

**THE MENTAL HEALTH OF TEACHERS IN STRICTO SENSU POSTGRADUATE COURSES: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

***A SAÚDE MENTAL DO DOCENTE NA PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO STRICTO SENSU: UMA REVISÃO DE LITERATURA***

***LA SALUD MENTAL DEL DOCENTE EN LA POSGRADUACIÓN STRICTO SENSU: UNA REVISIÓN DE LITERATURA***



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**ABSTRACT:** This research aimed to map the current state of knowledge related to the mental health and psychological distress of professors in stricto sensu postgraduate programs in the Brazilian context. Through a bibliographic review, scientific articles published between 2019 and 2023 were analyzed. The systematic survey was carried out on the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) platforms. The corpus of this review consisted of 10 articles, which were subjected to a rigorous analysis process. The results showed a degradation and undervaluation of the teaching/research profession. Teachers working in postgraduate programs face precarious working conditions and do not receive due recognition for their activities. Among the challenges identified are the intensification of teaching work, the bureaucratization of the profession, and the pressure for productivity.

**KEYWORDS:** Mental health. Psychic suffering. Stricto sensu postgraduate. Teacher. Literature review.

**RESUMO:** A presente investigação teve como objetivo mapear o atual estado do conhecimento relacionado à saúde mental e ao sofrimento psíquico dos professores de programas de pós-graduação stricto sensu no contexto brasileiro. Por meio de uma revisão bibliográfica, analisou-se artigos científicos publicados entre os anos de 2019 e 2023. O levantamento sistemático foi realizado nas plataformas Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) e Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES). O corpus desta revisão constituiu-se de 10 artigos, que foram submetidos a um rigoroso processo de análise. Os resultados evidenciaram uma degradação e subvalorização da profissão docente/pesquisador. Os docentes que atuam na pós-graduação enfrentam condições de trabalho precárias e não recebem o devido reconhecimento pelas atividades desempenhadas. Entre os desafios identificados estão a intensificação do trabalho docente, a burocratização da profissão e a pressão por produtividade.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Saúde mental. Sofrimento psíquico. Pós-graduação stricto sensu. Docente. Revisão de literatura.

**RESUMEN:** El objetivo de esta investigación fue mapear el estado actual del conocimiento relacionado con la salud mental y el malestar psicológico de los profesores de programas de posgrado stricto sensu en Brasil. A través de una revisión bibliográfica, se analizaron artículos científicos publicados entre 2019 y 2023. La encuesta sistemática se realizó en las plataformas Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) y Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES). El corpus de esta revisión consistió en 10 artículos, que fueron sometidos a un riguroso proceso de análisis. Los resultados mostraron una degradación e infravaloración de la profesión docente/investigadora. Los profesores que trabajan en programas de posgrado se enfrentan a condiciones laborales precarias y no reciben el debido reconocimiento por sus actividades. Entre los retos identificados están la intensificación del trabajo docente, la burocratización de la profesión y la presión por la productividad.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Salud mental. Sufrimiento psíquico. Posgrado stricto sensu. Docente. Revisión de literatura.

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## Introduction

The theme of mental health in contemporary society remains laden with stigma, particularly in relation to education. In this context, it becomes imperative to conduct research exploring the perceptions of faculty members in stricto sensu graduate programs regarding teacher mental health, as well as the stress factors present in this environment that hinder adaptability and cause psychological distress in this population.

Thus, there is a need to align the field of education—embracing the convergence of full human development in teaching-learning interactions—coherently with psychological knowledge. This alignment proposes a dialogue to construct a practice that recognizes the individual as a biopsychosocial being, necessitating an understanding that humans are influenced by an intersection of biological, psychological, social, and historical factors (Belloch; González, 1993).

By acknowledging all dimensions that compose the uniqueness of the human being, the crucial role played by education, the university institution, and teachers in the integral (biopsychosocial) development of the students present becomes evident. In this context, education is understood to be grounded in an emancipatory practice (Adorno, 1970), prioritizing recognition of experiences and respect for the origins of each individual. This implies not only providing technical and academic knowledge, but also promoting a process of self-awareness and active listening practice.

Suffering in the university context reveals a variety of challenges and obstacles stemming from a diversified professional-academic life and a society that increasingly promotes individualization, competitiveness among peers, and rapid production, substantially influenced by the postmodern society model grounded in the cultural industry. This social hegemony establishes production and performance as fundamental guiding principles of its structure, as highlighted by Horkheimer and Adorno (1985) and Leão *et al.* (2019).

Issues such as professional devaluation, precarious working conditions, loss of authority, low salaries, productivity demands, disruptive peer relationships, competitiveness, individualism, abuse of power, and lack of belonging are among the stress factors present in the university work environment that progressively deteriorate teachers' mental health (Antunes, 2019; Santos, 2019; Vivan *et al.*, 2019; Avila, 2021; Andrade, 2021).

