

Psychosocial risks in the work environment

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Abstract: This paper presents a bibliographic review on psychosocial risks at work, especially in view of the health situation the world is going through. Knowing the occupational risks can be very useful to be able to take care of health situations that may arise in time. Work environments are a space of professional competitiveness, and where the person usually spends long hours a day, therefore, it is essential to recognize occupational hazards that could trigger problems in the productivity of the individual. As main results it was found that psychosocial risks have increased considerably with the pandemic, and that the psychological and emotional state of people has changed significantly. These changes can be detrimental to the worker but can also be harmful to industrial production.

Keywords: Psychosocial risk, work situation, occupational risk, risk at work.

Riesgos psicosociales en el ambiente laboral

Resumen: En este trabajo se presenta una revisión bibliográfica sobre los riesgos psicosociales en el trabajo, más aún ante la situación de salud que atraviesa el mundo. Conocer los riesgos laborales puede resultar de gran utilidad para poder atender con tiempo las situaciones de salud que podrían presentarse. Los ambientes laborales son espacio de competitividad profesional, y donde la persona suele pasar largas horas al día, por esto, es indispensable el reconocimiento de los riesgos laborales que podrían desencadenar problemas en la productividad del individuo. Como resultados principales se consiguió que los riesgos psicosociales se han incrementado considerablemente con la pandemia, y que el estado psicológico y emocional de las personas ha cambiado de forma importante. Estos cambios pueden ser perjudiciales para el trabajador pero además pueden ser dañinos para la producción industrial.

Palabras Clave: Riesgo psicosocial, situación laboral, riesgo en el trabajo.



I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, job requirements have become more and more demanding, and it is no longer enough to have an academic degree to get a good job, but people are also required to have skills and abilities above and beyond scientific and technical knowledge. Even so, competencies within professional sectors are often high, and so are the demands of everyday life.

In spite of important technological developments, eight hours of work does not seem to be enough, but long working hours are becoming increasingly necessary, often in unfavorable conditions for people.

There are institutions of all kinds, some consider workers as part of a team necessary for business growth and productivity, but others do not think in the same way, and have higher demands on their workers and lower labor benefits, causing significant psychosocial risks.

Psychosocial risks are those occupational aspects that put at risk the emotional and health stability of people [1]. These risks are already classified by institutions such as the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Health, others related according to the country.

In this work, a literature review of psychosocial risks at work and their impact on work performance and productivity is performed. For this purpose, published works, thesis works, academic and scientific material that will show the implications of psychosocial risks were taken into account.

This work consists of four sections, the first one describes the contextual aspects of the research, the second one presents the theoretical foundations that make the research possible, the third one describes the methodological aspects, then the results and conclusions are shown, and finally the references that support this research.

II. PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AT WORK, A CONSEQUENCE OF THE NEW TIMES.

The modern era has brought important scientific and technological developments, which greatly facilitate work activities. However, work demands are increasing and the daily workday is no longer sufficient to meet the demands of the company.

To a large extent, work demands have increased because technology allows to disguise the effort, so it is possible to assume that a worker who has and uses technological tools, can meet greater demands, but these requirements are becoming increasingly greater, and the saturation of work is complicated for the common employee.

Among the risks recognized worldwide as prone to

cause problems at work [1], the following factors can be mentioned:

1. Organization and conditions of employment

It can be described as those factors that have to do with job stability, job benefits, respect at work, and family-work relationship. There are many companies that do not have clear labor policies, or whose policies are detrimental to the well-being of the worker.

Poor working conditions tend to be more prevalent in the agricultural and rural sector; however, there are many institutions, companies, and even universities where working conditions are not adequate to ensure a pleasant and respectful environment for employees.

2. Active work and skills development

It is related to those activities that allow the worker to integrate, control their work activity time, their job growth, and their sense of commitment to the organization. In many work environments, results are demanded from workers above the opportunities and benefits that the organization can offer to its employees. This is, for example, in the case of universities, demanding scientific publications when teachers are not granted research hours, in other areas, demanding overtime when benefits are not granted for excess hours worked.

3. Psychological demands

It refers to all those emotions that workers are forced to express or repress. For example, the requirements to maintain a constant smile, a harmonious tone of voice, an attitude of joy and happiness even in work situations where the worker is not at ease. In addition to those requirements where the worker cannot express discomfort of any kind.

4. Violence and harassment

This section refers to situations of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and harassment in general. It can occur in different types of companies, and in all genders. In many organizations, physical and labor harassment is extremely common, and workers do not have appropriate days off, and are pressured to respond to continuous activities at work, even above their contractual duties.

5. Relationships within the workplace

This refers to the support of the authorities, respect for the role, the integration of shared functions, the relationship between colleagues and their links with authorities and with the roles they represent. This type of situation can occur in companies where the main leader

does not delegate functions appropriately and does not establish clear criteria for the roles to be performed.

