

Women Psychologists: Challenges in Balancing The Roles of Caregiver and Professional

Mulheres Psicólogas: Desafios na Conciliação Entre Papéis de Cuidadora e Profissional

Mujeres Psicólogas: Desafíos en la Conciliación Entre los Roles de Cuidadora y Profesional

RESUMO

Este artigo discute a sobrecarga de mulheres psicólogas à luz da teoria das estruturas de poder que delimitam a identidade sexual. Utilizou-se dados estatísticos do último Censo do Conselho Federal de Psicologia em diálogo com estudos sobre a feminização da profissão e o ideal de cuidado associado à prática clínica. A revisão dos dados revela a permanência de um perfil majoritariamente feminino, apesar do aumento da diversidade, e evidencia a precarização do trabalho, baixa remuneração e exposição a riscos ocupacionais. Tais fatores são associados à naturalização do cuidado como atributo feminino, reforçando desigualdades estruturais. O estudo aponta a necessidade de aprofundar a articulação entre gênero, cuidado e trabalho na Psicologia.

DESCRIPTORES: Mulheres; Psicólogas; Trabalho Feminino.

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the overload of female psychologists in the light of power structures that delimit sexual identity. Statistical data from the latest Census of the Federal Council of Psychology was used alongside studies on the career feminization and the care ideal associated with clinical practice. A review of the data reveals that there is still a majority female profile, despite the increase in diversity, and highlights the precarious nature of work, low pay and exposure to occupational risks. These factors are associated with the naturalization of care as a female attribute, reinforcing structural inequalities. The study points to the need to form links between gender, care and working conditions in psychology.

DESCRIPTORS: Women; Psychologists; Women's Work.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza la sobrecarga de las mujeres psicólogas a la luz de la teoría de las estructuras de poder que delimitan la identidad sexual. Se utilizaron datos estadísticos del último censo del Consejo Federal de Psicología en diálogo con estudios sobre la feminización de la profesión y el ideal de cuidado asociado a la práctica clínica. La revisión de los datos revela la permanencia de un perfil mayoritariamente femenino, a pesar del aumento de la diversidad, y pone de manifiesto la precariedad del trabajo, la baja remuneración y la exposición a riesgos laborales. Estos factores están asociados a la naturalización del cuidado como atributo femenino, lo que refuerza las desigualdades estructurales. El estudio señala la necesidad de profundizar en la articulación entre género, cuidado y trabajo en la psicología.

DESCRIPTORES: Mujeres; Psicólogas; Trabajo femenino.

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INTRODUCTION

The anthropologist Margaret Mead⁽¹⁾ considers that the best sign of civilization is care. However, care is the least valued human design in Western society. This dissonance extends to the professions, especially in the field of psychology. A profession mostly occupied by women in Brazil, its axiogenesis has become that of a vocation for love and altruism, leading to the precariousness of the activity and the overload of professionals in the field.

Caught between gender identitarianism about the maternal device and the basic needs of remuneration and fulfillment at work, women psychologists are squeezed both by the occupational risks of the profession and by the excessive hours spent caring for people both inside and outside the workplace. The result is the precariousness of the category at both an individual and collective level.

Thus, the aim of this article is to discuss the overload of female psychologists in the light of the theory of power structures that delimit sexual identity, based on statistical data from the latest Census of the Federal Council of Psychology (CFP) through a review of documents and literature. In addition, the discussion will be complemented with data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)⁽²⁾ and the Continuous National Household Survey (Pnad - IBGE)⁽³⁾. We then turn to Marx⁽⁴⁾ and Badinter⁽⁵⁾ to show how women are alienated from work and subjectivized to care, reproducing the power structure that associates the maternal with the feminine. The final

considerations are a warning: as long as there is no awareness, the tendency is for this reality not to change.

