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## Work and health of teachers in Brazil: a publication to be highlighted

*Trabalho e saúde dos professores no Brasil:  
uma publicação para ser destacada*

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We read with great appreciation the article titled: “Work Absence Due to Musculoskeletal Disorders Among Basic Education Teachers in Brazil,”<sup>1</sup> published in the Epidemiology, Health, and Work Dossier of the Revista Brasileira de Saúde Ocupacional (RBSO).

As the authors themselves emphasized in the introduction: “In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of studies conducted in the country interested in investigating the work and health relationships in this occupational category. Generally, these researches have focused on teachers in cities or groups of Brazilian cities, without, however, achieving national coverage and representativeness.”

Having studied the subject for some time and being part of this “growing” movement of interest observed by the authors, we have indeed identified both an increase in publications over 20-year period (1997-2017) and the need for studies with national coverage and representativeness. Among the 175 publications we found, none of them fit this description<sup>2</sup>. Before that, the closest we observed was Wanderley Codo’s study on burnout among teachers, which, as reported, involved over 52,000 participants, distributed across 1,440 schools in various states of the federation, finding that “almost half (48%) of education workers” were experiencing at least one of the burnout<sup>3</sup> indicators. Thus, the book with the research results contributed significantly to the studies and debates on the subject.

Regarding the discussed article, the robustness of its design, procedures, and methodological accuracy are noteworthy. Using data from the Educatel Study, which led to other publications and has been widely acknowledged for its significant contribution<sup>4,5</sup>, the publication in question now allows us to assert that, within the limits that self-reported data and the temporal scope could express, the prevalence of work absences due to musculoskeletal disorders among Brazilian teachers is approximately 14.7%. This is no small matter because, until recently, the studies available did not allow us to speak about such prevalence among Brazilian teachers but rather among teachers from specific locations. In our study on the profile of publications, for example<sup>2</sup>, out of the 175 identified articles, only two were specific to absences due to musculoskeletal disorders<sup>6,7</sup>, and none had national scope. This only reinforces the importance of the mentioned article, which we are commenting on in a congratulatory manner, without detracting from the significance of previous studies and efforts undertaken by other groups of researchers, whether referenced here or not, for the advancement of this field of study.

From the standpoint of the results, several points drew our attention, but three, in particular, prompted us to make brief observations.

The first point that caught our attention is the position occupied by musculoskeletal disorders, which appeared as the second leading cause of work absences (14.7%), behind voice-related problems (15.8%) and ahead of “emotional problems” (12.9%). This is noteworthy because in the

literature, such prevalence is usually lower, as mentioned by the authors themselves. Furthermore, in other studies, especially in recent surveys based on access to information laws, mental disorders, which, although not technically the same as “emotional problems,” can be related to them as an encompassing thematic category since “emotional problems” can indicate or precede mental disorders, and present a trend of being the principal causes of absences, sometimes even more prevalent than voice disorders. In some cases, attention is drawn to their potential associations. Is this a mistaken perception, or could some of these musculoskeletal disorders also be indicative of mental disorders, in line with the “somatic” issues mentioned by the authors?

The second point of interest is that, perhaps counterintuitively, variables such as noise, discipline problems, and insufficient time to carry out professional tasks were associated with absences due to musculoskeletal disorders. When discussing the association with the last variable and indicating a higher prevalence among female participants, the authors attributed this association to “domestic activities,” stating that “this type of double workload disrupts the regulation of time for recovery activities.” Focusing on domestic tasks but not mentioning the intrusion of work dimensions into personal life, something known in the profession<sup>8</sup>, we wonder: did the authors consider the impact of this work brought home into the equation? Lastly, but no less important, the outcome differences between male and female participants stood out. Authors have highlighted the centrality of these differences<sup>9</sup>. As a conclusion, it was suggested that the challenge of overcoming these issues imposes strategic policies and actions, with which we agree<sup>10</sup>. However, questions persist: what examples or policy suggestions can we provide, and should researchers collaborate to propose changes?

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