In addition to these factors, a new, unexpected element was added to the professional lives of teachers and graduate students worldwide: the COVID-19 pandemic. The year 2020 witnessed the emergence of a new strain of coronavirus originating in Wuhan, China, which

rapidly evolved into a pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020. Measures such as social distancing, isolation, rigorous hygiene, and suspension of face-to-face activities aimed to contain the virus spread. These actions drastically affected education, with over 156 countries suspending in-person activities in educational institutions, impacting approximately 1.5 billion students and teachers, representing about 70% of the global educational population (Farias; Silva, 2021).

Studies indicate a high prevalence of anxiety and stress among teachers in higher education institutions in Brazil (Barbosa, 2021; Dextre, 2021), associated with issues such as depression, eating disorders, binge eating, and sleep disorders (Baldo, 2021). The period of social isolation has intensified teaching work, while also stimulating productivity and gradually wearing down the mental health of the teaching staff (Barbosa, 2021).

Moreover, amid a pandemic context that established social isolation as a preventive measure, reshaping our collective interaction, psychological distress became evident in the daily lives of teachers. Their research was interrupted, many had their funding cut due to budgetary constraints, and suddenly found themselves teaching remotely, often without adequate financial resources or familiarity with digital tools. Interactions with students and supervisees began to occur exclusively through video conferences, while many also faced the loss of family and friends due to COVID-19 infection (Glatz, 2022).

Furthermore, in addition to the aforementioned stressors, occupational activity has long been identified as a significant factor contributing to teachers' mental distress, with more than 160 million people worldwide suffering from work-related illnesses, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Birolim *et al.*, 2019). It is further emphasized that the teaching profession has been identified by several studies (Yaegashi; Benevides-Pereira; Alves, 2013; Silva *et al.*, 2018; Miguez; Braga, 2018) as one of the professions most susceptible to manifestations of psychological distress, triggering symptoms such as depression and Burnout Syndrome, stemming from chronic occupational stress (Benevides-Pereira, 2012).

Santos (2019) revealed that anxious, depressive, and mood symptoms were primarily responsible for the economic impact on a Brazilian federal higher education institution, which, over six years (2013-2018), incurred an indirect cost of US\$ 2.582.122,80 (including the sum of lost workdays due to absenteeism and disability retirements). Indirect costs related to medical leaves due to psychological distress were estimated at US\$ 2.169.923,52, with 36% of this total attributed to anxiety.

Based on the aforementioned, this research aimed to map the current state of knowledge regarding the mental health and psychological distress of professors in stricto sensu graduate programs within the Brazilian context, seeking to address the following research question: What has been investigated regarding the factors affecting mental health and triggering psychological distress among professors in Brazilian stricto sensu graduate programs?

Hypothesizing a range of stressors arising from the academic environment of graduate programs that may exacerbate teacher psychological distress, this literature review intends to critically assess the organizational work conditions (psychosocial, structural, and relational factors) impacting the mental health of professors teaching in stricto sensu graduate programs.

The article is structured into 3 sections to facilitate data presentation and analysis of findings. The first section covers the methodological procedures employed for literature review in scientific databases. The second section presents the results and discussions derived from the collected data. Finally, the concluding remarks highlight perceptions and insights into academic productions related to professors' mental health and psychological distress in the Brazilian graduate education system.

## **Methodological Procedures**

To structure this study, a "state of knowledge" bibliographic research was conducted. This type of research is characterized as a bibliographic study aimed at mapping and discussing academic production in various knowledge areas within a specific time period (Ferreira, 2002; Romanowski; Ens, 2006).

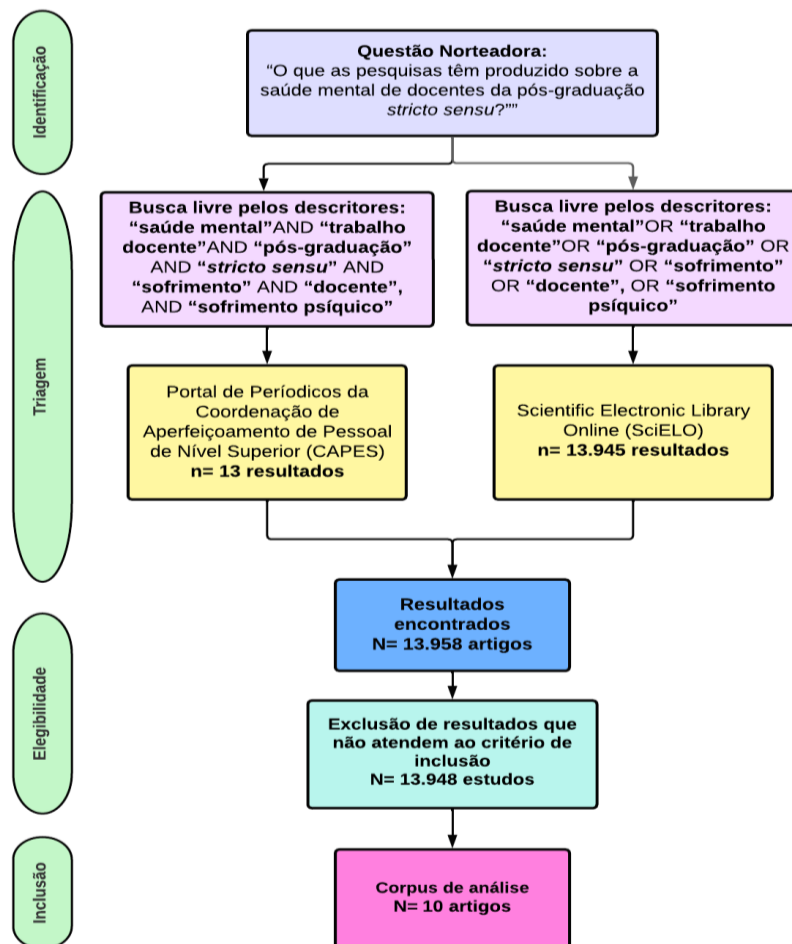
In order to identify academic research on the mental health and psychological distress of professors in Brazilian stricto sensu graduate programs, an advanced search was performed in two scientific dissemination databases: Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES).

