

Predictors of the Quality of Work Life in Fundamental Education Teachers

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Abstract

The present study aimed to identify the predictive power of sociodemographics, work, working conditions, and health variables in the pandemic/COVID-19 period for Quality of Life at Work (QWL). As instruments, we used a sociodemographic and labor data questionnaire and questions related to working and health conditions during the pandemic/COVID-19 period and the QWL Assessment Scale. The sample consisted of 189 Basic Education teachers. Multiple Linear Regression analysis (Stepwise method) was performed, and the results revealed explanatory models for QWL consisting mainly, of variables related to the pandemic and general health perception. In this sense, they indicate the importance of the pandemic context for QWL in teachers, perceiving themselves as healthy and receiving assistance and support from the educational institution.

Keywords: quality of life at work, work conditions, COVID-19, teachers, elementary education

PREDITORES DA QUALIDADE DE VIDA NO TRABALHO EM PROFESSORES DA EDUCAÇÃO BÁSICA

Resumo

O presente estudo teve como objetivo identificar o poder preditivo das variáveis sociodemográficas, laborais, condições de trabalho e saúde no período pandêmico/COVID-19 para a Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho (QVT). Como instrumentos utilizou-se um questionário de dados sociodemográficos, laborais e questões relacionadas às condições de trabalho e saúde no período pandêmico/COVID-19 e a Escala de avaliação da QVT. A amostra foi constituída por 189 professores da Educação Básica. Foi realizada análise de Regressão Linear Múltipla (método *Stepwise*) e os resultados revelaram modelos explicativos para a QVT constituídos, em sua maioria, por variáveis relacionadas à pandemia e percepção de saúde geral. Neste sentido, indicam a importância do contexto pandêmico para a QVT em professores, isto é, perceber-se saudável e receber assistência e apoio por parte da instituição de ensino.

Palavras-chave: qualidade de vida no trabalho, condições de trabalho, COVID-19, professores, educação básica

PREDICTORES DE LA CALIDAD DE VIDA EN EL TRABAJO EN MAESTROS DE EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA

Resumen

El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar el poder predictivo de variables sociodemográficas, laborales, de condiciones de trabajo y de salud en el período pandemia/COVID-19 para la Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo (CVT). Como instrumentos se utilizó un cuestionario de datos sociodemográficos, laborales y preguntas relacionadas con las condiciones de trabajo y de salud en el período pandemia/COVID-19 y la Escala de Evaluación CVL. La muestra estuvo conformada por 189 maestros de Educación Básica. Se realizó un análisis de Regresión Lineal Múltiple (método *Stepwise*) y los resultados revelaron modelos explicativos para la QWL que consisten, en su mayoría, en variables relacionadas con la pandemia y la percepción general de salud. En ese sentido, indican la importancia del contexto de pandemia para la CVT en los docentes, o sea, percibirse sanos y recibir asistencia y apoyo de la institución educativa.

Palabras clave: calidad de vida en el trabajo, condiciones de trabajo, COVID-19, maestros, educación básica

The education system has been affected by the instabilities and discrepancies caused by the global spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2), known as COVID-19. Since late 2019, this new coronavirus agent rapidly spread across the globe, impacting various segments of society, including the school education system (Cipriani, Moreira, & Carius, 2021). Educational guidelines during the pandemic influenced the school community, with repercussions on families, students, and teachers. Fundamental Education was particularly affected, as it encompasses the stage of teaching and learning for children and young people aged 4 to 17 (Previtali & Fagiani, 2021). In Brazil, schools, due to the adoption of quarantine measures to curb the spread of the virus, had to suspend in-person classes. On April 28, 2020, the National Council of Education approved guidelines to provide directions to Fundamental Education schools and Higher Education Institutions during the pandemic (Brasil, 2020).

In 2020, the pandemic highlighted, in an even more urgent manner, the need for teachers and students to abruptly leave physical classrooms and find new ways of learning. These alternatives had to be adapted to various socioeconomic contexts students and teachers, who had to adjust to distance learning (Britto & Waltenberg, 2021).

The implications of the territorial shifts in school knowledge due to the pandemic were numerous, including the availability and quality of equipment, digital resources, and internet access, as well as a conducive environment for home studies, and family help in completing school activities, all of which depended on the economic and social conditions of the students. Teachers, facing sudden pressures in public and private education networks to plan, develop, and evaluate remote activities without prior qualifications, were compelled by circumstances to acquire the necessary materials for remote teaching at their own expense. They encountered challenges in organizing their family routines, as the responsibilities of virtual education were added to domestic duties and caring for their children (Oliveira, 2020).

