



## Teaching in Nursing: dissatisfaction and unfavorable indicators\*

*Docência em Enfermagem: insatisfações e indicadores desfavoráveis*

*Enseñanza en Enfermería: insatisfacción e indicadores desfavorables*

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To identify and analyze, among teachers from an undergraduate course in nursing, moments of dissatisfaction and unfavorable indicators of their profession, and also to verify the relationship between these elements. **Methods:** It was a descriptive exploratory study with a qualitative approach; 13 teachers took part in the research. The technique of data collection was a questionnaire with leading questions (identification and on the theme). The data analysis was made by identification of themes and categorization. **Results:** It was found that the dissatisfaction with the profession was mainly expressed by two categories: 1) ethical issues and 2) excessive activities; these categories were also identified as unfavorable indicators of the profession. **Conclusion:** Both, dissatisfaction and unfavorable indicators were related to ethical issues and excessive activities demanded by the academic career; this situation demands to pay attention, since those issues may cause health problems to the professional.

**Keywords:** Faculty, nursing; Education, nursing; Education, higher; Burnout professional

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Identificar e analisar entre docentes de um curso de graduação em Enfermagem os momentos de insatisfação e os indicadores desfavoráveis de sua profissão e a relação entre esses elementos. **Métodos:** Estudo descritivo-exploratório de abordagem qualitativa, tendo como participantes 13 professores. A técnica de coleta de dados foi um questionário com questões norteadoras: de identificação e sobre a temática. A análise do material foi por identificação dos eixos temáticos e categorização. **Resultados:** Verificou-se que a insatisfação na profissão compreendeu principalmente, duas categorias: questões éticas e o excesso de atividades, categorias que também foram identificadas como indicadores desfavoráveis da profissão. **Conclusão:** Tanto a insatisfação, quanto os indicadores desfavoráveis tiveram como principais questões éticas e excesso de atividades da carreira acadêmica, demandando atenção, devido aos problemas de saúde que podem acarretar ao profissional. **Descritores:** Docente de Enfermagem; Educação em Enfermagem; Educação superior; Estresse ocupacional

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Identificar y analizar entre los profesores de un curso de Enfermería los momentos de insatisfacción y los indicadores desfavorables de su profesión; y, la verificar la relación entre estos elementos. **Métodos:** Se trata de un estudio descriptivo exploratorio con abordaje cualitativo, en donde participaron 13 profesores. La técnica de recolección de datos fue un cuestionario con preguntas orientadoras (identificación y tema). El análisis de los datos fue realizado mediante la identificación de temas y categorización. **Resultados:** Se encontró que la insatisfacción en la profesión, estuvo principalmente compuesta por dos categorías: 1) aspectos éticos y 2) actividades excesivas; estas categorías también aparecieron como indicadores desfavorables de la profesión. **Conclusión:** Tanto la insatisfacción como los indicadores desfavorables estuvieron relacionadas con cuestiones éticas y actividades excesivas de la carrera académica, lo que exige atención, debido a los problemas de salud que pueden ocasionarle al profesional.

**Descriptores:** Docentes de Enfermería; Educación en Enfermería; Educación superior; Agotamiento profesional

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## INTRODUCTION

Technology and advances in the information area modified the work environment in the past few years, including in the educational area, and consequently, professorship.

Such changes corroborate with the urgent need for updating and modernization of teaching, adjusting methodologies to current student needs, which culminates in great transformations to the traditional paradigm, still in vigor.

Schools and teachers should be motivated for such change, and adjustments to the new pedagogic conception – a more open, and post-modern one, where horizontal dialogue is welcome, and students help build knowledge – will be necessary<sup>(1)</sup>.

Higher education professors have been realizing the need to adjust to such new model, and proposing changes to curricula, demanding adaptations, considering demands imposed by the contemporary society.

Several courses in the health area are currently meeting this new logic, including the Nursing graduation courses, which are fairly advanced in that sense, adjusting their curricula to the demands.

Nevertheless, it is a slow process that demands great effort and work from the professionals involved in order to reach the proposed objectives, including the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (Law for National Education Guidelines and Base)<sup>(2)</sup>.

Demands and ethics-related questions, as well as the academic and scientific obligations – such as teaching and researching, extension initiatives and management – generate dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and overload professors, contributing to exhaustion when having to deal with such matters, harming both physical and mental health.