The search was limited to articles published between 2019 and 2023. The search terms used included: "mental health"; "teacher"; "teaching work"; "psychological distress"; "distress"; "graduate education"; and "stricto sensu". In both databases, the search was set to "all fields", without specifying occurrence in the title, subject, or abstract. The descriptors were combined using the boolean operator AND for the CAPES Periodicals Portal and OR for SciELO.

Criteria for inclusion were defined as scientific articles published between 2019 and 2023, in Portuguese, Open Access, and containing elements related to the themes of mental health and psychological distress among professors in stricto sensu graduate programs. Exclusion criteria, on the other hand, were determined by duplicate articles across databases, fragmented publication of the same research in multiple scientific journals, and lack of alignment with the research's guiding question.

The initial database search yielded 13,958 articles. However, upon applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 21 publications were identified. Subsequently, after a thorough review of titles, abstracts, and methodologies, 11 articles were excluded for not meeting the research inclusion criteria (addressing mental health and psychological distress among professors in stricto sensu graduate programs), resulting in a corpus of analysis composed of 10 articles. Figure 1 illustrates, through a flowchart, the research stages conducted in the databases.

**Figure 1** – Flowchart based on the search and selection of articles composing the corpus of analysis



Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

The selected articles were categorized by authorship, journal of publication, Brazilian state of the journal, year of publication, and Qualis Rank of the originating journals. It is noteworthy that all 10 articles were read in full and analyzed in a qualitative-quantitative manner. Quantitative data organization was accomplished with the development of Table 1.

Qualitative data obtained from the research were categorized into thematic/semantic axes based on word frequency found in each study. Conducting a content analysis as proposed by Bardin (2011), three categories were identified: 1) Productivism and psychological distress among professors in stricto sensu graduate programs; 2) The relationship between health and work in graduate education; and 3) Intensification and precarization of teaching work in stricto sensu graduate programs.

## Results and Discussions

### Quantitative Analysis of Productions

To facilitate the quantitative analysis of findings, Table 1 was developed, which includes the names of authors for each production, the database where each study was found, the journals in which they were published, the Brazilian state of the journal, the year of publication, and the Qualis Rank (2017-2022)<sup>4</sup>.

In order to synthesize and standardize the literature review, each identified article was assigned a code that will reference it throughout the study (Art1, Art2, Art3, and so forth).

**Table 1** – Distribution of articles by author, database, published journal, Brazilian state of the journal, year of publication, and Qualis Rank

CODE	AUTHORS	DATABASE	JOURNAL	STATUS	YEAR	QUALIS
Art1	ROSA; CECÍLIO	CAPES Portal	Periodical <i>Revista Educação</i>	PR	2023	A2
Art2	NUNES <i>et al.</i>	SciELO	<i>Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior</i>	SP	2022	A1
Art3	SOUZA <i>et al.</i>	SciELO	<i>Ciência &amp; Saúde Coletiva</i>	SP	2021	A1

<sup>4</sup> Refers to the latest evaluation of journals carried out by CAPES, relating to the four-year period 2017-2022.

<b>Art4</b>	VASCONCELO; LIMA	SciELO		<i>Katálysis</i>	SC	2021	A1
<b>Art5</b>	MAGNIN <i>et al.</i>	SciELO		<i>REAd - Revista Eletrônica de Administração</i>	RS	2020	A3
<b>Art6</b>	VIEIRA <i>et al.</i>	SciELO		<i>Revista Educação e Pesquisa</i>	SP	2020	A1
<b>Art7</b>	ALMEIDA <i>et al.</i>	SciELO		<i>Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem</i>	SP	2020	A2
<b>Art8</b>	BARRETO <i>et al.</i>	CAPES Portal	Periodical	<i>Revista da Anpoll</i>	SC	2019	A1
<b>Art9</b>	VIVIAN <i>et al.</i>	CAPES Portal	Periodical	<i>Caderno de Psicologia Social e do Trabalho</i>	SP	2019	A3
<b>Art10</b>	FREITAS; NAVARRO	CAPES Portal	Periodical	<i>Revista Eletrônica de Educação</i>	SP	2019	A2

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Analyzing Table 1, it is observed that out of the 10 selected articles, 5 were found in journals in the field of Education, 1 was published in a journal of Language and Linguistics, 3 were found in journals related to Health (Psychology, Public Health, and Nursing), and only 1 was found in a journal in the field of Administration.

