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Understanding burnout syndrome from the perspective of cognitive behavioral therapy: an analysis of the relationships between the individual and work

Compreendendo a síndrome de burnout na perspectiva da terapia cognitivo-comportamental: uma análise das relações entre indivíduo e trabalho

Comprendiendo el síndrome de burnout desde la perspectiva de la terapia cognitivo-conductual: un análisis de las relaciones entre el individuo y el trabajo

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Abstract: This study discussed Burnout Syndrome from the perspective of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), considering the relationships among automatic thoughts, dysfunctional beliefs, cognitive distortions, and professional exhaustion. Its objective was to understand how cognitive interpretation patterns are related to psychological distress in the workplace, also considering the influence of working conditions, organizational pressures, and performance demands on workers' mental health. To contextualize this discussion, the character Kento Nanami from Gege Akutami's work Jujutsu Kaisen was used as an illustrative fictional reference, without any diagnostic or clinical purpose. Methodologically, a qualitative, descriptive bibliographic study was conducted, drawing on scientific publications related to Burnout Syndrome, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, cognitive distortions, and mental health in the workplace. The theoretical framework focused particularly on Aaron Beck's cognitive model, addressing thought patterns such as dichotomous thinking, catastrophizing, and personalization, as well as their possible relationships with the interpretation of work-related experiences. The discussion showed that Burnout should not be understood exclusively as an individual issue, since it is also related to organizational and social working conditions. It was concluded that the cognitive-behavioral perspective contributes to understanding the interpretation processes associated with occupational distress and that fictional narratives can foster reflection and psychoeducational discussions about mental health and work.

Keywords: Mental health. Work environment. Psychoeducation. Psychological flexibility.

Resumo: O presente trabalho discutiu a Síndrome de Burnout sob a perspectiva da Terapia Cognitivo-Comportamental (TCC), considerando as relações entre pensamentos automáticos, crenças disfuncionais, distorções cognitivas e esgotamento profissional. Teve como objetivo compreender de que maneira os padrões de interpretação cognitiva se relacionam ao sofrimento psicológico no contexto laboral, considerando também a influência das condições de trabalho, das pressões organizacionais e das exigências por desempenho na saúde mental dos trabalhadores. Para contextualizar essa discussão, utilizou-se o personagem Kento Nanami, da obra Jujutsu Kaisen, de Gege Akutami, como referência ficcional ilustrativa, sem finalidade diagnóstica ou clínica. Metodologicamente, foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica, de abordagem qualitativa e caráter descritivo, com consulta a produções científicas relacionadas à Síndrome de Burnout, à Terapia Cognitivo-Comportamental, às distorções cognitivas e à saúde mental no trabalho. A fundamentação teórica considerou especialmente o modelo cognitivo de Aaron Beck, abordando padrões de pensamento como o pensamento dicotômico, a catastrofização e a personalização, bem como suas possíveis relações com a interpretação das experiências laborais. A discussão evidenciou que o Burnout não deve ser compreendido exclusivamente como uma questão individual, uma vez que também se relaciona às condições organizacionais e sociais do trabalho. Concluiu-se que a perspectiva cognitivo-comportamental contribui para a compreensão dos processos de interpretação associados ao sofrimento

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ocupacional e que as narrativas ficcionais podem favorecer reflexões e discussões psicoeducativas sobre saúde mental e trabalho.

Palavras-chave: Saúde mental. Ambiente Laboral. Psicoeducação. Flexibilidade psicológica.

