

Teaching in times of pandemic: a study on the experiences of brazilian teachers during the isolation period

A docência nos tempos de pandemia: um estudo sobre as vivências de professores brasileiros durante o período de isolamento

Enseñar em tiempos de pandemia: um estudio sobre las experiencias de los profesores brasileños durante el período de aislamiento

RESUMO

Objetivo: Compreender as vivências dos professores brasileiros durante o período de quarentena e isolamento social decorrente da pandemia da Covid-19. Método: Pesquisa de natureza qualitativa. A coleta de dados foi realizada virtualmente, com abrangência nacional, através de link de formulário eletrônico no mês de maio de 2020. As respostas foram analisadas através da técnica de análise de conteúdo temática proposta por Minayo. Resultados: Participaram da pesquisa 190 professores, sendo a maioria casado, com pós-graduação completa e oriundo da região nordeste. Os participantes relataram medo, insegurança, tristeza e angústia frente às incertezas do contexto da pandemia. A organização de horários, tempo para lazer, cuidar da saúde física e psíquica, apoio da família e de amigos e a presença da espiritualidade foram elementos importantes para lidar com as adversidades presentes neste contexto. Conclusão: O uso de diferentes estratégias de adaptação auxiliou no bem-estar e qualidade de vida dos professores durante a pandemia.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Pandemia por Covid-19; Professor; Adaptação psicológica.

ABSTRACT

Aim: Understand the experiences of Brazilian teachers during the quarantine period and social isolation resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic. Method: Research of a qualitative nature. Data collection was performed in a virtual manner, with national coverage, through an electronic form link in May 2020. The answers were analyzed using the method of thematic analysis proposed by Minayo. Results: One hundred and ninety teachers participated in the research, most of them married, with complete graduate studies and from the northeast region. Participants reported fear, insecurity, sadness and anguish in the face of uncertainties in the pandemic context. The organization of schedules, time for leisure, taking care of physical and mental health, support from family and friends and the presence of spirituality were important elements in dealing with the adversities present in this context. Conclusion: The use of different adaptation strategies helped teachers' well-being and quality of life during the pandemic.

DESCRIPTORS: Covid-19 pandemic; Professor; Psychological Adaptation.

RESUMEN

Comprender las experiencias de los docentes brasileños durante el período de cuarentena y aislamiento social resultante de la pandemia de Covid 19. Método: Investigación de carácter cualitativo. La recolección de datos se realizó de manera virtual, con cobertura nacional, a través de un enlace de formulario electrónico en mayo de 2020. Las respuestas fueron analizadas utilizando el método de análisis temático propuesto por Minayo. Resultados: Ciento noventa maestros participaron en la investigación, la mayoría de ellos casados, con estudios completos de posgrados y de la región noreste. Los participantes reportaron miedo, inseguridad, tristeza y angustia ante las incertidumbres en el contexto de la pandemia. La organización de horarios, el tiempo para el ocio, el cuidado de la salud física y mental, el apoyo de familiares y amigos y la presencia de la espiritualidad fueron elementos importantes para hacer frente a las adversidades presentes en este contexto. Conclusión: La utilización de diferentes estrategias de adaptación contribuyó al bienestar y la calidad de vida de los maestros durante el período de la pandemia.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Pandemia de Covid-19; Maestro; Adaptación Psicológica.

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INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the new coronavirus caused significant impacts and mobilized several sectors such as health, education, politics and economy. ¹The Covid-19 pandemic forced the population to take measures of protection and isolation, in order to contain and control the spread of the virus. ²Teaching centers around the world were also surprised by the new scenario that presented itself. In this way, they had to suspend face-to-face activities in the first half of 2020 to reach new teaching modalities, facing new difficulties and reinventing the way knowledge is shared. ^{3,4}

A study of mixed nature carried out in Poland, whose objective was to investigate the characteristics of the so-called “emergency online teaching” from the perspective of teachers, pointed out the challenges faced by teachers during the implementation and experience of a new teaching modality, among them the purchase and modernization of electronic equipment as well as the technical problems encountered in its daily use. ³

Added to the problems related to the use of technology and the reorganization of the curriculum for the virtual modality, the professors had to deal with some adver-

The Covid-19 pandemic forced the population to take measures of protection and isolation, [...]. ² Teaching centers around the world were also surprised by the new scenario that presented itself.

sities in the professor-student relationship. The lack of control over students' behavior during classes, the inherent distance from virtual media, as well as frequent plagiarism, consultations and improper information sharing during activities, presented themselves as new obstacles, often making it impossible to establish an accurate assessment of student development. ^{3,4,5} In addition, the transition from teaching to the home has caused parents to acquire direct access to classes, generating unrealistic expectations directed at educators and classes, lack of support for students within the residential environment, excessive control of devices and platforms. ^{3,6}