Regarding the Brazilian states where the journals of the analysis corpus of this review are located, it was noted that only 1 is from Paraná (PR), 2 are from Santa Catarina (SC), 1 is from Rio Grande do Sul (RS), and 6 are from São Paulo (SP).

Still in accordance with Table 1, among the 10 analyzed articles, 3 were published in the year 2019, 3 in 2020, 2 in 2021, 1 in 2022, and 1 in 2023. It is noticeable that out of the 10 studies in focus, 6 (60%) of them were published between the years 2019-2020, a period when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, altering our social organization and, consequently, our scientific and research practices in Brazil and worldwide.

Finally, regarding the Qualis Rank of the articles analyzed in this research, it is noted that all of them were published in journals classified as Qualis A by CAPES, with 5 in A1, 3 in A2, and 2 in A3.



## Qualitative Analysis of Productions

To facilitate the analysis of qualitative data and to synthesize important information, Table 2 was organized, listing the title, objective, sample, and instruments used in each of the studies.

**Table 2 -** Distribution of articles by title, objective, sample, and instruments used for data collection

CODE	TITLE	GOAL	SAMPLE/INSTRUMENTS
Art.1	Teaching Work Conditions in Stricto Sensu Graduate Education in the Triângulo Mineiro Region: Factors under Analysis	Understanding how capitalism, in its phase of flexible accumulation, has influenced the work conditions of faculty members and the lives of professors in Stricto Sensu Graduate Education in Education in the Triângulo Mineiro region (PGERTM).	Faculty members of Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs in Education (PPGE) from 4 distinct universities: Federal University of Uberlândia (UFU) Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro (UFTM) University of Uberaba (UNIUBE) Federal Institute of Triângulo Mineiro (IFTM). 44 faculty members responded to the remotely administered questionnaire, and 10 participated in a semi-structured interview.
Art.2	Precariousness and Social Function: Analysis of Meanings of Teaching Work in Postgraduate Programs	Analyzing the meanings and significance of work for faculty members associated with Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs at a Brazilian university.	Faculty members affiliated with Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs (PPGs) at a Brazilian university.  33 permanent faculty members of PPGs responded to an online questionnaire sent via email.
Art.3	Teaching Work, Gender Inequalities, and Health in Public Universities	Problematizing aspects of higher education teaching work regarding gender, evaluation policies, and health.	The instruments used for data collection included "worker health workshops" and "health and work notebooks." According to the authors (p. 5928), "[...] worker health workshops constitute spaces where workers and researchers discuss work-related health topics [...]." The health and work notebooks are an investigative tool inspired by the Italian union experience.  The study conducted 4 workshops and administered 8 notebooks in the field between 2015-2016. 10 faculty members participated in the workshops, while 8 filled out the notebooks, totaling 18 subjects in the sample.
Art.4	Work and Health-Related Illnesses among Teaching Staff in Public Universities	Analyzing the relationship between work and health-related illnesses among faculty members of public universities in Rio Grande do Norte (RN).	Field research was conducted - between April and June of 2019 - through the application of questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with social workers and permanent faculty members of stricto sensu graduate programs in the area of Social Services at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) and the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN).

			The study sample consisted of 16 female professors (seven from UFRN and nine from UERN).
<b>Art.5</b>	Productivism in Graduate Studies in Administration: Brazilian Researchers' Positions, Production Strategies, and Challenges Faced	Analyzing the positions of Brazilian researchers who have published the most in the field of Administration regarding the scientific evaluation policies adopted by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), the production strategies employed, and the main challenges faced.	<p>The sample consisted of 13 researchers affiliated with Graduate Programs of public universities that published the most in the field of Administration from 2015 to 2017, affiliated with USP (3), UNB (5), UFRJ (2), UFPR (2), and UFRGS (1), with 6 women and 7 men.</p> <p>The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview conducted in person and remotely between March and May 2018.</p>
<b>Art.6</b>	Productivism in Postgraduate Studies from the Perspective of Activity Ergonomics	Analyzing the teaching work activity in higher education, identifying the constraints faced by professionals in this category, especially due to the intellectual production evaluation system linked to graduate programs.	<p>A case study was conducted at a federal public university, in the Department of Production Engineering, considering the responses of all 21 faculty members, with 15 dedicated to the Graduate Program.</p> <p>Data collection involved:</p> <p>A questionnaire was administered to the 21 faculty members using Google Forms (with 17 responses received).</p> <p>A work diary to track the teachers' daily work routines for one week (with 3 diaries returned).</p> <p>Participant observation.</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews.</p>
<b>Art.7</b>	Workaholism among Stricto Sensu Graduate Nursing Faculty in Brazil	Identifying the prevalence and associated factors of workaholism among faculty members of Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs in Nursing.	<p>A cross-sectional study was conducted with 333 nursing faculty members from master's and doctoral programs at 47 Brazilian public universities. Participants completed a characterization questionnaire and the Dutch Work Addiction Scale, which were analyzed descriptively and through multiple logistic regression.</p> <p>The research was conducted between July and December 2018.</p>
<b>Art.8</b>	Working Conditions and Health of Stricto Sensu Graduate Faculty in Languages and Linguistics	Investigating the working conditions and health of faculty members in Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs in Languages and Linguistics in Brazil.	<p>This is a cross-sectional study involving 654 faculty members affiliated with courses from 155 Graduate Programs in Languages and Linguistics in Brazil, recognized or recommended by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).</p> <p>Data were collected using an electronic platform called Mubble, which hosted a semi-structured questionnaire.</p> <p>Data collection took place between February and August 2019.</p>
<b>Art.9</b>	Defense Strategies Against Work Suffering among	Identifying defense strategies against work-related suffering developed	Participaram da pesquisa 47 docentes de uma universidade no sul do Brasil que participaram no estudo,

