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ORIGINAL

Dimensions of psychosocial care in the teaching profession

Dimensiones del cuidado psicosocial en el cuerpo docente

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: working conditions and the nature of work have changed dramatically in recent decades. Current work environments are characterized by an increasing emphasis on knowledge and information-based work.
Aim: to describe the dimensions of psychosocial care in the teaching staff as a result of the tensions and changes in the current scenarios of the educational sector.
Method: a qualitative phenomenological documentary study was designed to identify categories of analysis related to the dimensions of psychosocial care of people who work as teachers in the Argentine context.
Results: the teaching activity implies important emotional demands that require sustained emotional effort. Academic work requires teachers to interact with a great diversity of actors. Increasing levels of competitiveness with greater demands on the quality of processes and results. Teaching is typified as one of the most stressful occupations due to high cognitive and emotional demands, increasing work overload, conflicting schedules, job instability and difficulties in reconciling academic and family life.
Conclusions: the study of psychosocial risks assumes a vital role in universities, where academic professionals constitute their main strategic asset. A systemic knowledge of the work factors that expose academics to greater psychosocial risk is essential for the development of preventive policies and strategies to reduce work demands and/or increase the resources available to cope with them.

Keywords: Psychosocial Care; Teachers; Qualitative Research.

RESUMEN

Introducción: las condiciones de trabajo y la naturaleza del trabajo han cambiado drásticamente en las últimas décadas. Los entornos de trabajo actuales se caracterizan por un énfasis creciente en el conocimiento y el trabajo basado en la información.
Objetivo: describir las dimensiones del cuidado psicosocial en el cuerpo docente, producto de las tensiones y cambios en los escenarios actuales del sector educativo.
Método: se diseñó un estudio cualitativo fenomenológico documental identificando categorías de análisis relativas a las dimensiones del cuidado psicosocial de personas que ejercen la actividad profesional docente en el contexto argentino.
Resultados: la actividad docente implica importantes demandas emocionales que requieren un esfuerzo emocional sostenido. El trabajo académico exige a los docentes que interactúen con una gran diversidad de actores. Niveles crecientes de competitividad con mayores exigencias en la calidad de los procesos y resultados. La docencia es tipificada como una de las ocupaciones más estresantes por elevadas demandas cognitivas y emocionales, sobrecarga de trabajo creciente, horarios conflictivos, inestabilidad laboral y dificultades para compatibilizar la vida académica y familiar.
Conclusiones: el estudio de los riesgos psicosociales asume un papel vital en las universidades, donde los profesionales académicos constituyen su principal activo estratégico. Un conocimiento sistémico de los factores del trabajo que exponen a los académicos a mayor riesgo psicosocial resulta fundamental para el desarrollo de políticas y estrategias preventivas que permitan reducir las demandas laborales y/o incrementar los recursos disponibles para afrontarlas.

Palabras clave: Cuidado Psicosocial; Docentes; Investigación Cualitativa.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the WHO's health definition, which describes it as the optimum state of biophysical, psychological, and social well-being, the preservation of this equilibrium can be disrupted by multifactorial risk factors. Among these, psychosocial determinants play a significant role in the health and the quality of life of individuals engaged in teaching, encompassing various dimensions as: personal and experiential aspects, the immediate or familiar environment, the surrounding social environment, and the working environment.[1,2,3]

The working conditions and the nature of the work have changed dramatically in the last few decades.[4,5]

The current working environments are characterized by an increasing emphasis on knowledge and work based on information, along with a growing reliance on new technologies.[6]

This situation has created new requirements for assuming the evolving teaching role and the challenges of education with a new pedagogical, technological, and methodological focus. These changes impact personal relationships and pay conditions, supported by continuous evaluations, that exert significant influence over working conditions, psychological well-being and the physical and mental health.[7,8,9,10] In this context, stress stands out as the main variable measuring the connection between the psychosocial and health-related factors.[11,12,13,14,15]

On the other hand, since having occupational health involves feeling more active and competent at work, it is important to design strategies to enhance the health of teachers. This should take into account the heterogeneity of problems and seek solutions tailored to the new working context.[16,17]

Objective: To describe the dimensions of psychosocial care in the teaching staff, a result of tensions and changes in the current educational setting.

METHOD

A qualitative phenomenological documentary study was designed, identifying categories of analysis that are relevant to the dimensions of psychosocial care for individuals engaged in the professional teaching activity in the Argentine context.[18,19]

RESULTS

Context: according to the National Census of Educational Establishments Personnel in 2014, Argentina had 177 658 teachers, as reported in the University Statistical yearbook, and a total of 1 359 530 educators. Estimations for the year 2019 indicate that the number of teachers increased to 1 423 408, reflecting a growth of 4,7 % compared to 2014. The most substantial increase was observed in the number of university teachers (10,0 %, compared to 3,9 % in non-university teachers). The Argentine university system is composed of a total of 154 institutions, with 56 being state-managed and 62 privately managed.

Fragments of stories about teachers' experiences in Argentina

- Teaching activity implies significant emotional demands, which require sustained emotional effort.
- Academic work demands that educators interact with a wide diversity of stakeholders.
- Teachers must successfully manage, monitor, and regulate their emotions with the aim of achieving effectiveness in the teaching process and creating a positive learning environment. This involves meeting social expectations related to enthusiasm, happiness, confidence, and passion, which, teachers must demonstrate during the practice of their role.
- When emotional demands become too overwhelming, they usually lead to states of emotional dissonance (tension or conflict between the projected and the actually felt emotions) associated with losses in psychological well-being.

Psychosocial risk in the teaching job market

- Increasing levels of competitiveness with higher demands on the quality of processes and results.
- New demands and challenges for academics in terms of scientific productivity, academic and pedagogical training, continuous assessment, and requirements for technological innovation.
- Teaching is typified as one of the most stressful occupations due to high cognitive and emotional demands, increasing work overload, conflicting schedules, job instability, and difficulties in juggling academic and family life.
- Sources of psychosocial risk include: an increase in student enrollment rates during times of tight budget constraints, limited access to physical resources, low salaries, and weak career development opportunities.
- Growing work demands and insufficient organizational resources heighten the psychosocial risks for teachers.
- The academic profession is often practiced under diverse modalities of hiring, which can result in different levels of job insecurity.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, psychosocial risks were analyzed as factors related to work that, whether due to excess, defect, or combination, constitute a threat to physical, social and/or psychological integrity.

The study of psychosocial risks plays a vital role in the universities, where academic professionals constitute the principal strategic asset. Systematic knowledge about the working factors that expose academics to higher psychosocial risk is fundamental for the development of policies and preventive strategies. These strategies enable to reduce labor demands and/or increase the available resources to address them, with the goal of promoting the development of teachers and, at the same time, preserving their

mental and physical health.

Academicians with lower levels of exposure to psychosocial risks also experience more positive states, exhibit better performance within the courses they are engaged in, and demonstrate higher levels of institutional and disciplinary commitment. As a result, they are more inclined to venture into other varieties of academic activities in addition to teaching, such as research or transfer.

Several studies have highlighted that social support, understood as "the degree to which the job provides opportunities for employees to receive assistance from others", plays a pivotal role in the employees' well-being, particularly when they are engaged in stressful jobs such as the academic profession.

University teaching is undergoing constant transformation and adaptation to the social, economic, cultural and policy realities of society. This dynamic environment gives rise to a prevalent exposure to psychosocial risks that should be identified, treated, prevented, and eliminated for the benefit of the teacher as an individual and for the enhancement of the educational process as a part of scientific and technological development.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

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