Review Article

Influence of occupational stress on interpersonal and organizational relationships: an integrative review

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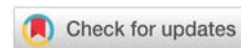
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Abstract

Objective: To investigate, through scientific literary findings, the effects of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships in the work environment.

Methodology: This is an integrative literature review, with a descriptive and qualitative approach, carried out through a survey in the Scielo, Pubmed and Lilacs databases, with the words indexed in the DeCs: Psychology, Occupational Stress and Burnout Syndrome. As well as the Boolean operator "AND" to perform the crossing between the descriptors. Articles related to the proposed theme, published between the years 2016 to 2021, available in full, with no language restriction; in addition to theses, dissertations and monographs.

Results and discussions: The findings of the scientific literature exposed in this research could show that occupational stress has a total impact on interpersonal relationships and on emotional exhaustion, constituting a network conducive to the emergence and development of Burnout syndrome.

Final considerations: The research included in this study could unanimously prove that occupational stress leads to a decline in interpersonal and organizational relationships, which directly compromises the mental health of professionals, generating a risk of harm to the health of the worker, with the syndrome of Burnout is the most prevalent pathology in this context.

Introduction

Work represents an important factor for the constitution of personality subjectivity, livelihood guarantee, the definition of social status and way of life, in addition to the possibility of relating to other people and developing their potential and skills [1,2]. However, just as work can bring pleasure and satisfaction, it can also represent psychological suffering and illness. Nothing is as current as stress in the work environment, especially as this is the place where most people usually spend many hours of the day [3].

In this way, the occurrence of unemployment or the feeling of insecurity regarding stability can bring stress, anguish, and other forms of suffering. Excessive workload, long hours, and increased pressure for results are other causes often cited as motivation for the emergence of psychological illnesses [1–3].

In this sense, among the various reasons that can lead to stressful situations, one of them has received greater attention in studies on occupational health: interpersonal relationships. That is, in both relationships within the work environment and in the personal context, the daily routine of professionals has proven to be a great source of stress generation, which can lead to dissatisfaction and frustration with work, violent behavior, health problems, to more serious situations [2].

According to França & Rodrigues [3], stress is a variable

001

that can be divided into two dimensions: the first dimension concerns a positive response to a given event (eustress), while the second dimension refers to a negative response (distress), generating tension and emotional imbalance in the individual. Eustress is the harmony between the time of conflict, accomplishment, efforts, and results, making the individual not feel bad in adverse situations, on the contrary, he can overcome challenges [4].

On the other hand, distress is the disarrangement of biopsychosocial factors, that is, it occurs due to the absence or excess of deleterious factors to mental health, essentially with pessimistic thoughts and immediacy [3-5]. Within this scenario, challenges are seen as threats, disturbing all aspects of life and all its spheres. Corroborating what has been discussed, the study by Castro e Zanelli [4] demonstrates that the Quality of Life at Work (QLW) refers to the development of healthy habits, coping with everyday tensions, awareness of the impacts of environmental factors, permanent development of inner balance and in relationships with others.

Therefore, underestimating or ignoring the result of these pressures on mental health is a major risk factor that can bring considerable damage to the performance of the organization and mainly, to the worker. Therefore, in view of the above, the objective of this study is to understand the main aspects of stress in the work environment and how they affect people's interpersonal relationships, whether in the work context or in the personal context [4,5].

According to WHO, around 30% of workers suffer from mild mental disorders, and between 5% and 10% face serious psychological problems? In this way, as work occupies more space in life, so does the interest in trying to find a balance, so that it does not harm family life, that is, if it is necessary to find a balanced way to reconcile these two areas so important for every person. Leite [5] states that occupational stress is one of the factors that most cause accidents at work, relationship problems, absences due to health problems, a drop in productivity, and a lack of motivation.