	Stricto Sensu Graduate Faculty	by faculty members in Stricto Sensu Graduate Programs.	responding to a questionnaire based on the Work and Illness Risk Inventory. Additionally, two representatives from each of the university's seven stricto sensu Graduate Programs were interviewed.  Data collection occurred between October 2018 and March 2019..
<b>Art.10</b>	Intensification of Teaching Work and Health: Study with Faculty from the Federal University of Goiás Linked to Graduate Programs	Discussing the relationship between the intensification of teaching work and the health of professors.	A semi-structured interview was used as the data collection instrument. 11 professors affiliated with the two highest-rated Graduate Programs at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG), according to CAPES, were interviewed: PPGEO and PPGecoEvol (both with a rating of six in the mentioned evaluation).  Data collection took place between 2010 and 2012.

Source: Authors' elaboration (2023).

Analyzing Table 2, it is evident that all articles aim, to some extent, to investigate and discuss the psychological distress of faculty members in Brazilian stricto sensu graduate programs, linking the phenomenon to the commodification of education, precariousness, and intensification of work, productivity demands, and the meanings attributed to the profession during a period of neglect and dismantling of higher education.

For the qualitative analysis, as previously mentioned, the articles were subdivided into three analytical categories. In the category "Productivity and psychological distress of faculty members in stricto sensu graduate programs," articles Art.5 and Art.6 were included. Articles Art.3, Art.4, and Art.8, on the other hand, belonged to the category "The relationship between health and work in graduate education." Finally, the category "Intensification and precariousness of faculty work in stricto sensu graduate programs" is considered for analysis articles Art.1, Art.2, Art.7, Art.9, and Art.10. The following sections will discuss the listed categories.

### **Productivity and psychological distress of faculty members in stricto sensu graduate programs**

In the article by Magnin *et al.* (2020), the authors pointed out that among researchers affiliated with Graduate Programs in Administration at Brazilian public universities who published the most in the area between 2015 and 2017, 5 are from the University of São Paulo (USP), another 5 teach at the University of Brasília (UNB), 2 are affiliated with the Federal

University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), 2 with the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), and one is a professor/researcher at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).

The study revealed a profound subjective precariousness among professors who, despite having the highest publication rates in the country in their field, do not consider themselves productive and often question the real importance of publication for Brazilian science. However, these same faculty members express a desire and goal to publish even more in the next 5 years (Magnin *et al.*, 2023).

Moreover, Mendes *et al.* (2007) indicate that faculty work is intrinsically linked to a sense of discomfort, leading professors to compensate for their displeasure through frenzied intellectual creation, thereby driving the logic of productivity in the academic environment. Additionally, self-isolation, denial, and cynicism are employed by professors to overcome situations of suffering and continue working under a guise of "normalcy" (Avila, 2021; Menezes, 2014).

According to Magnin *et al.* (2020), the intensification of faculty work is naturalized within the environment of graduate education. The logic of productivity, which assigns a market value to science and education, prepares the work of professors who become ill in order to meet the production expectations tangentially linked to the scientific evaluation policies of CAPES. Furthermore, the strategy of internationalization of stricto sensu graduate programs ends up contributing to the perpetuation of Brazilian researchers' subjection and subordination, reproducing in the country's science a certain "idolatry" of foreign research.

Additionally, Magnin *et al.* (2020) reveal that among the major challenges faced in graduate education in administration are: internal friction and political problems within programs; disinterest and demotivation of students who enter research merely guided by the pursuit of a diploma; administrative and bureaucratic tasks referred to by faculty as "time-consuming drains" (Magnin *et al.*, 2023, p. 289). They also mention funding – or the lack thereof – and its execution; stagnant salaries; precarious working conditions; lack of professional recognition; management of Brazilian academic journals, as well as the arduous and slow publication process leading to obsolescence and outdated publications; and finally, the difficulty in overcoming the publish or perish logic.