In this context, Brazilian public universities are experiencing an excessive increase on the number of classes professors have to teach, a significant time reduction for masters' and doctorate courses, and being assessed by the quantity of publications, congresses, commissions, and reports they generate, considering professorship the ability to quickly transmit knowledge. In the same context, professors are hired based on their ability to research highly specialized themes<sup>(3)</sup>.

Currently, educators are going through an identity crisis that involves what they know and what they know how to do, the contents of their knowledge and information, and how to use specific strategies appropriately. However, its main aspect is how to manage the growing demands generated by the contemporary world and the agitated social reality they are part of<sup>(4)</sup>.

Higher education professors are a constant focus of

criticism, from the beginning of their career, through systematic assessments for professional growth, submittal of researches to qualified journals and congresses, presentation of projects and research/activity reports, among other goals they have to reach in order to be competitive and up to date<sup>(5)</sup>.

In a study with 314 professors of several departments in a public institution in Bahia, authors verified that more than half of the interviewees considered the work rhythm to be accelerated, which generated a high physical and psychic load<sup>(6)</sup>.

These changes represent an enormous personal and collective effort to educators who want to be able meet the expectations of the new educational paradigm – progressist, and social-critical<sup>(7)</sup>.

Nursing professors have already mobilized some educational institutions through their performance, from a reflexive perspective. They aim to elaborate a curriculum model that is linked to the market place, breaking the theory/practice dichotomy, using innovative and alternative pedagogic strategies, such as contextualized teaching, with meaningful learning towards a future with more awareness, and committed to professional and social questions<sup>(8)</sup>.

On the other hand, higher education professors are also workers, professionally identified<sup>(9)</sup>, and the work they perform can interfere in other aspects of their lives, including behavior, expectations, future projects, language, and even the affective side<sup>(10)</sup>.

The work of university professors is seen as something they can manage to organize as they wish. However, procedures adopted to do so do not consider professors' subjectivity, either individual or collectively, which can trigger suffering at work<sup>(11)</sup>.

Demands and difficult situations professors have to go through in their interpersonal relationships and work can trigger diseases.

The high work load was one of professors' complaints, considering the current capitalist model imposes as many tasks as one can perform. Such high work load can cause physical and mental exhaustion<sup>(6)</sup>.

Tension in the work environment increases when it comes to the relationship with bosses, due to their demands and methods to force workers to do more, generating conflicts in interpersonal relationships, when one's dignity and self-esteem are harmed<sup>(12)</sup>.

Considering the concern with regard to professors' health, and all the pressure they receive, either directly or concealed, from the institution, the research fomentation departments, and even from peers, the present study aimed to identify and analyze dissatisfaction factors, unfavorable professional indicators, and the relationships between such elements among professors at a Nursing graduation course.

## METHODS

This study was performed through a qualitative approach research, based on theoretical references<sup>(1,13)</sup>, developed at a public university in the countryside of São Paulo. Participants included 13 professors of the Nursing graduation course, identified in the results as “P”.

The data collection technique was an informative questionnaire (with open and closed questions), identifying personal data (gender, age, marital status, religion, and children), background information, and the nursing professors’ perspective of the main theme, with the following questions: “Please mention moments of professional dissatisfaction” and “What are the unfavorable indicators of professorship?”

The research project was approved by the Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa (Committee for Ethics and Research) of the Nursing College of Ribeirão Preto, Universidade de São Paulo (Process no. 0834/2007), according to the norms of Resolution n.º 196/96.

Data collection took place in November 2007, through letters left in each professor’s post box in the studied institution. The Informed Consent Term was left in a sealed envelope, to be signed and authorize their participation. The answered questionnaire, along with the signed Informed Consent Term were collected by the researcher during a pre-defined period from the same location it had been delivered.

Data analysis occurred through the thematic universe survey, according to Freire’s referential<sup>(13)</sup> adapted by Bueno<sup>(1)</sup>, aiming to describe and interpret the research participants’ situation, through needs, previous knowledge, and abilities identification. Such analysis was organized as follows:

- Generator themes survey;
- Data collection material organization;
- Selection and coding of registered/enounced words and sentences;
- Selected words and sentences synthesis;
- Order of generator themes.

## RESULTS

The study participants were 13 professors of the Nursing graduation and post-graduation courses, some of which were nurses and others were not (such as Pedagogues, Statistics Professionals, and Biologists), who represented basic and specific areas of the three existing departments and their courses.