Not enough, the constant pressure for better results, the reduction of employees, times of economic crisis and insecurity regarding professional stability are just some of the factors that have contributed significantly to the increase in the appearance of stress. Consequently, reconciling professional and personal life has been more than a challenge. This challenge goes against what today's society preaches and demands, success. However, it is essential to establish limits between these ways of living [6].

And with that, one of the main strategies in combating occupational stress is specialized management. Where the manager/leader plans and executes innovative actions with his team, in order to be closer to the reality of the labor sector, and through this, to know the factors that contribute to occupational stress. In this way, there is the empowerment/strengthening of employees through management that is concerned and attentive to the requests of its operators [6,7].

As work occupies a greater place in people's lives, due to its more complex and extensive workload, the concern to have a balance in the quality of life is also an important factor that causes concern in individuals. Although work is of great relevance, each person has their own subjectivity, their family, friends, and goals to be achieved that are different from each other [7].

Thus, this balance is a subject that has grown on the part of organizations, as it has been known for a long time that, in the long run, an employee who is too dedicated to work and leaves his family ends up with problems that may reflect on his health physical and mental. Therefore, this work is justified in a way of understanding the various factors related to stress and its implications for the physical, emotional, and social well-being of people. Above all, which organizational strategies to deal with stress? [6,7].

According to Lima [7] over time, Quality of Life at Work (QWL) has been receiving different connotations, thus, it has been treated as a broad theme, and, in many cases, confusing. There are many definitions found that deal with the subject. It usually involves aspects related to health, safety, leisure activities, and motivation, among others, which end up influencing confusion in the theoretical and technical contexts of QWL, aimed at creating fads within organizations [6-8].

Given the above, the guiding question of the study arises: what are the impacts of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships in the organizational scenario? To answer the question, it listed the following general objective: to investigate the effects of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships in the work environment. Specifically, identify the stressors in interpersonal relationships in the work environment; discuss the effects of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships in the organizational structure.

Methodology

This study was characterized as an integrative literature review, with a descriptive and qualitative approach, which was carried out through a survey of scientific articles that were related to the objective of the study [8]. This review was carried out between January and October 2021, and for the consolidation of this research, the following methodological steps were chosen: identification of the theme and research question; sample selection; categorization of selected studies; definition of information extracted from reviewed publications; evaluation of selected studies; interpretation of results; and presentation of research results.

A search was carried out according to the searches mentioned above in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), National Library of Medicine (PubMed); and Lilac. After the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the articles for the study sample were selected. In addition, the words indexed in Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS): Psychology, Occupational Stress, and Burnout Syndrome were used. In addition, the Boolean operator ''AND'' was applied to perform the crossing between the above-mentioned descriptors.

Articles related to the proposed theme, published between the years 2016 to 2021, available in full, with no language restriction; in addition to theses, dissertations and monographs. Exclusion criteria were bibliographic review articles, articles, or abstracts published in conference proceedings; from editors and preprints. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria and evaluating the abstracts, the studies that met the criteria were selected and organized, tabulated, and discussed.

The research followed the protocols and guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and also the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) strategy. The data collection procedure occurred through the extraction of information from previously selected articles for the construction of results, discussions, and final considerations of the study.

In the data analysis process, Bardin Laurence's content was used, and this analysis was divided into 3 stages: material research and organization by subthemes; exploration of data and subsequent synthesis of the most important aspects of the text; the evidence and description of the most important information. And the presentation of results and final discussion will be carried out in a descriptive way, in the form of figures and tables.