In 2021, educational companies and public authorities began to demand a return to in-person classes, disregarding health guidelines, the rise in COVID-19 cases, and the slow pace of vaccination, particularly in the economically active age groups that education professionals belong to (Previtali & Fagiani, 2021). However, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers, especially in Fundamental Education, faced difficulties in their professional practice due to their extra-class workload, low remuneration, and poor working conditions regarding work-related devices (Paludo, 2020).

During the pandemic period, despite the resistance of many teachers to changes related to the inclusion of technology, the pandemic forced these professionals into virtual classrooms. This moment required adaptation and overcoming challenges (Souza, Barros, Dutra, Gusmão, & Cardoso, 2021). Many workers needed to readjust their routines and lifestyles, working remotely from their homes (Silva & Leite, 2021).

The electronic format, utilizing social media and technology, burdened teachers, accumulating work and increased preparation time for classes without the technological and pedagogical resources for the teaching activities (Souza et al., 2021). The difficulty of educational

institutions in providing suitable conditions and development opportunities for educators negatively impacts their Quality of Work Life (QWL) (Rabelo, Camarini, & Chamon, 2021). Studying the conditions that influence the QWL of teachers contributes to the development of actions aimed at improving the work environment for this professional class, given that these professionals are essential for educational progress (Catapan, Bonfim, Panucci-Filho, Oliveira, Vila & Reis, 2014; Rabelo et al., 2021). Aspects related to the work environment, years of service, education level, and the education level they teach also affect teachers' QWL (Catapan et al., 2014).

The QWL model described by Walton (1973) continues to be one of the most accepted and applied studies (Amâncio, Mendes & Martins, 2021). According to this model, QWL is divided into eight factors: 1. Adequate and fair compensation, encompassing how the remuneration aligns with professional qualifications, the necessary responsibilities for the work performed, and the receipt of benefits; 2. Safe and healthy working conditions involve adjusting working hours and the work environment to minimize health risks; 3. Immediate opportunity to use and develop human capacities pertains to the degree of autonomy the professional has in performing tasks using various skills, having information about the entire work process, and participating in task scheduling and implementation; 4. Future opportunities for continuous growth and security refers to career advancement, income growth, and job security opportunities; 5. Social integration in the work organization covers factors such as the absence of prejudice, egalitarianism, mobility, support groups, and a sense of community within the organization; 6. Constitutionalism in the work organization involves the right to maintain the confidentiality of personal life, dissent from superiors, equity, and labor rights; 7. Work and the total life space characterize how much work encroaches upon a professional's personal life; and 8. The work-life's social relevance involves the company's social representation (Walton, 1973).

In a more recent model of four QWL factors based on Walton's model and developed from the evaluation scale by Rueda, Ottati, Pinto, Lima, and Bueno (2013), they are described as follows: 1. Integration, respect, and autonomy are characterized by promoting respect for individual differences and employee rights, collaboration and respect among colleagues, as well as promoting autonomy through clear rules and opportunities to use and develop worker capacities, fair compensation, and responsibilities aligned with the job role; 2. Fair and adequate compensation refers to the quality of life associated with satisfaction with salary and organizational salary policies. It considers the perception that the salary is fair for the worker's physical and/or mental effort; 3. Possibilities for leisure and social interaction are characterized by balancing work and total life space, the adequacy of working hours to allow for family, social, and leisure time outside the company, without work or company-related activities interfering with these interactions. It encompasses the quality of non-organizational interactions made possible by organizational characteristics, such as working hours and schedules; and 4. Incentives and support indicate opportunities for continuous growth, security, and working conditions, opportunities to use and develop capacities, the social relevance of work life, and pre-planned

work activities. This dimension includes providing training, enhancement courses, and incentives for cultural activities.

According to Amâncio et al. (2021), discussions about QWL in Brazil are academically and organizationally evolving. The authors suggest that advancing knowledge and monitoring these movements by managers positively impact workers and the service these professionals provide. The QWL helps align institutional goals with employee well-being (Figueira & Ferreira, 2013). A study by Dai, Zhang, Looi, Su, & Li (2020) found that adults who self-reported poorer health conditions had more mental health problems. Le and Nguyen (2020) surveyed 350,000 respondents in 51 U.S. states during the Coronavirus pandemic and found that people in confinement reported worse general health perception.

Changes in teachers' life contexts due to the pandemic required adaptations that could compromise their health and QWL (Paludo, 2020). Therefore, this exploratory study aimed to identify the predictive power of sociodemographics, work and working conditions and health variables during the pandemic/COVID-19 period for the QWL.

