of infrastructure and material resources. They persist as significant sources of wear and tear. In a context of budgetary constraints and The expansion of higher education institutions, insufficient resources, and inadequate infrastructure emerge as barriers. specific to the execution of the activity and, consequently, to its completion.

4.3. Contractual Analysis and Gaps by Occupational Group

The distribution of records by Occupational Group allows for the creation of profiles of suffering and pleasure, in addition to... to identify important gaps in the scientific literature. The Administrative Technicians in Education (TAEs) represent the largest volume of information in the corpus, with 69 records (44.5%), which gives them It gives prominence to PDT studies.

The experience of the TAEs is notably focused on working conditions (14 records). Suffering – burnout (12) and Socio-professional relationships (10). This triad suggests that the The suffering of the administrative and technical staff stems from the lack of infrastructure to perform their tasks, from resulting burnout from overload and conflicts or difficulties in obtaining support in the social environment of work.

In contrast, the distress profile of tenured faculty (44 records) is more focused on Work organization (12) and Suffering – burnout (9). This concentration reflects the demands from the academic career, such as the pressure for scientific production and teaching goals, which translate into under high workload and exhaustion. Substitute teachers (22 records) exhibit a pattern Similar, but on a smaller scale, also focusing on burnout and organization.

Finally, the analysis reveals a scarcity of data on Outsourced Workers (15 records; 9.7%) and Retired Teachers (5 records; 3.2%). In the outsourced group, Working conditions (5) and Socio-professional relations (4) are the most frequent themes, reinforcing the hypothesis that the Material insecurity and issues of valuation and visibility are central. The near absence of data The study of retirees highlights an important gap in the literature and suggests the need for further research. future experiences after work.



4.5. Case Studies: The Dialectical Intensity of Work Experiences

This subsection analyzes excerpts from speeches by various professional categories (tenured teachers, substitutes, TAEs, outsourced workers and retirees) that reveal the pleasure-suffering dialectic in Daily work routines at Federal Educational Institutions.

4.5.1. Working Conditions and Severe Suffering

Working conditions are a primary source of suffering, with distinct manifestations depending on the individual category. Among TAEs (Technical-Administrative Employees), the workload exceeds formal responsibilities:

The position of Administrative Assistant at the University is very versatile. [...] I give full support to students. Sometimes I also help some professors when they need it, but in the technological area, which some of the older professors have a little more difficulty with (GOMES, 2023, p. 34).

This unrecognized versatility reveals an organization that expands its demands and requires... unforeseen skills, impacting professionals (DEJOURS, 2012). For outsourced workers, the Conditions are even more precarious, marked by fear and insecurity: "No, it's how I am telling you." saying [...] everyone avoids talking, they're afraid! [...] this happens here. I have to deduce what: irregularity. Do you understand?" (BRANDÃO JUNIOR, 2017, p. 67). In this way, precariousness creates a climate of fear that prevents the construction of spaces for dialogue, essential for the collective elaboration of suffering and mental health (DEJOURS, 2012).

4.5.2. Socioprofessional Relationships: Between Conflict and Support

Socio-professional relationships are ambivalent, a source of suffering or pleasure and recognition. For tenured faculty, the connection with students is central to satisfaction: "...human relationships, I think that's a very positive point, right? Working with others [...] you see that your work brings a... a significant result for the other person. It's significant for the other person and for me too. significant!" (SIQUEIRA, 2015, p. 142).

Student recognition is a symbolic reward that gives meaning to the activity, creating... resonance between the teacher's subjectivity and the objectives of the profession (DEJOURS, 2004). In Conversely, hierarchical relationships generate conflict for TAEs (Technical-Administrative Employees), who adopt defensive strategies: "Look, it took a lot of patience and having to swallow some things, staying quiet because it wasn't easy." As I said, I even asked to leave the sector" (GOMES, 2023, p. 58). This forced silencing reveals the ethical suffering that negates the worker's expression. Although protective, such strategies perpetuate harmful organizational conditions (MENDES, 2007).



4.5.3. The Two Sides of the Coin: Autonomy and Pleasure versus Burnout and Harm

For substitute teachers, the pleasure-suffering dialectic is intense: the recognition Student life coexists with precarious employment contracts: "Students usually say this. Professor, the People like substitute teachers because they're more concerned with teaching us [...]. Month In the past, I was even invited to be the namesake of a graduating class. [...] it's the feeling of a job well done" (RATES; LEDA, 2018, pp. 48-49).

The assessment of student usefulness offers recognition that compensates for the precariousness. And the invitation to be the "class namesake" is a symbol that transcends formal hierarchies. Faculty Retired people who remain active enjoy autonomy, selecting tasks they enjoy: "Being retired was a gain, because I had many activities that took away what I liked. [...] It's a obligation, because what you have managed to acquire [...] you have an obligation to pass on to others. People. Work is not something I would trade for a salary" (DOS SANTOS CARVALHO; DOURADO, 2022, pp. 8-9).

Retirement is a strategy to regain enjoyment in work through autonomy. "Social obligation" reveals a commitment that transcends the economic, aligning with the concept of living work (DEJOURS, 2012). Even in adverse conditions, outsourced workers find pleasure in it. Task: "Seeing it executed [...] I like it, I like working with cleaning [...] I like what I do." "Here, there's a lot of work, but I like it [...] when you do it out of obligation [...] you don't want to work anymore, right?" (BRANDÃO JUNIOR, 2017, p. 89-90). Pleasure can arise from satisfaction with the task and a feeling of usefulness, even in precariousness. The distinction between "preference" and "obligation" highlights the subjectivity in the construction of The meaning of work.

The analysis of these excerpts reveals that experiences of pleasure and suffering in IFEs are mediated by the specificities of each professional category, by organizational conditions and through the possibilities of recognition and autonomy available. Understanding this dialectic is fundamental for the development of institutional strategies that promote the mental health of workers and the quality of public education services.

Final Considerations

This document review, in light of the Psychodynamics of Work, systematized 14 studies (155 (excerpts) about experiences of pleasure and suffering in the Federal Institutions of Higher Education in the Northeast. Indicators of... predominated. Suffering: burnout, inadequate conditions, and socio-professional tensions. Technical- Administrative staff showed greater vulnerability (overburden and structural inadequacy); faculty



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Permanent staff suffered from the intensification of demands; outsourced workers experienced precarious working conditions and fear. weakening public spaces for speech. Recognition (Dejours, 2012) appeared as a mediator. of pleasure, while the defenses were primarily individual.

Based on the gaps identified in the literature, three directions are proposed for

Future research: **(a)** Longitudinal studies on retired teachers still in activity,

investigating the specifics of their work experiences and the impacts on the organization of work

(a) University; **(b)** Research on collective coping strategies in different categories

professionals from Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFEs), focusing on building public spaces for dialogue and developing the suffering; **(c)** Comparative investigations between outsourced and permanent workers in the same

institution, analyzing the impacts of precarious employment on socio-professional relationships and the quality of educational services.

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