Most of the present research participants were women, with more than 41 years old, who were married and catholic. As to the work load, participants worked 40 hours a week, in integral work dedication to

Professorship and Research, and their positions were: Professor-doctor (46%), Faculty member/associate professor (31%) and Professor (23%).

With regard to professorship, all participants worked with under graduation and masters’ courses, and most of them also worked with specialization and PhD. The areas they worked with included Education for Health in several nursing areas (education for health, mental health, women’s health, workers’ health, public health, environmental health; nursing fundamentals; clinical nursing, surgical nursing, oncology, cardiology and genetic nursing, statistical nursing, and parasitology).

### Professional dissatisfaction factors categorization

Participants’ answers listed the following dissatisfaction factors: ethical questions, excessive work, and lack of professional recognition.

#### - Professional dissatisfaction regarding ethical questions

Most of the interviewees indicated dissatisfaction regarding ethical questions, such as: lack of fellowship and collaboration, competition among peers, verbal disrespect, demands and unfairness regarding career planning, as well as lack of organization concerning the tasks they should develop while professors, among others.

*“...professional ethics are incipient...”(P1); “.. no involvement or collaboration from peers, there are internal conflicts. (P2)”;* *“...competition, disloyalty, lack of cooperation”(P5).*

#### - Professional dissatisfaction regarding excessive work

Professors mentioned excessive work, excessive number of demands, responsibilities, and urgent matters; difficulties fulfilling tasks planning, along with a growing bureaucratization, and day-to-day stress as professional dissatisfaction factors.

*“Excessive work, too many meetings, tasks accumulation, excessive number of demands, excessive number of responsibilities.” (P1); “...too many simultaneous activities; countless meetings; excessive pressure at work...”(P6); “...overload on the number of classes, excessive number of meetings, and administrative activities.” (P13)”;* *“...some bureaucratic activities are difficult. (P8)”.*

#### - Professional dissatisfaction regarding recognition and wage

Some answers also mentioned lack of recognition, wage and career plan inadequacy – consequently disrespecting labor laws – as professional dissatisfaction factors.

*“...lack of recognition and wage...” (P7); “No openings to*

*become a full professor...*"(P9).

### **Professional unfavorable indicators categorization**

Besides professional dissatisfaction factors, participants were asked about professional unfavorable indicators in the nursing professorship area.

#### **- Unfavorable indicator related to excessive work**

Many of the participants reported excessive work as a professional unfavorable indicator, for they do not find time to rest, have fun, or even spend time with their families.

*"Work planning is disorganized..."* (P4); *"Demands from bosses, students, deadlines..."* (P6); *"Excessive number of tasks, institutional pressure..."* (P7); *"Too many tasks, lack of time, few exchanges among co-workers..."* (P9); *"Too many responsibilities, lack of time, ... professional overload..."* (P12).

#### **- Unfavorable indicator related to professional ethics**

*"Gossip, intrigues..."* (P3); *"Internal competition for positions and tasks, competition for research fomentation..."* (P6); *"Individualism at work, teaching, and extension initiatives..."* (P9); *"Devaluation of the professional activity"* (P12).

#### **- Unfavorable indicator related to few investments**

*"It is a difficult situation in the Brazilian education, few investments in professor (both in education and professors)..."* (P8); *"Scarce resources for researches"* (P12).

Besides such factors, the fact education is still currently based on traditional and biomedical paradigms was also remembered.

*"Education is still very traditional... fragmented, non-humanized... both professors and students need more maturity"* (P1).

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Transformation of educational demands**

Higher education workers realize the constant transformation their professional routine is going through. This panorama is expected to fit in the competitive system that aims to generate students, articles, consulting, and be profitable for the new socio-productive organization<sup>(14)</sup>.

Besides the daily tasks, university professors are expected to participate in commissions, consultancy, and advising, publish in 1<sup>st</sup> class journals, participate in post-graduation and civil service examination boards, learn

new technological resources, comply with the institution and public education technical norms and rules, among other things<sup>(15)</sup>.

Professors have too many responsibilities, including bureaucratic tasks, which make them feel disrespected, mainly when such tasks are unnecessary and unrelated to the essence of their profession. Therefore, the current educational context generates dissatisfaction. Consequently, professionals tend to dedicate less time to perform their work as professors, update themselves, have leisure and a social life, spend time with their families and simply rest, physically and mentally<sup>(16)</sup>, which corroborates with the present study findings.