Resumen: El presente trabajo abordó el síndrome de burnout desde la perspectiva de la terapia cognitivo-conductual (TCC), considerando las relaciones entre pensamientos automáticos, creencias disfuncionales, distorsiones cognitivas y agotamiento profesional. Su objetivo fue comprender de qué manera los patrones de interpretación cognitiva se relacionan con el sufrimiento psicológico en el contexto laboral, considerando también la influencia de las condiciones de trabajo, las presiones organizacionales y las exigencias de rendimiento en la salud mental de los trabajadores. Para contextualizar esta discusión, se utilizó al personaje Kento Nanami, de la obra Jujutsu Kaisen, de Gege Akutami, como referencia ficticia ilustrativa, sin finalidad diagnóstica ni clínica. Metodológicamente, se realizó una investigación bibliográfica de enfoque cualitativo y carácter descriptivo, consultando publicaciones científicas relacionadas con el síndrome de burnout, la terapia cognitivo-conductual, las distorsiones cognitivas y la salud mental en el trabajo. La fundamentación teórica consideró especialmente el modelo cognitivo de Aaron Beck, abordando patrones de pensamiento como el pensamiento dicotómico, la catastrofización y la personalización, así como sus posibles relaciones con la interpretación de las experiencias laborales. La discusión evidenció que el burnout no debe entenderse exclusivamente como una cuestión individual, puesto que también se relaciona con las condiciones organizacionales y sociales del trabajo. Se concluyó que la perspectiva cognitivo-conductual contribuye a comprender los procesos de interpretación asociados al sufrimiento ocupacional y que las narrativas ficticias pueden favorecer reflexiones y debates psicoeducativos sobre salud mental y trabajo.

Palabras clave: Salud mental. Entorno laboral. Psicoeducación. Flexibilidad psicológica.

1. Introduction

Burnout syndrome is understood as a phenomenon related to the occupational context, associated with prolonged exposure to chronic stress situations in the work environment. It is characterized by manifestations such as emotional exhaustion, mental distancing from professional activities and reduced efficacy at work, which may compromise mental health, interpersonal relationships and the quality of life of workers. In this sense, occupational exhaustion is an important issue of public health, especially in the face of changes in labor relations and the increasing demands imposed on individuals.

In the contemporary scenario, demands for productivity, competitiveness, intensification of working hours and individual accountability for professional performance can contribute to the worsening of psychological distress. Thus, work-related illness should not be understood exclusively from the individual characteristics of workers, but also considering the social, economic and organizational conditions in which professional activities are developed (Souza; Bezerra, 2019; Nardi; Ramminger, 2012).

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In this context, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) presents itself as a relevant approach to the understanding of cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes related to psychological distress. Based on the cognitive model developed by Aaron Beck, this perspective considers that the interpretations attributed to situations influence the emotional and behavioral responses of individuals. Thus, concepts such as automatic thoughts, dysfunctional beliefs and cognitive distortions, such as dichotomous thinking, catastrophizing and personalization, allow us to discuss how professional experiences can be interpreted and faced by workers. However, such processes should not be considered alone, since they relate to the concrete living and working conditions of individuals (Beck, 2013; Roubuste; Lüdtke, 2015; Alves et al., 2024).

Kento Nanami, a character in Gege Akutami's Jujutsu Kaisen, was chosen because his fictional trajectory can serve as a reference for discussing job dissatisfaction, everyday demands, overload and emotional strain. His portrayal allows interpretative connections with experiences in the contemporary world of work, particularly tensions between professional responsibilities and individual needs. The analysis does not seek to diagnose the character psychologically, but uses his experiences, statements and behaviors in the narrative to illustrate psychological concepts. Fictional narratives such as manga and anime can therefore serve as cultural resources for connecting theoretical discussions with human experiences and mental health issues (Carvalho; Souza, 2023; Vida; Borges, 2025).

In view of these considerations, the following question was established as a research problem: how can Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy contribute to understanding the relationships between automatic thoughts, beliefs, psychological distress and organizational working conditions, considering Kento Nanami's fictional representation in Jujutsu Kaisen? The investigation was justified by the need to understand occupational exhaustion from a perspective that contemplated both individual cognitive and emotional processes as well as social and organizational factors that go through work experiences.

Thus, the general objective of the research was to understand Burnout Syndrome from the perspective of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, considering the relationship between cognitive processes, psychological distress and working conditions, with the fictional representation of the character Kento Nanami as an illustrative reference.