Results and discussion

A total of 415 articles were found, of which all had their titles and abstracts read, after that, 390 articles were excluded for not meeting the eligibility criteria, leaving 25 articles that were carefully read in full, after complete reading, 07 articles were selected to be tabulated, characterized and demonstrated their level of evidence, which met the PICO strategy, thus finalizing the final sample of this study (Figure 1).
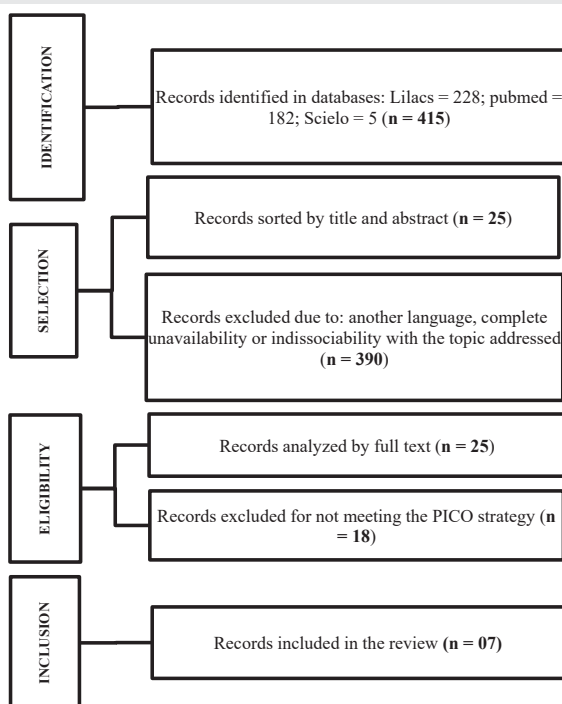

Figure 1: Flowchart of studies included in the integrative review.

In relation to Figure 1, the selected articles were observed in a critical-descriptive way, according to the methodology, originality, and which dealt with occupational stress and its impacts on interpersonal relationships. Once the eligibility criteria were applied, 7 articles that met the pre-established criteria were selected for this review. In addition, all selected studies demonstrate the impacts of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships with a focus on organizational psychology (Table 1).

The objective of this research was to investigate the effects of occupational stress on interpersonal relationships in the work environment. Considering this, it was observed that regardless of the area of activity, that is, the area of health, safety, or education, the levels of occupational stress are totally related to the decline in interpersonal relationships and mental illness, essentially with the manifestation of the syndrome of Burnout [1,13].

In a cross-sectional study carried out by Sadir & Lipp [10], it was observed that the emotional manifestations resulting from occupational stress favor the emergence of associated pathologies, essentially those related to emotional lack of control, feelings of incapacity, low satisfaction and depressive symptoms, factors that directly impact interpersonal and organizational relationships.

Within this context, it is noted that the presence of psychologists in the organizational environment is extremely important. Considering that, according to the aforementioned study, it was possible to show that psychological techniques such as Psychological Stress Control Training were effective in mitigating levels of stress and anxiety at work. The main results of this study can still demonstrate positive impacts in the social sphere, mainly in self-control and job satisfaction [12].

Based on this assumption, mental health is an important factor, with regard to the reach of human potential, in the educational context, this is no different. In order for education professionals to provide a good quality of education, it is of paramount importance that they remain psychologically healthy. Considering that, in order to maximize learning, the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the students must be present [9].

However, the educational sector, essentially at a higher level, can present requirements and demands that generate emotional and cognitive overload, making the educational field a fertile field for the emergence of psychological syndromes that lead to emotional exhaustion, such as burnout syndrome [9,10].

Going against the above, the study by Ribeir [12] showed that workers who perceived reduced social support had greater exposure to occupational stress. Thus, the impact on interpersonal relationships is a major risk factor for the illness of teachers and other professionals, and it is necessary to implement stress prevention strategies among workers, such as strengthening social support in the organizational setting [13].

Table 1: List of articles selected for analysis (*n* = 07).