Through a systematic review, Brazilian researchers sought to identify the prevalence of anxiety, depression and stress among teachers during the pandemic pointed to a significant increase in stress and anxiety levels, especially in female professionals. Teachers who worked in schools showed a higher prevalence of anxiety, depression and stress when compared to university professors. This phenomenon may be related to the fact that school teachers deal with children and adolescents, a group that finds it more difficult to engage and adapt effectively. ⁷

A longitudinal study carried out in Chile that aimed to evaluate the quality

of life of Chilean teachers and how it was affected during the pandemic period pointed to a significant decrease in the quality of life of professionals when compared to the pre-health crisis period.⁸ The increase in working hours added to adverse working conditions promoted the growth of psychosomatic diseases caused by exhaustion at work, such as Burnout Syndrome (a phenomenon characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased personal fulfillment resulting from high levels of professional stress).^{2,8,9}

Having experienced such abrupt changes in their work routine due to the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as in their personal lives, education professionals face new challenges daily, some of which are repeated regardless of the city, country or continent and other particulars of each individual. Sanitary crises like the one in question expose individuals to high levels of discomfort, both physical and psychological, as well as contributing to an increase in mental exhaustion and anxiety that end up harming not only social spheres, but also occupational activities.¹⁰ In view of the above, the question is: how were the experiences of Brazilian teachers during the period of quarantine and social isolation resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic?

METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study¹¹ with qualitative analysis. The survey took place virtually, with national coverage, through a link to an electronic collection form via Google Forms during the period from May 15 to 22, 2020.

The study population consisted of teachers aged 18 and over who experienced the period of quarantine and social isolation resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers in hospital conditions that prevented the use of technology resources to respond to the form were excluded from the collection.

The initial text of the form had basic information about the research and an access link to the Free and Informed Consent Term - TCLE with information about the

purpose, risks and benefits of the research and also inform you that, by continuing to answer the form, the participant will be giving their free and informed consent. Acceptance was considered as the participant continued to respond to the form. This adopted measure became relevant because it considers the determination of social isolation and reduction of personal contact and also because any personal contact could cause some risk or damage to both the participant and the researcher.

Data were collected via an online form developed by the research group specifically for this study. The data collection form contained general questions about the participants, such as gender, age, education, profession, marital status, state where you reside, among others, as well as two semi-open questions that question, respectively: the main strategies that were used to deal with the adversities of the pandemic and

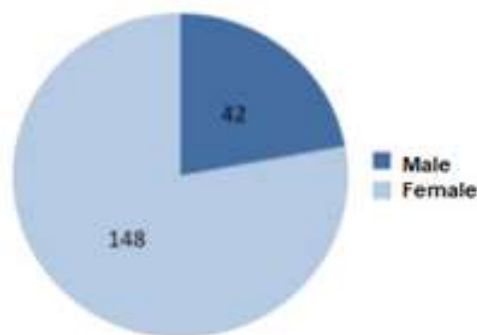
the feelings that were more present during that period. The average response time was 15 minutes. Post-response data were forwarded directly to an electronic database exclusively accessible to the research team.

The sociodemographic data were quantified and the semi-open responses were analyzed using the thematic analysis method proposed by Minayo, which is divided into the following phases: pre-analysis, material exploration, treatment of results and interpretation.¹²

In this study, the ethical aspects established by Resolution 510/16 of the National Health Council were preserved. Data collection was only started after approval by the National Research Ethics Commission through CAAE number 30546320.0.0000.5201.

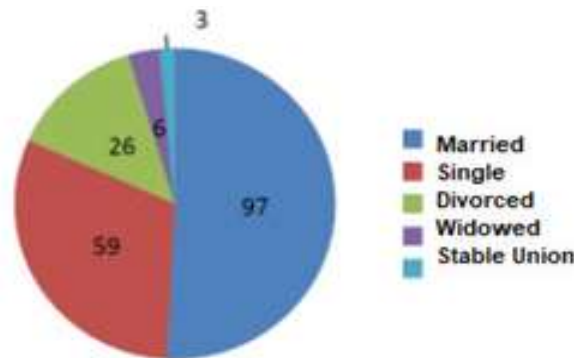
RESULTS

Distribution of participants by gender



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Distribution of participants by marital status



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A total of 190 teachers participated in the research, aged between 20 and 80 years. Of the entire sample, 9 professionals reported that they had already experienced a condition of quarantine or social isolation before Covid-19. Participants organized themselves into the following data:

DISCUSSION

The two categories of analysis that emerged from the participants' reports will be presented below, namely: 1) Strategies used to deal with the changes arising from the pandemic and 2) Feelings that are most present today.