Specifically, we sought to discuss the social and organizational conditions related to occupational exhaustion and its psychological manifestations; present the foundations of Aaron Beck's cognitive model; understand the relationship between automatic thoughts, dysfunctional

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beliefs and psychological distress in the work context; analyze aspects of Kento Nanami's fictional trajectory in light of the concepts of CBT; and reflect on the possibilities of using fictional narratives such as discussion and psychoeducation resources about mental health and work-related suffering.

2. Methodology

This study was developed through a literature review, with a qualitative approach and descriptive character, in order to gather and discuss scientific knowledge related to Burnout Syndrome, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and cognitive processes associated with occupational exhaustion. The research focused on the literature that addressed the worker's mental health, organizational factors related to occupational illness, Aaron Beck's cognitive model and the use of fictional narratives as resources for reflection and psychoeducation.

The bibliographic survey was conducted on SciELO and Google Scholar platforms, considering scientific articles, books, dissertations and academic papers related to the theme. A rigid chronological cutoff was not established, since works prior to the most recent period were also considered when they presented relevant theoretical contributions to the understanding of Burnout, the cognitive model and the relations between fiction, psychology and education. Publications in Portuguese and English were prioritized, with identified authorship and content related to the research objectives.

To guide the searches, we used the descriptors “Burnout Syndrome”, “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy”, “worker mental health”, “cognitive distortions”, “automatic thoughts”, “occupational exhaustion”, “anime”, “manga” and “psychoeducation”, as well as their correspondents in English, when relevant. As inclusion criteria, scientific and academic publications that presented discussions on the psychological and organizational aspects of Burnout, the foundations of CBT and the use of fictional narratives in educational and psychological contexts were considered. Materials without identification of authorship or origin, texts with no direct relation to the theme, duplicate publications and materials made available only in summary format were excluded, without access to the content necessary for the bibliographic analysis.

After the survey, the selected publications were examined by reading and organizing the relevant contents, seeking to identify approximations between the studies and the central concepts of the research. The discussion was structured based on the contributions found in the

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literature, considering the relationship between working conditions, dysfunctional thinking patterns and occupational exhaustion.

The fictional trajectory of Kento Nanami, a character in Gege Akutami's Jujutsu Kaisen, was used as an illustrative reference to connect the theoretical concepts discussed. The analysis considered features of his narrative portrayal involving professional responsibilities, dissatisfaction with particular working conditions and tensions between external demands and individual needs. These elements were interpreted in relation to concepts presented in the literature, without constituting a case study, clinical assessment or source of empirical data.

3. Results and discussion

The literature consulted presented Burnout Syndrome as a phenomenon related to prolonged exposure to stressful working conditions, involving emotional, relational and professional dimensions. Souza and Bezerra (2019) characterized the syndrome through three main dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. These manifestations go beyond ordinary tiredness, involving progressive deterioration in individuals' relationships with their professional activities, colleagues and the meaning they attribute to work. The studies thus indicated that burnout should be interpreted not merely as an individual difficulty in managing obligations but also as a phenomenon related to the conditions under which work is performed.

The discussion about occupational illness evidenced the importance of social and organizational factors. Nardi and Ramminger (2012) discussed the challenges related to the articulation between mental health and work, highlighting that changes in labor relations have repercussions on workers' lives.

In this scenario, competitiveness, intensification of demands and individual accountability for performance contribute to environments in which psychological distress can be naturalized. This perspective broadened Burnout's understanding by demonstrating that exhaustion experiences cannot be explained exclusively by the personal characteristics of workers, and should also be related to the organization and concrete working conditions.

The collective dimension of the problem also appeared in discussions on public mental health policies. Caputo et al. (2020) emphasized the need to understand suffering considering the social determinants, inequalities and living conditions of the population, avoiding explanations that reduce illness to a strictly individual issue. In dialogue with this perspective, Guimarães (2025) addressed the importance of multidisciplinary care and the organization of

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mental health services to confront Burnout. These contributions allowed us to understand that worker care requires articulation between different professionals and services, since the consequences of occupational illness are not limited to the psychological sphere, also reaching their social relationships and their participation in everyday life.