Title	Authors	Year	Country
Military police mental health: Interpersonal relationships and stress in professional practice	Couto, et al. [9]	2012	Brazil
Occupational stress: Influence of stress control training in interpersonal relationships at work	Sadir & Lipp [10]	2013	Brazil
Prevalence and Factors Associated with Burnout Syndrome and Occupational Stress in Psychologists	Rodriguez e Carlotto [11]	2014	Brazil
Occupational stress among workers in the health of a university hospital	Ribeiro, et al. [12]	2018	Brazil
Burnout Syndrome in Civil Servants: Prevalence and Association with Occupational Stressors	Carlotto & Câmara [13]	2019	Brazil
Self-efficacy at work and burnout syndrome in nursing professionals	Loiola e Martins [14]	2019	Brazil
Satisfaction, stress and professional exhaustion of nurse managers and assistants in Primary Health Care	Garcia e Marziale [15]	2021	Brazil

Most studies in the psychological field report and evidence occupational stress and burnout syndrome essentially in the educational and health field [13]. However, the study by Couto, et al. [9] demonstrates, through a cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach, the mental health characteristics of military police officers, with emphasis on occupational stress and its impacts on interpersonal relationships in professional practice.

Among the main findings of this research, it was observed that more than 55.9% of the study sample presented occupational stress. However, the results of this study also indicate that the more experienced police officers become, the less susceptible they are to occupational stress, thus preserving interpersonal relationships, which are essentially essential in this professional field [9].

For Carlotto & Câmara [13], it is extremely important that content aimed at mental health in the organizational environment can be discussed regardless of the professional area. The authors of this study state that the main predictive stressors of Burnout Syndrome are: work content, work organization, type of public served, social work environment, physical conditions of the workplace, working hours, workload, the relationship with the boss, and the relationship with colleagues. The results suggest the need for intervention in the occupational stressors present in the organization of work [14].

In the study by Garcia & Marziale [15], it was shown that occupational aesthesis in health professionals was related to the lack of interpersonal communication, professional and organizational role conflicts, and also the impacts on interpersonal relationships that generated dissatisfaction and low professional fulfillment. With this, the levels of Burnout were evidenced, manifesting themselves from moderate to high regarding the factors of professional disappointment, dehumanization, and emotional exhaustion.

In this general panorama, it is evident that burnout syndrome directly affects interpersonal relationships, and this leads to other professional and personal declines, such as dissatisfaction and low professional achievement [9]. These scientific literary results are largely for the context of public health, given that most health professionals deal directly with the quality of life of thousands of people. As a result, the mental illness of this population can harm the Health System [15,16].

Corroborating with the above, the study by Loiola and Martins [14] states that the signs and symptoms of burnout syndrome are associated with professions that directly and often imply demands that require help, care, or risk of death. As an example, health professionals, teachers, and police officers stand out. And finally, filling in the risk factors of exposure to mental illness, we note the psychologists.

For Rodriguez & Carlotto [11,17,18], the psychologist's daily work is complex and involves psycho-emotional problems, attention, and care for the patient. In this way, the therapist needs to develop a bond of trust with his patient, establishing complex and intense affective and emotional connections, which may favor the professional in a field conducive to the emergence and development of psychological syndromes, such as burnout syndrome [17-20].

Conclusion

The scientific literary findings exposed in this research could show that occupational stress has a total impact on interpersonal relationships and on emotional exhaustion, which constitutes a network conducive to the emergence and development of Burnout syndrome. With this, the installation of this syndrome in individuals also causes associated problems, which stand out: suicidal tendencies, depression, low self-esteem, professional dissatisfaction, low social interactions, and damage to the entire biopsychosocial arrangement inherent to the quality of life of the person with this syndrome.

Burnout can be evidenced in all areas of activity, such as education, health, and safety. However, the scientific literature expresses a greater number of articles that address the prevalence of Burnout syndrome in health professionals. Scarce in the literature original articles that demonstrate the effects of Burnout in other areas.

The studies that were included in this study could unanimously prove that occupational stress leads to a decline in interpersonal and organizational relationships, which directly compromises the mental health of professionals, creating a risk of harm to workers' health, with Burnout syndrome being the pathology more prevalent in this context. Finally, this study encourages the development of new scientific research that demonstrates the prevalence of burnout syndrome and the relationship between occupational stress and interpersonal and organizational relationships beyond the health area.

Acknowledgment

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