Method

Participants

The non-probabilistic sample comprised 189 Fundamental Education teachers (Preschool, Initial and Final Years of Elementary School, and High School). The sample size followed the guidance of Field (2009) for linear regression analysis, which recommends a number of participants equal to 50, added to eight times the number of independent variables, to ensure reliable results. In this study, 16 predictors were used. Therefore the minimum estimated sample was 130 participants.

The inclusion criterion was to have been working for at least six months in the current school, and the exclusion needed to be present for reasons such as health, maternity, and personal leave. The participants had a mean age of 37.96 years ($SD = 8.92$, range = 24 to 58 years). The majority identified as female (86.8%, $n = 164$), had a partner (76.2%, $n = 144$), had children (56.1%, $n = 106$), held a postgraduate degree (78.9%, $n = 149$), and resided in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (85.7%, $n = 162$).

Regarding work data, the mean years of experience in the profession were 12.29 years ($SD = 8.10$, range = 1 to 35 years), and the mean years of experience in the current school were 6.40 years ($SD = 6.49$, range = 1 to 35 years). In terms of the fundamental teaching levels, they were engaged in, the largest portion taught classes in the initial years of Elementary School (29.6%, $n = 56$), followed by Preschool (28.0%, $n = 53$), then High School (22.2%, $n = 42$), and finally, the later years of Elementary School (20.1%, $n = 38$). Concerning contracted working hours, the participants reported a mean of 33.17 hours per week ($SD = 10.26$, range = 5 to 60). The mean number of students they taught daily was 67.35 students ($SD = 72.88$, range = 5 to 510 students). Of the respondents, 67.2% ($n = 127$) reported working in only one school and only in the public education system, 62.4% ($n = 118$) in the private education system, 30.2% ($n = 57$) in the private sector, and 7.4% ($n = 14$) in both systems.

Concerning compensation, 51.9% ($n = 98$) received between 1 and 3 minimum wages, 39.7% ($n = 75$) received between 3 and 5 minimum wages, and 8.5% ($n = 16$) received 5 minimum wages or more. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic context, the majority reported working in a hybrid format, 71.4% ($n = 135$).

Instruments

The data was collected using four instruments, these being: 1. Sociodemographic data questionnaire: age; marital status; number of children; level of education; 2. Work-related data questionnaire: containing questions covering years of professional experience; level of fundamental education taught; contracted weekly working hours; actual weekly working hours; number of students taught daily; duration of working at the current school; working in a school network (public/private); working in another school; engaging in other paid work activities unrelated to education; monthly income; experience of work absence in the previous year; and teaching format (online, in-person, hybrid); 3. QWL Assessment Scale: Developed by Rueda et al. (2013), the instrument possesses 35 items, which are divided into four factors. The factors are: 1) Integration, respect, and autonomy (15 items; $\alpha = .89$, sample item: "freedom of expression is respected"); 2) Fair and adequate compensation (6 items; $\alpha = .89$, sample item: "my salary is fair for the effort (physical or mental) I exert"); 3. Opportunities for leisure and social interaction (6 items; $\alpha = .84$, sample item: "my job allows for leisure time with family"); and 4. Encouragement and support (8 items; $\alpha = .76$, sample item: "the company provides regular training"). The questions are scored using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = strongly agree); 4) Self-assessment of general health, evaluated through the question: "How do you perceive your general health?" with response options ranging from 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent).

Data collection procedures

Data were collected through an electronic form (*SurveyMonkey*), between April and September 2021. Participant recruitment occurred through social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, E-mail and through contacts of the researchers. The invitation requested participants to respond and forward it to their network of contacts.

Access to the instruments was only granted after reading and accepting the consent terms. The study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Vale do Rio Sinos (UNISINOS), and approved under authorization number 43856621.9.0000.5344.