Parallel to Magnin *et al.*'s findings (2020), Sampaio (2016) also revealed in her doctoral research that the new profile of graduate students constitutes one of the major difficulties of programs, as there is no longer a genuine interest in research but only in obtaining a degree for career progression and salary increase. According to the author, students are "professional

students" who do not dedicate themselves exclusively to research, have significant difficulties in reading, writing, and understanding texts, and sometimes fail to access quality scientific knowledge even when familiar with new technologies.

Discussing the profile of students constituting Brazilian stricto sensu graduate programs brings to light another important issue regarding scientific practice in the 21st century: academic production aimed at financial advancement. As previously mentioned, education as a commodity permeates institutional walls, making them reproducers of the social logic that pervades them. If today the pursuit of entry into a graduate program is often driven solely by diploma attainment for career advancement and meeting market-driven requirements, it would be odd if productivity were not a central concern in this context.

Studying more to produce more, to be more competitive, and consequently, to earn more—this is the logic. Faculty members, who already operate in a competitive professional environment, also bear the responsibility of guiding individuals who pursue education merely for the credential, without the dedication it demands.

The article by Vieira *et al.* (2020) sheds light on significant issues concerning productivity and the extended work hours of graduate-level teachers/researchers. According to the authors, 30% of the surveyed faculty members work between 60 and 73 hours per week, while the remaining 70% stated they work a minimum of 46 hours per week. This includes not only extending their workdays into nights and weekends but also using these times for grading exams, writing scientific papers, reading dissertations and theses, responding to emails, and preparing activities for the next day.

Moreover, it is revealed that over 85% of faculty members experience physical strain and discomforts, such as headaches and neck pain, as well as discomfort and tingling in the shoulders, arms, and wrists (Vieira *et al.*, 2020). For 65% of respondents, aggressive pressure for results, workplace conflicts, and individualism are the major challenges in the academic work environment, along with inadequate peer communication cited by 53% of them.

Vieira *et al.* (2020) emphasize that self-management of time triggers anguish and psychological distress among graduate-level teachers. Sleep disturbances are also a significant issue, with 60% of faculty members reporting sleep problems, and 33.33% of them frequently using anxiolytics. Approximately 29% of teachers/researchers self-reported symptoms such as loneliness, irritability, loss of self-confidence, and difficulty making friends, while over 20% felt isolated and sad and experienced appetite changes and habits of consuming alcoholic beverages to "relax."

Regarding the evaluation measures employed by CAPES to assess the productivity of professionals and stricto sensu graduate programs in the country, 41.2% of the surveyed individuals revealed that the CAPES system is perceived as unjust, "simplistic, oppressive, and short-sighted" (Vieira *et al.*, 2020, p. 11, our translation), as it values quantity over the quality of scientific production, akin to industrial production line work, thereby increasing pressure, constraint, and competitiveness in the work environment, disrupting collective work dynamics in favor of a "publish or perish" policy (Vieira *et al.*, 2020, p. 1, our translation).

Ratifying the points raised in this category of analysis, Antunes (2019) and Sampaio (2016) expressed that academic productivity, evaluation methods stemming from the mode of organization of higher education institutions, the disruptive relationship among peers—characterized by competitiveness, individualism, comparison, abuse of power by those in leadership/coordination roles, ego clashes, and lack of a sense of belonging to a collective—are the main causes of suffering experienced by professors in Brazilian universities.

The direct linkage between individual productivity assessment and faculty performance evaluation generates significant tension, easily perceived as a technical analysis of professional competence. This aspect appears intertwined with personal identity, resulting in individual and collective effects that interfere with relationships established within the group, with students, and even with the institution (Antunes, 2019).

Under this framework, it is evident that productivity influences the mental health of faculty members, while academic production ceases to fulfill its central purpose of generating knowledge and contributing to the advancement of Brazilian science, instead serving merely as a criterion for classification and ranking among individuals and universities.

### **The Relationship Between Health and Work in Graduate Education**

The article by Souza *et al.* (2021), revealed that today there is a normalization of teaching work "at home." Demands from the productive sphere are extending beyond the workday and impacting the private lives of faculty members, resulting in personal and family conflicts and triggering intense psychological suffering, as previously mentioned in Vieira *et al.* (2020) study.

According to Souza *et al.* (2021), females are most affected by the precarization of relationships and the sexual division of domestic labor, which still burdens and sensitizes females more. Thus, teaching work associated with motherhood creates a significant burden

and sense of guilt among female faculty members who must cope with demands from work, family life, and the patriarchal societal idea that females need to be—and primarily be—good mothers. Moreover, participants revealed that various assessment processes in teaching work prescribe many discriminatory norms that provoke gender inequalities, demonstrating that, unfortunately, the "hierarchy of masculine and feminine still remains alive" (Souza *et al.*, 2021, p. 5930, our translation).