5. Double presence

This refers to family or personal concerns that the employee may have during working hours. These may be temporary or permanent situations, which may arise due to poor business organization, schedule adjustments, overtime, additional demands, among others that may affect the worker's responsibilities in his personal environment.

A. Labor exploitation

In Latin America, labor exploitation seems to be a common practice, however, this practice does not lead to the best in development.

Some authors [2], [3], [4], affirm that labor exploitation occurs in Ecuador because there is no strong State policy, and because laws are not strictly enforced. Public and private companies have an ambiguous labor law that is not forceful for the benefit of workers. Thus, we can observe companies where labor exploitation is significantly important, mainly towards the most fragile sectors such as women, children and foreigners.

The lack of clear policies in the labor sector notoriously affects pregnant women [4], and there are several situations of exploitation and mistreatment during pregnancy. Although the law provides for the protection of pregnant mothers, compliance with the law is not strictly supervised.

Although since 1989, UN member states [3] have recognized the protection of children in all contexts, regulations lack strict supervision to ensure the integrity of children. In Ecuador, Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela and Peru, poverty affects the living conditions of children, making them prone and exposed to trafficking and labor exploitation [3].

Exploitation in Latin America, in its various forms, generates extremely high economic profits, comparable only to drug and arms sales [5]. However, there is much human suffering behind human trafficking and the social costs are significant.

Labor exploitation is routine in many countries and does not become evident because it is customary, but the psychosocial effects of this exploitation are a major social problem.

One of the sectors where there is evidence of an increase in labor demands is in the academic sector in countries such as Ecuador and Peru, where more and more administrative and research needs are required of teachers in all educational sectors [6]. These demands do not go hand in hand with academic quality, since class hours are becoming longer and longer, as is the number of students per classroom.

In agricultural companies, there are important risk factors, since working conditions are not the most suitable and the work shifts consist of heavy work, which increases work stress and psychological situations that people may suffer.

A. Risk factors and their impact on job performance.

Some authors [6] have shown that occupational stress in universities is greater for teachers, presenting illnesses such as high blood pressure. Other authors [7] affirm that the main risk factors in the university sector are stress, burnout and mobbing, which can have a serious impact on the emotional state of the educator and can also have repercussions on the teaching process.

Figure 1 shows some psychosocial risk factors that can significantly affect the health of workers.

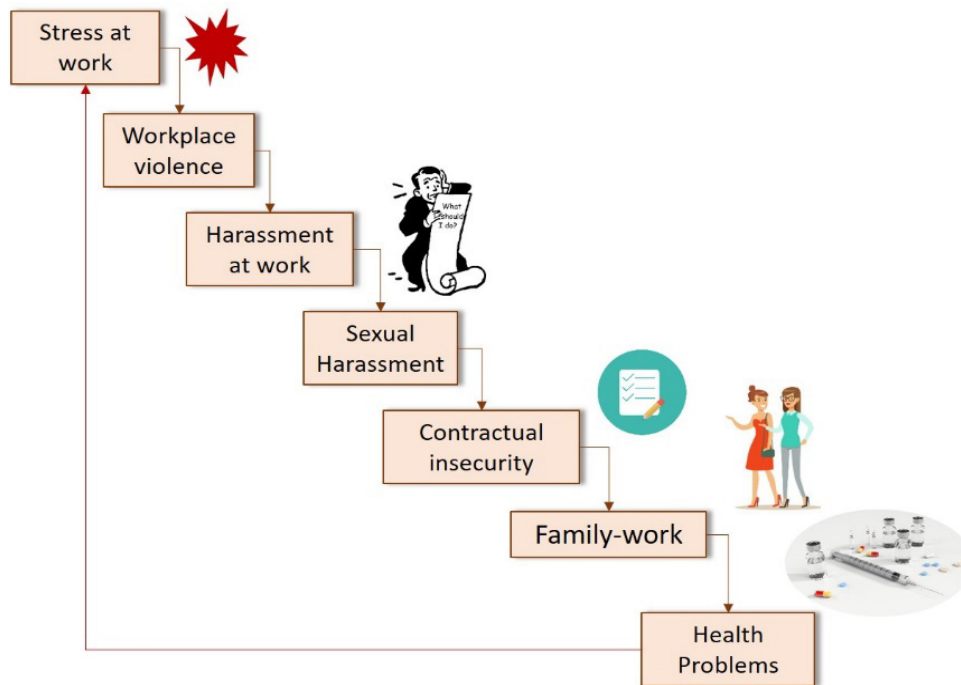


Fig. 1. Psychosocial risk factors

As shown in Figure 1, risk factors can be diverse, all of them leading to work-related stress or burnout, which can severely affect the individual and in turn affect the production process. Among the most prominent risk factors is workplace violence, which refers to physical, verbal and psychological aspects that can be aggressive towards the individual. We can also mention harassment at work, which refers to the pressures corresponding to the role, excessive responsibilities and lack of freedom in decision making.