Data analysis procedures

The database was analyzed using the SPSS 20 package. Initially, exploratory descriptive analyses were conducted to assess item distribution. Subsequently, frequencies, means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlations of the variables under study were calculated.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (Stepwise method) was performed, considering the four QWL dimensions (Integration, Respect and Autonomy; Fair and Adequate Compensation; Leisure and Social Interaction Opportunities; and Incentives and Support) as dependent variables. The independent variables were sociodemographic (age, gender, marital status, having children, education) and work-related variables (years of professional experience, tenure at the current school, working in another school; engaging in other non-education-related paid work activities; monthly salary), as well as work and health conditions in the pandemic context (self-assessment of general health, having suitable conditions for teaching during the pandemic, receiving personal protective equipment for teaching amid the COVID-19 pandemic, perception of increased workload due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

The multiple linear regression assumptions were assessed, and no violations were detected that would contradict its use, following the guidelines established by Field (2009). There was no evidence of multicollinearity among the variables under study. All Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 4 (ranging from 1.012 to 1.491), and tolerance values were less than 1 (ranging from 0.671 to 0.988). The Durbin-Watson coefficients were close to 2, ranging from 1.938 to 1.988. This suggests the independence of the distribution and the absence of correlation in the residuals. Cook's distance values were below 0.06, indicating the absence of influential predictors and confirming the model's adequate fit.

Predictor variables were selected based on a significance level of $p < .05$. In the regression analysis, the standardized regression coefficients calculated in the final model were used to determine the magnitude of the effect, following the approach outlined by Marôco (2007).

Results

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and alpha of the instrument used to measure the dependent variables. It can be observed that the highest mean obtained, considering an evaluation scale from 1 to 5, was for the Integration dimension, while the lowest was for the Compensation dimension.

Table 1

Mean, standard deviation and alpha of the QWL dimensions

QWL dimensions	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Integration, respect and autonomy	3.94	0.80	.93
Fair and adequate compensation	2.34	1.16	.92
Possibilities of leisure and social interaction	2.74	0.82	.78
Encouragement and support	3.26	1.02	.81

The results obtained for the single-item variables revealed a mean of 6.88 ($SD = 1.74$) for the general health self-assessment, evaluated on a scale of 1 to 10. Regarding adequate teaching conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, on a scale of 1 to 5, the mean obtained was

2.39 (*SD* = 0.91). While for receiving personal protective equipment to teach during the COVID-19 pandemic, the mean was 2.27 (*SD* = 1.01), evaluated on a scale of 1 to 4. Concerning the perception that the workload increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the mean was 5.53 (*SD* = 0.64), considering a scale from 1 to 6.

For the Integration, respect, and autonomy dimension the regression analysis, presented in Table 2, revealed a predictive model indicating a positive relationship with the general health self-assessment and the evaluation of having received personal protective equipment for COVID.

The Fair and adequate compensation dimension was explained by its positive correlation with the evaluation of having received suitable teaching conditions, the self-assessment of general health, compensation, and the perception of receiving personal protective equipment for COVID. Considering the Leisure and social interaction possibilities dimension, a positive association was found with self-assessed general health, the perception of receiving COVID-related protective equipment, and a negative association with increased demands during the pandemic. Working in another school had a reducing effect on this dimension. The Encouragement and support dimension was explained by its positive correlation with the evaluation receiving personal protective equipment for COVID and the self-assessment of general health.

Table 2

Linear regression model for the dimensions of quality of life

Quality of Work Life	R ²	R ² Adj	B	β	t
Integration, respect and autonomy					
Self-assessment of general health	.21	.21	.18	.40	6.10**
Received protective equipment/COVID	.26	.25	.18	.23	3.45**
Fair and adequate compensation					
Adequate conditions to teach	.27	.27	-.39	.31	4.37**
Self-assessment of general health	.33	.33	.18	.26	4.23**
Monthly remuneration	.37	.36	.20	.20	3.48**
Received protective equipment/COVID	.40	.38	.23	.20	2.96**
Possibilities of leisure and social interaction					
Self-assessment of general health	.25	.25	.23	.39	6.19**
Received protective equipment/COVID	.30	.29	.18	.18	2.82*
Increased demand with the pandemic	.33	.32	-.31	-.19	-3.06*
Working at another school#	.35	.34	-.33	-.15	-2.54*
Incentive and social support					
Received protective equipment/COVID	.28	.28	.32	.39	5.73**
Self-assessment of general health	.35	.34	.11	.23	3.62**
Adequate conditions to teach classes	.37	.36	.15	.16	2.31*

p* < .05, *p* < .01 # 0=no,1=yes

The results illustrate that the magnitude of the effect ranged from moderate ($R^2 = .26$) to high ($R^2 = .40$), in accordance with the guidelines provided by Marôco (2007). Consequently, this suggests that the relationships identified may also extend to the target population of Fundamental Education teachers.

Discussion

The present study aimed to identify the predictive power of sociodemographics, work and working conditions, and health variables during the COVID-19 pandemic for the QWL. To address the study objective, the analysis and discussion of each QWL dimension are presented. The analysis and discussion of each QWL dimension are presented to address the study objective.