BETWEEN OFFICES AND HOMES: A PROFILE OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

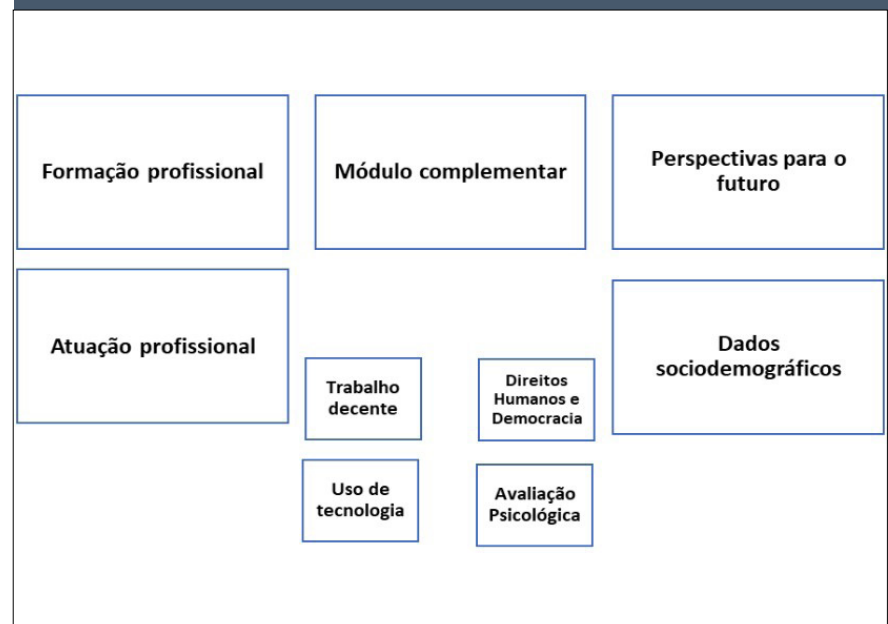
Psychology in Brazil has a face: it's a woman. With 80% of its professional contingent and the majority working in clinics⁽⁶⁾ women suffer embarrassment both in the exercise of their profession and in the overload of care at home. The inclusion of women in psychology in Brazil reflects not only the feminization of the profession, but also the structural challenges that shape their trajectories. According to Cunha & Dimenstein⁽⁷⁾ historically, professional practice has been associated with caring, with the

majority of women in practical professional work, while men went into academic and/or scientific work.

Although the most recent census from 2022 shows a slight diversity in both the profile and the area of work, it does not attest to substantial changes. This survey, carried out from time to time by the Council System^(10,9) aims to carry out a longitudinal follow-up and also to "monitor the transformations underway in the professional practice of psychology in Brazil"⁽⁶⁾.

The data collected confirms the feminization of the profession and warns of disparities. In this sense, the survey was carried out using a questionnaire sent via link, with 79 items, divided into five⁽⁵⁾ blocks, shown in Figure 1⁽⁶⁾.

Figure 1 - Thematic division of the CensoPsi 2022 instrument



Source: The Census of Brazilian Psychology: conception, structure and methodological decisions, by the Federal Council of Psychology⁽⁶⁾. Adapted.

The survey was publicized through the social networks of the CFP and the Regional Councils. After initial data collection and processing, the team of researchers reached 20,207 respondents. Using software such as Excel, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Iramuteq, they analyzed the data.

They concluded that in the year of the survey, there were 15,787 (79.9%) women and 3,916 (19.8%) men among the psychology professionals who responded. The 30-39 (32.6%) and 40-49 (22.1%) age groups stood out as the majority. In addition, 11,035 (54.6%) were married and 6,860 (33.9%) single, 12,845 (63.9%) self-declared white, 5,252 (26.1%) brown, 1,701 (8.5%) black, 234 (1.2%) yellow/original and 56 (0.3%) indigenous. With regard to professional activity, 17,176 (85.0%) of the participants were working in some area of psychology. Thus, the general profile of the Brazilian psychologist is white, young and middle class, with a predominance in the Clinical area, with 12,569 (73.2%) of the participants; followed by Social (3,463 or 20.2%); Health (3,262 or 19.0%); and Teaching (3,140 or 18.3%)⁽⁶⁾.

The feminization of the profession can be seen over the more than 60 years of psychology in Brazil⁽⁹⁾ and to this day the majority of clinical psychologists are women. A subtle change can be seen in the areas of practice, indicated in the area of teaching, since historically this space has been occupied more by men.