Also important is the sexual harassment that can occur in some workplaces, which affects a significant population in the labor sector, mostly women. Another relevant factor, and perhaps the most common in recent years, is job insecurity due to unstable contracts, poor labor relations, insecure from the legal point of view, which produces anxiety and stress in the affected person.

Family situations, and their relationship with the working day, can also be a risk factor, since the different family situations can be an element of concern for the worker, and to this is added the jobs that require overtime, extra days and that do not allow an appropriate family bonding of people. Finally, health problems can cause significant stress in workers. Recent times with the presence of the COVID-19 virus have brought a quite notorious occupational stress, since all the risk factors present in Figure 1, are manifested simultaneously in almost all workers in almost all productive

areas.

B.Organization and management of work and psychosocial risks

An organized company must consider the psychosocial risk factors of its workers, and must ensure risk control and management to avoid problems in its production system. It is the responsibility of organizations to avoid psychosocial risk, since this, in addition to causing illnesses in their staff, can cause significant risks in business production [8].

The most common irregularities that reveal an inadequate business organization are:

- 1.Excessive amount of work and lack of time to complete activities.
- 2.Difficult to comply with demands and lack of clarity in the processes.
- 3.Poor interpersonal relationships.
- 4.Poor job benefits.
- 5.Few days off to share with the family and rest.

A good psychosocial environment can lead to healthier people, who perform their job functions harmoniously and allow them to have greater self-confidence, greater social integration, professional valuation, identity, status, and professional development.

In an inadequate psychosocial environment, health risks include stress, high blood pressure problems,

mental problems, exhaustion, fatigue, lack of motivation, proneness to make mistakes, family problems, motivation for alcohol or drugs, accidents at work, among other conditions resulting from stress.

Business managers must show sensitivity to the particular situations of workers, and must also create a risk management plan to prevent inappropriate psychosocial environments from developing. Understanding the family situations of workers, although not provided for by law, is a value that every employer should have with their workers.

Numerous investigations show that the increase of work stress produces a decline in production, causing important economic losses. Therefore, the regulation of psychosocial risks is fundamental within organizations. An important way to reduce the risk and allowing the participation of workers, the dialogue between employees and managers, the healthy conversation where the needs of both parties are exposed.

Psychosocial risks can be assessed and managed following a risk prevention model [8]:

1. Risk identification.
2. Risk assessment and prioritization.
3. Risk preventive planning strategy.
4. Execution of a prevention plan, with active actors, methods and clear procedures to avoid the risk or minimize the risk.
5. Follow-up of the prevention plan and adjustments to the plan according to the results.

These basic elements must be addressed to achieve a more appropriate psychosocial environment. And they must be consistent over time, in order to establish a preventive behavior in workers.

III. METHODOLOGY

This work was carried out under a bibliographic conceptual methodology, for which an evaluation of academic, scientific and technical material on the subject of study was considered. It was observed that there is a wide variety of works that deal with psychosocial problems at work, however, the study on this subject is not very significant, since it depends on the policies of the State for the companies.

The bibliographic review was composed of 4 basic elements (fig.2): the definition of the research, in order to establish the necessary parameters to provide a clear approach to the work. The systematic search, with the objective of focusing on the topic, in different scenarios and with different visions of the experts, which would allow the study topic to be channeled. The selection of information, necessary to define the legal and social aspects that are affected by psychosocial risks, and to find out where the main problem occurs in this labor issue. Finally, the data processing, which allows to highlight the most important risk factors and the legal factors that allow or not the presence of the risk.