According to some subjects in the analyzed sample, the evaluation criteria for teaching work prescribed by CAPES and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) are stricter for female faculty members than for male counterparts, constituting unequal and discriminatory policies and norms (Souza *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, female faculty members have expressed feelings of distress, sadness, overwhelm, depression, dissatisfaction, and frustration in the face of the invisibility of women in sciences and academia, a reality conceived and structured by a hegemonic patriarchal social standard that discriminates against and oppresses women, to the detriment of their potential and workforce strength.

As pointed out by Santos (2019), female individuals are more affected by medical leaves due to Mental and Behavioral Disorders (MBD) within the academic environment compared to males. In his study, the author observed that between 2013 and 2018, an average of 3.94% of female staff at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF) were absent each year due to psychiatric adversities, whereas among males, this average did not exceed 1.85%, clearly indicating that females are more affected by mental health-related absences.

This intersects with findings from the study conducted by Vasconcelos and Lima (2021), who researched two *stricto sensu* graduate programs at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) and the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN). The study sample comprised 16 female faculty members and revealed that 62.50% of these professionals rated the quality of their sleep as regular and/or poor. Moreover, 68.7% of them reported various health problems, including hypertension, vertigo, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, arthritis, diabetes, migraines, obesity, circulatory problems, kidney disease, and spinal issues.

The faculty members also indicated that involvement in management roles and integration into graduate programs lead to greater emotional and physical burdens, resulting in anguish, exhaustion, and intense psychological suffering. Additionally, they revealed that they often do not take leave from their academic duties when ill, as they fear an increased workload upon return and prefer to continue working even with medical certificates (Vasconcelos; Lima, 2021).

Finally, the article by Barreto *et al.* (2019) revealed that out of 654 faculty members from stricto sensu graduate programs in literature and linguistics in Brazil who participated in the study, 31.9% admitted to feeling exhausted; 42% of them had never considered leaving teaching in graduate school; 56.6% are dissatisfied with the quality of their sleep, while 46.9% have had to take some form of medication due to work-related distress.

According to Barreto *et al.* (2019), the current working and health conditions of Brazilian graduate faculty oscillate between feelings of pleasure and intense work-related suffering. In order to transform this reality, the authors argue that it would be possible to implement both individual and organizational strategies, such as providing psychological support, engaging in physical activities, flexible scheduling, improved working conditions, self-monitoring of social skills, and establishing agreements for coexistence between faculty and students.

It has been observed thus far that academic productivity intensifies psychological distress among faculty, while the working conditions in stricto sensu graduate education also impact the physical and mental health of these professionals.

### **Intensification and Precariousness of Teaching Work in Stricto Sensu Graduate Education**

The results presented in the article published by Rosa and Cecílio (2023) revealed that 40.9% of the responding faculty members reported that the excessive pace of work frequently affects their teaching duties. Moreover, 61.4% mentioned that their tasks are always completed under deadline pressure, while 70.4% evaluated that the demand for results and/or strict norms for task execution is what actually harms the conditions of their work.

Regarding the extension of the workday, 61.4% of the subjects stated that their professional occupation is extended due to multiple tasks beyond teaching, such as participating in scientific outreach events, writing academic papers, issuing ad hoc opinions, supervising dissertations and theses, organizing and participating in research projects, serving on editorial teams of journals, academic management, conducting research, and participating in ethics committees, among others (Rosa; Cecílio, 2023). Here, we can revisit the study by Vieira *et al.* (2020), where 70% of their faculty sample mentioned working a minimum of 46 hours per week, with 30% of them working well over 60 hours weekly, including holidays, weekends, or late nights.



Teachers also reported that teaching in graduate education demands professionals to be versatile, multifunctional, flexible, and engaged, fostering inconsistencies between available time versus functional responsibilities, engendering intense feelings of self-blame and failure for not managing their own work demands (Rosa; Cecílio, 2023).

The research findings demonstrated that capitalism, in its phase of flexible accumulation, has turned the university into a fertile ground for the commodification of higher education. Alongside the imposition of goals and quantitative parameters, this intensifies teaching work, reduces the quality of academic production, and considers productivity a necessary tool in scientific endeavors. As Rosa and Cecílio (2023, p. 28, our translation) noted, "[...] instead of working to live, professors live to work."

Rosa and Cecílio (2023) unveiled that 35.6% of the faculty sample in the study sees their work as an important apparatus of social function. They revealed that choosing to be a teacher/researcher, besides being a significant sociopolitical commitment, expresses the pursuit of solutions to problems afflicting humanity, contributing to the technical, political, social, human, and ethical formation of the country, as Nunes *et al.* (2022) also mentioned.

The authors emphasized that the work activities of graduate faculty are embedded in a neoliberal social context, driven and determined by capital policies (Rosa; Cecílio, 2023), which transform the educational process into mere merchandise, thereby intensifying teaching demands, burdening professionals, and bureaucratizing their activities. Moreover, teachers are pressured to engage in unrestrained scientific production, alongside the emerging need to be "versatile" and "multitasking," which realistically, and with less courteous wording, means their engagement in a multitude of administrative tasks and roles—a reflection of institutional precariousness and professional degradation—as well as the lack of prestige, recognition, and valorization of teaching activities.