Strategies used to deal with the changes arising from the pandemic

The reorganization of schedules so as not to waste time, wear clothes as if you were going to work, read books, listen to music, watch movies, having leisure and taking care of physical health were important elements to deal with the new times that the pandemic brought, according to the following statements:

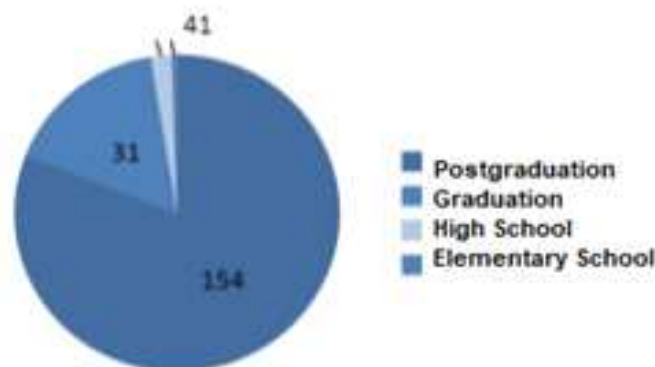
"(...) I reorganized my schedules so that the days were productive, not to 'waste time' on frivolous things, but to make the most of the hours, both to produce and to entertain myself within the necessary time"
(Participant 12, 22 years old)

"Having a daily shift to dedicate to work, wearing clothes as if you were going to work. Have schedules for reading books and updates on the pandemic." (Participant 118, 56 years old)

"Organization of the daily routine, contemplating times for work (remote), leisure (readings, movies, music, etc.)"
(Participant 133, 63 years old)

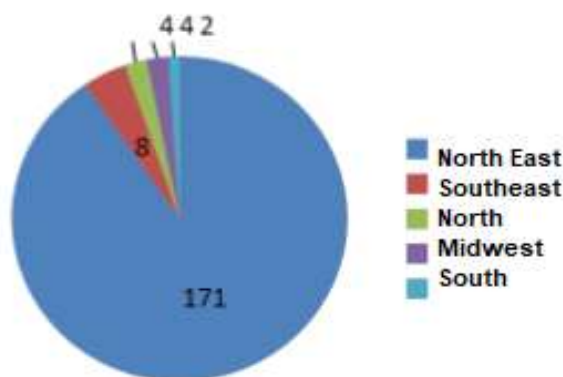
Active adaptation strategies with the presence of planning and preparation of

Distribution of participants by education



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Distribution of participants by region of origin



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individuals seem to demonstrate greater well-being and emotional stability when compared to those who do not dynamically seek solutions.¹³ In other words, by establishing a routine it is possible to reduce anxiety about isolation, as a sense of predictability and comfort is established within domestic and professional activities and tasks.^{13,14}

The practice of meditation, yoga, balanced diet, functional nutrition, and physical activity were also punctuated as important strategies during the pandemic:

"Meditation, yoga, physical activities, good reading, good movies, pro-efficient routines, balanced diet, functional nutrition (...)"

(Participant 150, 63 years old)

"(...) Carrying out physical and professional activities at home, resorting to movies, more dialogue practice" (Participant 79, 41 years old)

According to Ai et. al¹⁵, The performance of physical activity and leisure activities is an essential factor for the maintenance of both physiological and psychological well-being of the individual, especially as it constitutes an alternative for an escape from common day-to-day stressors.¹⁵ The authors also emphasize that physical exercises are capable of contributing to the psychological health of individuals in order to

help build greater resistance to stressful situations, increase self-confidence and promote distraction from daily stressors, thus reducing anxiety levels.

A considerable portion of the participants revealed to isolate themselves from the news, social networks and other means of communication, as a way to block contact with an exacerbated volume of information about the pandemic:

“(...) Try not to watch the news all day, because it was emotionally destabilizing me” (Participant 118, 56 years old)

“(...) I tried to read, listen to music and watch things not related to the pandemic on television” (Participant 66, 37 years old)

“(...) Escaping the news about the pandemic...” (Participant 82, 38 years old)

While some individuals use techniques for actively coping with adversity (such as planning, seeking emotional support, acceptance, etc.), others use strategies that primarily consist of moving away from the negative stimuli arising from the pandemic and social isolation.^{13,16} This profile is characterized by a more difficult adaptation to the environment, as well as greater difficulties in dealing with the limitations imposed by Covid-19.¹⁶