In this context, Gazignato and Silva (2014) discussed the importance of networking and matrix support in primary care, highlighting the co-responsibility between professionals and services in mental health care. This discussion highlighted the relevance of care that is not restricted to the individual's isolated care, but that considers the social and institutional conditions related to suffering.

By bringing this perspective closer to the debate on Burnout, it was understood that the recognition of occupational exhaustion needs to be accompanied by attention to working conditions and access to health services. Thus, prevention and care depend both on individual coping resources as well as on healthier working environments and effective public policies.

The legal and institutional dimension of occupational illness was also addressed by Lopes and Vasconcelos (2025), who discussed the recognition of Burnout in the context of work relations and gaps in the protection of workers in the digital age. This approach has contributed to broaden the discussion on the responsibility of organizations in the face of professional demands and the impacts they can produce on mental health. When labor demands continually exceed the resources available for their realization, suffering cannot be interpreted only as an individual fragility.

Therefore, the literature examined pointed to the need to relate mental health to working conditions, institutional protection and responsibility of the different actors involved in labor relations.

In the field of Psychology, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy offers an important perspective to understand the relationship between experienced situations, cognitive interpretations, emotions and behaviors. The cognitive model presented by Beck (2013) considers that the way a person interprets a given situation influences their emotional and behavioral responses. In this sense, similar events can produce different reactions, depending on beliefs, automatic thoughts and meanings attributed by each individual. Applied to the discussion about work, this perspective allows us to understand how professional demands can be interpreted through rigid thinking patterns, contributing to feelings of inadequacy, guilt and inability in face of daily demands.

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Cognitive distortions were another relevant element for understanding the psychological distress processes. Roubuste and Lüdtke (2015) discussed these distortions as interpretations that may not adequately correspond to reality, influencing the way the individual understands their experiences. In the professional context, extreme assessments of one's own performance, excessively high expectations and negative interpretations in the face of difficulties can intensify emotional suffering. This discussion is related to the work of Alves et al. (2024), which addressed the contribution of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the treatment of Burnout Syndrome, highlighting the importance of recognizing automatic thoughts and dysfunctional behaviors associated with exhaustion.

Among the cognitive patterns discussed in the literature, dichotomous thinking, also known as all-or-nothing thinking, deserves attention for its relationship with rigid performance expectations. In this pattern, situations are interpreted from extremes, such as success or failure, competence or inability, without considering intermediate possibilities. In the work environment, this form of interpretation may hinder the recognition of limits, partial achievements and rest needs. Beck (2013) presented the importance of identifying and examining automatic thoughts, while Roubuste and Lüdtke (2015) contributed to the understanding of distortions that interfere with the interpretation of experiences. Together, these contributions allow discussing how inflexible assessments can intensify self-imposed pressure and favor negative emotional responses to professional demands.

Catastrophizing and personalization were also relevant for the discussion of work-related dysfunctional thoughts. The first corresponds to the tendency to anticipate extremely negative consequences in the face of a given situation, while the second involves attributing to oneself an excessive responsibility for events that also depend on external factors. In professional environments marked by constant demands, these patterns can contribute to increased anxiety, guilt and the feeling of inability. Alves et al. (2024) discussed the use of CBT in coping with thoughts and dysfunctional behaviors associated with Burnout, while Beck (2013) presented the recognition and evaluation of automatic thoughts as important elements of the cognitive model. These contributions demonstrated the importance of understanding the interaction between individual interpretations and the concrete conditions of the work environment.

However, the cognitive understanding of Burnout does not mean attributing responsibility to the worker for his own illness. Souza and Bezerra (2019) related the burden to the demands of the organization and the worker's ability to respond to them, while Nardi and

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Ramminger (2012) discussed the transformations of the world of work and its effects on mental health. This connection was essential to avoid an individualizing interpretation of the syndrome. Although thoughts and beliefs influence the way people experience professional situations, they do not eliminate the importance of organizational factors, power relations and working conditions. Thus, the cognitive-behavioral perspective contributes to understanding suffering without disregarding its social and institutional dimension.