Consequently, Almeida *et al.* (2020) revealed in their study that among their sample of faculty (333 stricto sensu graduate teachers in nursing), 29.7% worked in 2 or more graduate programs; 39.9% reported feeling anxious during their work activities, and 69.7% acknowledged feeling pressured to publish. Despite this, 71.2% expressed satisfaction with their work in graduate education. This dichotomy among teachers has been previously noted in the findings of Barreto *et al.* (2019), revealing that teachers, while feeling exhausted and oppressed, did not consider giving up their academic profession.

Also, it was found that 20.1% of the teachers in the sample classified themselves as compulsive workers, 19.5% as excessive workers, and 10.5% were considered workaholics<sup>5</sup>. The excessive workload and accumulation of roles and responsibilities lead teachers to become accustomed to an increasingly intense and accelerated work pace. They often feel guilty for not being able to disconnect from their work duties, feeling useful only when they produce in a strenuous manner, neglecting their personal and social lives, and refusing to participate in leisure activities and/or sleep (Almeida *et al.*, 2020).

Supporting the previously presented data, Vivian *et al.* (2019) revealed in their study that 29.5% of teachers were taking medications to cope with adverse work conditions, as previously noted in the studies by Vieira *et al.* (2020) and Barreto *et al.* (2019).

According to Vivian *et al.* (2019), graduate faculty members seek defense strategies to protect themselves from the daily psychological distress experienced in their work activities. The main strategies include therapy/analysis, distancing themselves from work to experience moments of solitude and retreat, rediscovering religiosity and spirituality, clinging to family and friends, and even adopting Complementary and Integrative Practices (CIPs) such as Reiki.

However, not all defense strategies are healthy and conducive to individual health, as many teachers end up resorting to the use of psychotropic medications, alcohol, and even drugs, entering an addictive spiral with the consumption of "[...] anxiolytics during the day, sleeping pills at night, and psychostimulants in the morning" (Vivian *et al.*, 2019, our translation). Nevertheless, the authors argue that adopting leisure activities, strengthening bonds with colleagues, engaging in physical exercise, and sharing happy moments with family members is necessary for teachers to confront the inherent adversities of scientific work and teaching in the 21st century.

Finally, the last article to be analyzed in this literature review, authored by Freitas and Navarro (2019), revealed that the 11 graduate professors analyzed considered that the assignment of classroom hours, especially in undergraduate courses, constituted a hindrance to their research activities within the university. They also criticized administrative and management positions, which intensify precarious academic work, pointing out that the lack of staff within federal higher education institutions makes the work chaotic and superhuman. It is

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<sup>5</sup> Characterized as work addiction, it is compulsive and excessive work that is always performed in an exaggerated and irrational way because, at the same time as it recognizes its excessive work, it is not able to take control of the intense overload (Barretos *et al.*, 2019).

worth recalling that Magnin *et al.* (2020) also pointed out that university administrative tasks and their permanent bureaucracy wear down graduate professors.

Freitas and Navarro (2019) emphasize that teaching work has invaded private life, generating over-intensification, while capitalism accelerates life and surplus value production. Teachers strive to survive in a "commodified," conflict-ridden, contradictory, entrepreneurial, competitive, individualistic postgraduate environment, full of vanity, ego, ostentation, and power games that rob sleep, cause suffering, and illness, without the slightest restraint or remorse.

### **Final considerations**

The present study, as conceived, sought to map the current state of knowledge related to the mental health and psychological distress of professors in *stricto sensu* graduate programs in the Brazilian context, and thus, through a literature review, analyzed scientific articles published between 2019 and 2023.

In summary, the studies found revealed a devaluation of the university teaching profession, which works precariously and without due recognition, often facing alienation in labor relations — sustained by the tripod of flexibility, intensification, and precariousness, low salaries, and an increasing workload burden.

Nevertheless, challenges persist, including intensified work, the bureaucratization of the profession, "slave-like" policies from science funding agencies, productivity demands, competitiveness, individualism, the multiplicity of roles and demands, and difficulties with the current student profile in Brazilian universities and graduate programs.

Through the conduct of this study, it was found that the theme of mental health and psychological distress in the context of *stricto sensu* graduate programs is often neglected and sparsely addressed, highlighting the fragility and under-exploration of this field of study. This is particularly notable considering the scarcity of available academic research to drive scientific discourse on the mental health of graduate professors during the period covered in the review (2019 to 2023). This gap underscores the lack of researchers dedicated to investigating this topic and contributing to the systematization of studies aimed at discussing the phenomenon of psychological distress in the higher education environment.

The limitations of this study include the possibility of not having sought studies published in other languages, as the literature review was limited to works in Portuguese. For

future research, it is suggested that the search period be extended and other databases explored to ensure broader coverage.

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