The Integration, respect, and autonomy dimension revealed a predictive model in which a higher self-assessment of general health and the evaluation of having received personal protective equipment for COVID were associated with an increased perception that the institution respects individual differences and employee rights, promotes autonomy, adheres to defined norms, fosters the utilization and development of worker capacities, provides equitable compensation, and aligns responsibilities with the role performed (Rueda et al., 2013). These results underscore the significance of the self-assessment of general health for teachers to navigate new work contexts and stressors inherent in the profession, which were further accentuated by the pandemic. The provision of personal protective equipment by the school contributed to teachers feeling integrated and respected by the institution.

The Fair and adequate compensation dimension was explained by higher evaluations in the variables having received adequate teaching conditions, greater self-assessment of general health, compensation, and having received personal protective equipment for COVID. This dimension relating to Compensation is characterized by satisfaction with the institution's remuneration and salary policies, encompassing the perception that the salary corresponds fairly to the physical and/or mental effort exerted by the professional (Rueda et al., 2013). In the context marked by the impacts of COVID-19, with significant and intense changes in personal and professional routines, it can be speculated that feeling healthy, receiving the necessary materials for work, having proper safety equipment, and satisfactory salaries contributed to the perception that the remuneration was fair and adequate. One dimension of teaching work conditions that seems to influence the possibility of changing professions and the sense of social recognition is the salary of Fundamental Education teachers (Del-Ben et al., 2019). A recent literature review on QWL within the Brazilian public administration context also identified that remuneration is a constant subject of demands among public service professionals, with this aspect being tied to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Amâncio et al., 2021). Considering the sample of this study, it is likely that this result is related to the health crisis caused by SARS-CoV-2, which exacerbated the fragility of the Brazilian job market, that was already undergoing deterioration in the previous four years (Bridi, 2020). Therefore, market restrictions and the fear

of unemployment may have led to a more positive assessment of salaries and working conditions during this time.

Regarding the Leisure and social interaction possibilities dimension, it was identified that higher self-assessment of general health, receiving COVID-related protective equipment, increased workload during the pandemic, and working in multiple schools were predictors. The teachers, when perceiving better health and having received protective equipment for COVID, exhibited greater possibilities for leisure and social interaction. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the home became virtually the sole environment for leisure activities (Clemente & Stoppa, 2020). According to these authors, many experiences that were previously conducted in person had to transition to the virtual realm. This includes activities like live music shows, concerts, virtual tours, cooking classes, exercise sessions, and various other leisure options, all of which fostered increased family interaction.

The increase in demands during the pandemic, along with working in multiple schools, contributed to a lower evaluation of the leisure and social interaction dimension. Working in two schools likely amplified work tasks since each school adopted its own approach during the pandemic, necessitating adaptation and leaving less time for leisure and family life.

The Incentives and support QWL dimension was explained by the higher ratings in aspects such as having received personal protective equipment for COVID, having suitable conditions to conduct classes, and a higher self-assessment of general health. For teachers, these issues align with the characterization of this dimension according to Rueda et al. (2013), which involves the support offered by the school that provides adequate working conditions and safety, important forms of incentive, and social recognition of the work life.

It can be concluded that the results revealed explanatory models for QWL primarily composed of variables related to the pandemic and the perception of general health. The aspects that were consistent across all models involved the self-assessment of health and having received personal protective equipment. Accordingly, the importance of appropriate support and assistance in the work context by the educational institution is emphasized for improving the QWL of teachers.

The study does, however, present some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. One of them is its cross-sectional design, which prevents the analysis of causal relationships. Another limitation is the regional focus of the majority of the investigated sample, who were from the state of Rio Grande do Sul. This state has distinct characteristics from other regions of the country, as, in addition to significant socio-cultural variations, there were differences in how the pandemic was handled, largely falling under the responsibility of municipal and state authorities.

Based on the investigation conducted, several potential areas for further research were identified. Therefore, it is suggested that studies be conducted, incorporating variables related to the characteristics of the teaching profession and psychosocial stressors, in order to enhance the predictive power of the QWL dimensions. It is also recommended that expanded studies with

randomized samples from different states in Brazil are carried out to assess the cultural and socioeconomic influence of educational institutions.

Regarding practical implications, in terms of prevention, it is crucial to monitor the QWL of teachers from the beginning of their work activities. Constructing initiatives aimed at improving QWL is important to promote greater integration, respect, autonomy, support, incentives, and fair and appropriate salaries, as well as a balance between work and social interaction, all contributing to overall general health.

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