The literature also presented discussions on the use of fictional productions as resources for approximation between theoretical concepts and human experiences. Sena Junior (2008) addressed the relationships between reality and fiction, highlighting that narratives are constructed in dialogue with the historical and sociocultural contexts in which they are inserted. In a complementary way, Maia et al. (2005) discussed the potential of cinema as a resource for the teaching of psychopathology, considering audiovisual language as a possibility to make certain content more accessible. These contributions allowed us to understand that fictional narratives can favor reflections on emotional and social experiences, provided they are used with adequate mediation and are not confused with clinical reports or diagnostic evidence.

In the specific case of anime and manga, Carvalho and Souza (2023) discussed the possibilities of using these productions in the fields of Psychology and education. The authors highlighted that such narratives may favor reflections on issues related to human development, social relations and emotional experiences. Vida and Borges (2025), in turn, addressed the use of manga and anime in psychoeducation strategies, emphasizing the importance of content selection and professional mediation. These discussions were relevant to the present study because they allowed considering pop culture as a language capable of bringing the public closer to themes related to mental health, without replacing scientific knowledge or procedures proper to professional activity.

The visual construction of the characters also contributes to this discussion. Anaz (2020) addressed the construction of characters in films and series from symbolic and narrative elements, while Campos, Wolf and Vieira (2014) discussed the role of design in the development of visual identity of characters. In a related perspective, Silva (2024) examined how graphic characteristics, expressions and postures can communicate aspects of the history and identity of characters. These contributions allowed us to understand that the visual elements of a narrative are not necessarily decorative, as they participate in the construction of meanings and communication of emotional and behavioral characteristics. However, such elements should not be treated alone as clinical indicators of a psychological condition.

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From these discussions, Kento Nanami, character of Jujutsu Kaisen, by Gege Akutami, was considered a fictional reference to bring the debate on occupational exhaustion closer to the concepts presented in the literature. The trajectory of the character was related to the experience of a worker submitted to professional demands and to a routine marked by wear. His representation made it possible to establish an illustrative dialogue with the studies of Souza and Bezerra (2019) on emotional exhaustion and reduction of involvement with work, as well as with the discussions of Nardi and Ramminger (2012) about the relations between work organization and mental health. This approach does not mean stating that the character had a diagnosis of Burnout, but using his fictional construction as a reference to discuss theoretical concepts.

Nanami's portrayal also connected the discussion of rigid thoughts and professional demands with the cognitive model. Beck (2013) helped explain how interpretations and beliefs influence emotional responses, while Alves et al. (2024) discussed CBT's contribution to recognizing dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors associated with burnout. From this perspective, the character illustrated the conflict between external demands and internal assessments of performance and professional responsibility. This interpretation reinforced the importance of recognizing that occupational distress involves both objective working conditions and how individuals interpret them.

The visual elements attributed to the construction of Nanami, such as formal posture, contained expression and appearance associated with fatigue, could also be discussed from studies on character design. Campos, Wolf and Vieira (2014) and Silva (2024) contributed to understanding how appearance, posture and other graphic resources participate in the communication of narrative characteristics. In dialogue with Carvalho and Souza (2023) and Vida and Borges (2025), this perspective showed that the images and narratives of anime and manga can favor the approximation of the public with psychological themes. Still, the appearance of a character does not constitute, in itself, proof of emotional exhaustion or depersonalization, and must be understood within fictional language and the meanings constructed by the narrative.

Another relevant aspect was the relationship between suffering, meaning attributed to work and possibilities of reorganization of professional life. Vaz de Carvalho (2019), addressing Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the context of Burnout, contributed to the discussion about coping with cognitive patterns and emotional difficulties related to exhaustion. Literature presented by Alves et al. (2024) also highlighted the importance of recognizing

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automatic thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs in the therapeutic process. In this sense, the discussion about Nanami allowed us to illustrate the difference between being subjected to a routine perceived as exhausting and seeking activities that have greater personal significance. This approach was used as a theoretical reflection, without attributing to the character a therapeutic process effectively performed or proposing an intervention from its trajectory.