Spirituality as a protection and as a way of overcoming the difficulties inherent in the period of the pandemic was frequently mentioned among the research participants:

“I tried to have more faith in God, participate in services and church meetings online” (Participant 67, 56 years old)

“A lot of prayer! Attending the masses and the word of God and Our Lady! It was what gave me comfort. Even lying without strength, I could hear the prayers! (...)” (Participant

171, 62 years old)

Bentzen¹⁷ points out that human beings commonly seek divine support to overcome difficult times. Through spirituality, individuals come into contact with mechanisms that offer comfort and explanation for difficult times, causing a decrease in stress and anxiety levels, which provides better adaptability and resilience.^{14,17} The older population was more vulnerable to the negative effects of isolation, as well as to the expression of feelings such as fear, anxiety and loneliness.¹⁸

With a new routine, new limitations and new rules of coexistence, the support of family and friends was also very present in the participants' reports:

“Make a video call to be close to the family” (Participant 160, 58 years old)

“(...) I keep in daily contact with all my friends through messages and calls to maintain relationships and ease the idea of isolation” (Participant 110, 23 years old)

“Talk more with my children, laugh, play.” (Participant 126, 44 years old)

Faced with a health crisis that had distance and isolation as imperative, people had to learn to deal with a situation they were not prepared to deal with: loneliness.¹³ Despite the new conflicts arising from an extensive coexistence, the families configure a support system that helps in the search for positive solutions, in the reduction of the negative effects of isolation and in the maintenance of the feeling of community.^{15,16}

Feelings experienced during the pandemic period

When asked about the feelings most present during the most rigid period of isolation, the participants reported: sadness, discouragement, fear, insecurity, anxiety, tiredness, sadness, anguish and other ma-

nifestations of physical, psychological and emotional discomfort, as illustrated in the reports below:

“Sadness, discouragement, insecurity, a desire to no longer exist (...)” (Participant 27, 39 years old)

“Fatigue due to overwork, sometimes I felt melancholy and impatience” (Participant 38, 41 years old)

“Anguish in relation to the suffering of others, to the losses of loved ones” (Participant 179, 40 years old)

“Very afraid of being alone with two children, afraid of getting sick, of something happening and leaving them. So much so that I reached the extreme of an anxiety or panic attack.” (Participant 167, 40 years old)

Kar et. al¹⁹ points out that feelings of anxiety, depression, stress and fatigue are common consequences of direct experiences with health crises such as Covid-19, Ebola, Influenza A, among others. Among the factors that act as predictors of the increase in these feelings are individuals who did not have a fixed income, who were in the risk group or had close relatives in a vulnerable situation and those who performed some function where the risk of contamination by COVID-19 was present on a daily basis.^{15,19}

Despite the vast majority of individuals reporting negative experiences and feelings with the pandemic period, a portion of the participants expressed feelings of hope, love for life, generosity, responsibility, solidarity, empathy, revealing a more positive approach to the difficulties imposed by the moment:

“Hope, faith, charity, generosity, group feeling, teamwork, brotherly love, spirituality, family, friendship and responsibility” (Participant 150, 63 years old)

“Tranquility, peace with me, a certain sadness for the situation in the country, reception in the family and obstinacy to build better solutions” (Participant 143, 28 years old)

“Love for life, nature, awareness of freedom of choice, hope in the transformation of the world, but first in my life” (Participant 95, 46 years old)

The clippings above reflect coping postures based on more active and positive behaviors regarding the future and the situation in which they are inserted. This type of approach proves to be more effective in the face of adversity, resulting in a greater probability of maintaining the emotio-

nal and psychic well-being of individuals through movements such as an active search for help and comfort in peers, acceptance of reality (a factor that is essential especially in situations where there is no control over events), planning of coping strategies, among others.^{19,20}

Although there are coping strategies that result in better psychological and emotional outcomes (such as active coping strategies) and others that often result in less promising results (such as avoidance and avoidance strategies from negative stimuli), the way human beings behave in the face of difficulties is directly influenced by the situations in which they find themselves, as well as by the tools and limitations they have to deal with such a situation.¹³

CONCLUSION

Within a new and challenging scenario of a pandemic, teachers around the world have had their adaptation skills put to the test every day, both to continue their professional performance and to deal with their own physical, psychic and emotional demands. The results reveal that isolation brought up diverse emotional manifestations, such as sadness, loneliness, hope and solidarity.

It is concluded that the different coping strategies, especially those of active coping, such as the search for maintaining relationships through technology, reorganization of schedules, the practice of physical activities, the search for comfort in spirituality, among others mentioned above, played a key role during isolation, acting as predictors of greater physical, psychological and emotional well-being.

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