THE DIFFICULTIES REPORTED IN THE PROFESSION

Souza⁽¹¹⁾ denounces the precariousness of psychology in terms of pay and internal structure. In the field of psychology, women are squeezed both by the overload of cognitive and affective expenditure^{(1) (2)} and the double working day⁽²⁾.

INTERPERSONAL STRESSORS

Zanella⁽¹³⁾ in the wake of the maternal device thesis, initially based on Badinter's myth of maternal love⁽⁵⁾ states: "women are asked to always be at the service of others, to please others, and very little for themselves... care can be understood as a prompt, concrete response to the needs of others" (p.150-152)⁽¹³⁾. Souza⁽¹¹⁾ corroborates this view by debunking the myth of psychology as a profession for love, that is, disconnected from its labor and identity benefits of any other profession.

The use of the motto Psychology for love was used to mask the inherent difficulties and occupational risks^{1*} of the profession. To expose these occupational risks, McCormack and McIntyre⁽¹²⁾ carried out a meta-analysis of 308 articles on the subject of stress among psychologists.

The results obtained in this article were that the most frequently cited dimension of stress among psychologists was emotional exhaustion, with a prevalence of 38% in the studies. Emotional exhaustion occurs in care professions because they are characterized as professions that increase emotional and interpersonal stressors.

Other articles support the evidence of this meta-analysis: while Mills and Huebner⁽¹⁴⁾ indicate that 40% of psychologists declared a high burden of emotional exhaustion (in a sample of 225 psychologists), Ackerley, Burnell, Holder & Kurdek⁽¹⁵⁾ place this same variable at 39.9%. There is also a replication of this study in Brazil: a *COPE* questionnaire by Carlotto and Rodrigues⁽¹⁶⁾ with 518 psychologists from Rio Grande do Sul also places the emotional element as a source of professional burnout.

An example of this professional burnout can be illustrated in the common theory of burnout research.

Maslach and Leiter⁽¹⁷⁾ point out the main stressors: excessive working hours, low pay and dissatisfaction, isolation from the community, continuous emotional and cognitive effort, as well as chronic fatigue. Specifically with regard to psychologists, additional stressors reported are: compassion fatigue^{** (18)} secondary traumatization^{2** (19)} and vicarious traumatization^{*(2)}. Another occupational risk factor for women is also affections such as fear and insecurity at work due to physical, sexual, moral, verbal and property violence⁽⁶⁾ which affect quality of life.

The interpersonal component immanent to the profession already brings intrinsic occupational risks, which are aggravated to the extent that the female psychologist identifies narcissistically with the maternal device⁽⁵⁾. The working hours are also intense and long⁽²⁾.

THE STRESS OF THE WORKLOAD

Psychologists still provide care in a dual way, both by providing care in the profession and by providing care in the family routine in an unpaid way⁽⁹⁾.

With regard to profession, the range of weekly working hours with the highest rate was 21 to 35 hours, 24.8% (3,876) and 36 to 50 hours, 41.5% (6,505), with 78.1% (13,064) of the participants indicating that they were self-employed⁽⁶⁾. With regard to housework, female psychologists spent more time on household chores than male psychologists, with 32% of women and 15% of men spending 3 hours or more on this⁽⁶⁾. A recent IBGE result⁽²⁾ confirms the data: women work twice as long as men (21.3 hours for women and 11.7 hours for men). In the Brazilian female population in general, 30% of women of working age who are not in the labor force are not looking for work due

^{1*}Occupational risk is the possibility of the worker suffering physical, emotional or moral damage or wear and tear due to the immanent conditions of the job and its environment⁽¹²⁾.

^{2**}Indirect trauma through exposure to disturbing images or reports of trauma⁽¹⁹⁾.

to their responsibilities with children and household chores, as opposed to men, whose proportion drops to 2%⁽³⁾. Among female psychologists, the CFP census⁽⁶⁾ shows that 5.4% said that the reason for not entering the job market was the difficulty of reconciling their profession with childcare. This is an important figure, given that the percentage of psychologists who have children or stepchildren (59%) is higher than that of psychologists (41%)⁽⁶⁾.