In an articulated way, the studies examined showed that the understanding of Burnout requires considering different dimensions: organizational conditions, the effects of work on mental health, the cognitive patterns involved in the interpretation of experiences and the possibilities of communication of these concepts through fictional narratives.

From this perspective, Souza and Bezerra (2019), Nardi and Ramminger (2012) and Caputo et al. (2020) contributed to the understanding of the social and labor dimensions of illness, while Beck (2013), Roubuste and Lüdtke (2015) and Alves et al. (2024) supported the discussion of cognitive processes. Carvalho and Souza (2023), Vida and Borges (2025), Anaz (2020), Campos, Wolf and Vieira (2014) and Silva (2024) allowed us to discuss the possibilities of approximation between visual narratives and psychological contents.

The articulation of these perspectives allowed us to understand that work-related suffering cannot be reduced to an individual issue, nor explained exclusively by patterns of thought. CBT contributes to the identification and understanding of the cognitive processes involved in the experiences of suffering, while the analysis of social and organizational conditions evidences the external factors that go through professional life.

4. Conclusion

This study enabled an understanding of Burnout Syndrome as a phenomenon related both to individual experiences and to social and organizational conditions in the professional context. The discussion showed that prolonged exposure to excessive workloads, excessive demands and pressure for results can compromise workers' mental health, manifesting through emotional exhaustion, detachment from professional activities and reduced personal accomplishment. Understanding burnout therefore requires consideration of the interaction between environmental, emotional and cognitive factors, avoiding the attribution of responsibility for illness exclusively to individuals.

In relation to the general objective, it is considered that it was achieved through literature review and interpretive analysis of the fictional representation of Kento Nanami, from the work Jujutsu Kaisen. The studies examined made it possible to discuss the relationship between

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Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, automatic thoughts, dysfunctional beliefs and factors associated with psychological distress in the work context. In this sense, it was understood that thought patterns and individual interpretations can influence the way workers experience professional demands and respond emotionally to them, although they are not isolated explanations for the development of Burnout Syndrome.

The analysis of Kento Nanami connected theoretical concepts with fictional portrayals of job dissatisfaction, overload and emotional strain. His trajectory was used as an illustrative resource for discussing tensions between professional responsibilities, external demands and individual needs. The research question was thus answered by recognizing that Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy contributes to identifying and interpreting cognitive processes related to psychological distress, while analysis of social and organizational conditions demonstrates the importance of external factors in understanding occupational exhaustion. This connection did not constitute a clinical assessment or diagnosis of the character, but an interpretation grounded in the concepts discussed throughout the research.

Among the limitations of the study, its bibliographic and interpretative nature was highlighted, which restricted the discussion to the information available in the publications consulted and the narrative elements of the work analyzed, without empirical investigation or clinical evaluation. In addition, the use of a fictional character as an illustrative reference did not allow to prove symptoms, establish psychological diagnosis or generalize their experiences for real workers. Another limitation was related to the availability of academic productions that jointly addressed Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Burnout Syndrome and the use of fictional narratives as resources for reflection and psychoeducation. Therefore, the interpretations presented should be understood considering the theoretical and methodological limits of the research.

Finally, the approximation between Psychology and pop culture presented relevant possibilities for communication and discussion of knowledge about mental health, especially through narratives with which different audiences can establish identification and reflection. As a recommendation for future research, it is suggested to expand studies on the use of anime and manga as psychoeducational resources, investigating their contributions to understanding psychological distress and work relationships. It is also considered important to deepen research on Burnout prevention, contemplating both individual cognitive processes and the responsibility of organizations in the construction of healthier professional environments. Thus, the work reinforced the importance of understanding occupational exhaustion in a broad way,

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recognizing mental health as a fundamental dimension of quality of life and working relationships.

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