### **Professorship dissatisfaction**

Professorship dissatisfaction is a constant feeling in the educational environment, resulting in countless consequences, among which is included the quality of interpersonal relationships in the work environment, due to the fact such relationships are mostly determined by the educators expectations and representations, thus affecting personal fulfillment<sup>(17)</sup>.

The results of a study with university professors of several courses, at a university in Rondonia<sup>(18)</sup> are worth of attention. They indicated the second most mentioned professional dissatisfaction factor was the relationship with co-workers, for there are always conflicts among groups, ethical issues among peers, and environment domination by one group, which reinforces the findings in the present study.

In this context, unhealthy competition, political influence in the work environment, hostile behavior among peers, and the waste of time with pointless discussions are among the stress-generating characteristics at work<sup>(19)</sup>.

Besides the lack of control over work, lack of recognition to people's contributions generates frustration, which walks along the lack of union among co-workers, and lack of respect and recognition of their value. Such elements lead to principle conflicts, when there is no harmony between personal/work principles and work demands<sup>(20)</sup>.

Studies demonstrate that, although public universities have reached excellence with regard to the teaching staff, professors are not secured by recognition and protection guidelines yet, in both legal and occupational health aspects<sup>(11)</sup>.

Nevertheless, when professors do not receive recognition for their work, responsibilities demanded are felt as overload, which then becomes conflict, and negatively impacts on health<sup>(21)</sup>.

With regard to public education, professors in general receive too much criticism, are excessively pressured, mainly when they fail, and are rarely recognized by their



success<sup>(22)</sup>.

### Dissatisfaction interfering in professors' health

One's dissatisfaction with work, for reasons such as the environment, or tasks executed, can trigger mental health problems in case the possibility to accomplish aspirations, ideas, and wishes is not offered to workers, or when the work organization is inflexible<sup>(23)</sup>.

However, it is difficult to reach balance when it comes to work demands and workers psychophysiologic needs, so much so, it can lead individuals to suffering, and consequently thinking about their physical and mental health<sup>(24)</sup>.

Prior researches verified that factors such as compensation/recognition are the first, more stressful factors to professors, and the third one concerns professional identity, personal growth expectations, and career development<sup>(18)</sup>.

In a study performed with university professors, the profession was assessed as stressful by almost all informants, and among the most mentioned reasons are the communication network in the institution, the relationship with peers and students<sup>(25)</sup>.

In 1986, during the 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference of Human Resources for Health<sup>(26)</sup>, the inadequacy of the workforce graduated by universities with regard to the population healthcare service needs was being discussed.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Public university professors, as well as teachers in other educational levels, are subjected to great demands in terms of scientific and academic production, management tasks, among others. This picture is true for higher education courses in general, including among professors in the health area. However, the excessive number of activities has generated among higher education nursing professors' dissatisfaction at work.

It was possible to verify through the present study

that dissatisfactions originated from work at the nursing professorship area, and unfavorable indicators are strictly related to the excess of activities developed by educators (teaching, research, extension initiatives, and management), besides demands from higher authorities and research fomentation departments; also, to the urgent need for constant updating, preparation for assessments, participation in examination boards, commissions, university-related and external opinions, research results publication in internationally known journals, among others.

However, this is not exclusive to the nursing career, and can be found in other areas of public universities, which suffer from the same demands.

Complex issues involving ethics were also mentioned as reasons for dissatisfaction, mainly when related to individualism, competition, lack of cooperation among peers, and lack of respect for other areas specificities. Such characteristics are not only within the university walls, but can also be found in the globalized and capitalist world we live today.

If these dilemmas are not worked out, discussed, reviewed, and modified so as to improve the work environment, they can lead professionals to serious health problems, both physical and mental.

Although all professors in the studied university were invited to participate in the study, and research is their career priority, the development of the present study found difficulties on the way, for most professors were late to return the questionnaire, and answered fewer questions than expected. They reported as reasons not having enough time to do so due to too many activities occurring at that moment.

It is important to suggest that public universities in general receive more investments so as to make the higher education professors' work more pleasant, less tiring, more recognized, and humanized, considering they work with the graduation of human resources, who see them as professional references.

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