In this sense, it is possible to see that female psychologists have major challenges to face, not only in terms of their professional practice, but also in terms of the balance between their personal and professional lives, given that women accumulate working hours inside and outside the home. The question to be asked is, if the data shows that the psychology profession is mostly made up of overworked and exhausted women, what are the historical and social precedents that explain this phenomenon?

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SEXUAL IDENTITY AS A POWER STRUCTURE

Human work is more than just the appropriation and transformation of resources; when it is collectivized, work is inscribed and circumscribed in a historical and cultural time. Work is therefore anthropogenic: it creates an idea of society and identities⁽⁴⁾. The identity of the postmodern subject, therefore, is neither fixed nor individually determined: above all, it is the result of social relations in historical contexts, through references to signs that are not explicit, but translate the spirit of the time.

From this perspective, according to Zanello⁽¹³⁾ there is no direct and timeless access to these signs that society uses, but this access is always mediated by culture and engendered from binarism and opposition. In this way, Butler⁽²¹⁾ points out that gender is con-

structed in accordance with patterns of intelligibility that are recognized from the social context in which the individual is inserted, which becomes a defining structure of the condition of person. Thus, gender "is relational and always implies relations of power, of privilege, of greater or lesser prestige" (p. 44)⁽¹³⁾.

In order to contextualize historically the subjectivation of women, especially in psychology, around care work, we turn to Federici's text⁽²²⁾. The author analyzes the social transformations between 1450 and 1650, highlighting the reconfiguration of the role of women and the reproduction of the workforce as central elements of primitive accumulation in the emergence of capitalism.

The concept of primitive accumulation is the phenomenon of the concentration and centralization of capital in the hands of a few people, resulting from the mechanism of capital reproduction in the production process. As the capitalist invests and reinvests in the production system, he appropriates the surplus value of the worker, increasing social inequality⁽⁴⁾. The result is immense inequality in the distribution of wealth, forcing the worker to submit to wage labor, which establishes the separation between him and the fruit of his production (alienation). This system also forges subjectivities adapted to the logic of capital, focused on obedience, productivity and competition: its main ideological vectors are school, family and religious institutions. They consolidate the sexual division of labour, naturalizing the role of women as responsible for caring for and reproducing the workforce.

In the current economic system, sexual identity has been constituted as a specific support for work functions, so femininity is also a cultural and social construct that functions as hidden production for the workforce with a veil of biological destiny. This

culminates both in the paradigm of the maternal device, which advocates that women have a natural maternal instinct and must always prioritize the needs of others over their own, and in the love device, in which women learn to love in an identitarian way and in which being chosen for their predetermined femininity is what ratifies their narcissistic valorization⁽¹³⁾.

Sexuality, motherhood and procreation were and are used as tools for disciplining women, so that the female body has become a place for implementing power relations⁽²²⁾. Thus, the new social values "(...)" signify the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general "(...)" opening up space for a vision of the feminine that is historically determined⁽²²⁾.

According to Louro⁽²³⁾ there is a set of dispositions and practices, referred to by Foucault as biopower, which have historically been useful for control. In this respect, gender technologies reflect biopolitical devices for the agency of biopower, which establish different social positions for men and women. One expression of this phenomenon can be seen in the choice of psychology course, which for men is based on social prestige, and for women on wanting to help others⁽⁶⁾.

It's important to emphasize how this difference, when viewed nostalgically, has an impact on maintaining the status quo, on reproducing relations of power and domination between the different genders and even between the different women^{3* * (23)}. Therefore, the further they move away from the ideal of femininity, the more these women are passed over. However, it is through these power relations that the status quo based on difference is maintained, who is considered dif-

3* *This cross-cutting nature is also manifested in the social divide, with the result that the majority of female psychologists are white⁽⁶⁾.

ferent and what this difference means, and what is at stake in these exercises of power is, in fact, inequality. On the other hand, the understanding of differences through a biological and naturalized reading has been adopted in such a way as to reserve social spaces of greater or lesser empowerment, influence and participation⁽²³⁾. These divisions are consistent with the exercise of power, in such a way that they "increase the economic usefulness" while "decreasing the political strength" of certain individuals in a minority position, as well as in relation to the female gender⁽²⁴⁾.

In the same vein, according to Basaglia⁽²⁵⁾ the female body was what founded the enslavement of women due to its characteristics, that is, the ability to procreate was what led to an association with caring as a social function, which translated into characteristics such as "gentleness, femininity, a natural propensity for dedication and sacrifice, weakness, the need for protection and self-protection" (p.14)⁽²²⁾. In the 21st century, professions considered to be caring and requiring emotional and interpersonal effort are occupied by women⁽⁹⁾ producing exhaustion both through emotional exhaustion^(18, 19, 20) and exhausting working hours^{(6) (11)}.

It should be noted that, according to Badinter⁽⁵⁾ the configuration of a society based on the dominant needs and values of a given time establishes social roles. If we think of capitalist society, which has the family as one of its central factors, the roles of mother, father and children are determined. A material reification of this assumption can be seen in the distribution of hours dedicated to domestic chores: 21.3 hours for women and 11 hours for men⁽²⁾.

In addition, Badinter⁽⁵⁾ discusses how the maternal role of educator extends beyond instruction to include the transmission of moral values. Based on this function, the idea of

a maternal instinct has been socially constructed, which in psychology has materialized as a profession for love, concentrating women in clinical practice and restricting the majority of CNPq grants to areas of care, in a proportion half that of men⁽⁷⁾.

Even though these ways of existing in the world encompass other social functions, women can occupy public spaces and enjoy broader civil rights, a standard of femininity based on care and attention for others around them is still demanded, and women are still expected to be more passive and docile. In this way, the more women dedicate themselves to work and self-fulfillment and the more they focus on their own needs, the less they are fulfilling what is expected of a normative femininity, as they are less available for caring for the needs of others. Exempli gratia, the PNAD-c census⁽³⁾ pointed out that 30% of women who were inactive in the labor market said they were taking care of their children and other family members, and in the case of female psychologists, 5.4% responded similarly⁽⁶⁾.

Furthermore, Zanello⁽¹³⁾ states that there has been a devaluation of caring by naturalizing this characteristic as something innately feminine, as women are vulnerable to not receiving appreciation and recognition commensurate with their efforts. Even in many contexts, these efforts are delegitimized and treated as something of an obligation, as if there were a need for women to perform with the utmost attention, patience, understanding and compassion for everyone around them, regardless of what context they are in and even if this means failing to meet their own needs⁽¹²⁾.

Thus, in addition to the way in which women are called upon to educate, care for and resolve various demands at the same time as they work, recognition, remuneration and appreciation of the profession take a back seat. Psychologists find themselves

overloaded due to a lack of understanding of the diversity of roles they accumulate, and the way they are required to carry out these roles.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Psychologists in Brazil have many challenges to face in their roles as caregivers and professionals; the career of psychology as a science and profession in Brazil is still in its infancy, only half a century old. However, it is already possible to observe certain trends, with the prevalence of female psychologists with children⁽⁶⁾. At the same time, these women are embarrassed by the precarious nature of the profession⁽¹¹⁾ and by the strenuous working hours when they leave the office to look after their families and homes⁽³⁾. This is because Brazilian culture makes women responsible for caring and this expectation extends to the office⁽¹¹⁾.

The result is an overload both in terms of working hours and in terms of the emotional and cognitive strain that work demands. Being an interpersonal profession, the emotional toll is enormous⁽¹³⁾ which is not restored in hours of rest⁽⁶⁾. The reason for these pressures, both internal and external, lies in the sexual division of labor⁽²²⁾ and the interposition of the maternal device⁽⁵⁾ which advocates that women have natural caring skills and that caring, therefore, is not work. Statistics cannot reproduce the richness and detail of human experience. However, the various unique life stories are repeated and reflected in the data: we are women with the same voice, which echoes throughout the corridors of time and history.

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