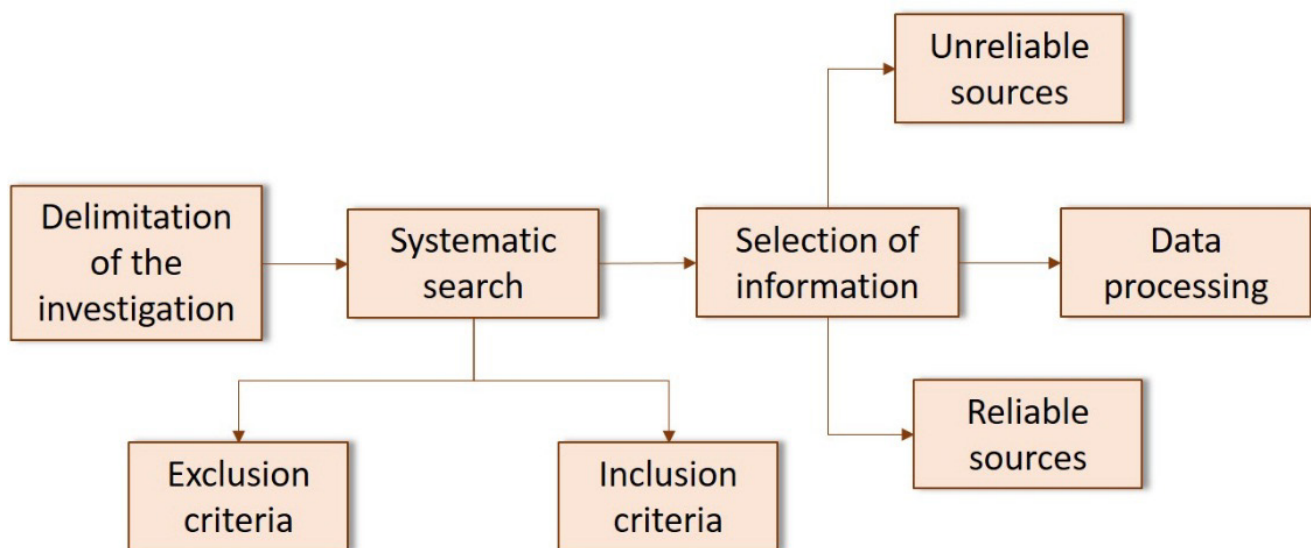


Fig. 2. Methodological description of the literature review

The inclusion criteria included works from reliable sources, related to the subject of the study and with a significant contribution that allowed visualizing the evaluation scenario in work environments. In addition, those works with a critical and analytical view of the problem were considered.

IV. RESULTS

Law No. 29783, Law on Occupational Safety and Health, its Regulations, approved by Supreme Decree

No. 005 - 2012-TR and its recent amendments, as well as Ministerial Resolution No. 375-2008-TR, Basic Standard on Ergonomics and Dysergonomic Risk Assessment Procedures [9], state that psychosocial risks can affect work performance and can significantly harm people's health. In the annual report presented in 2014 the Peruvian Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion, recognized that psychosocial risks can be intralaboral (Fig 2).

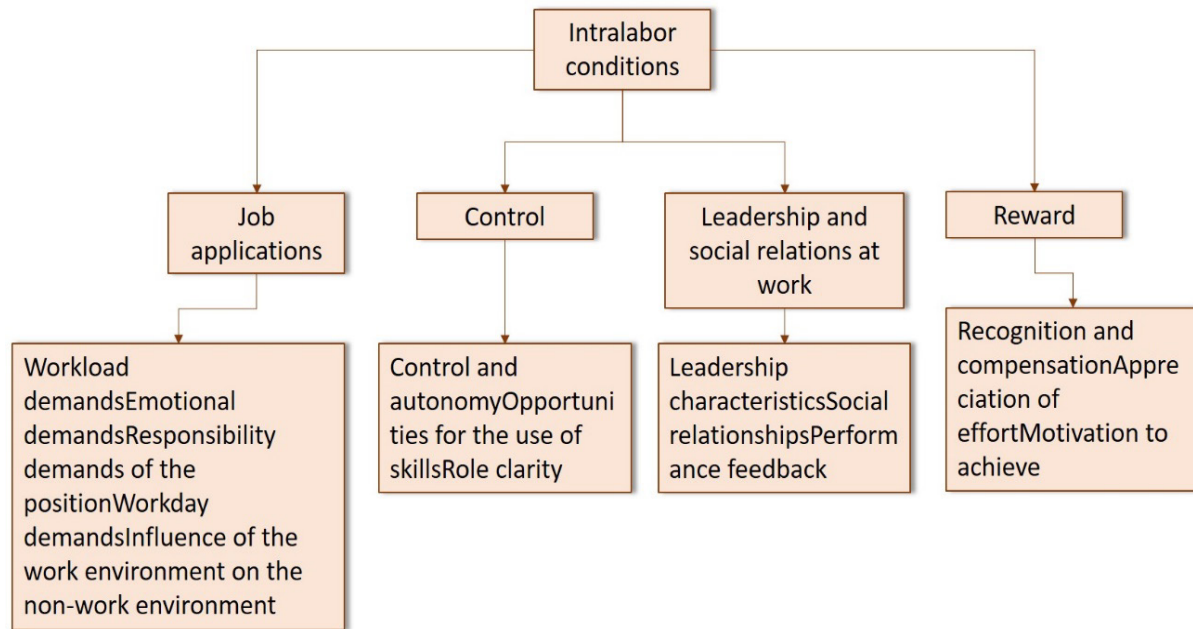


Fig. 3. Intra-work psychosocial risks

There are psychosocial risks that are not as visible as others, for example, work demands, which refer to the time available to perform an activity, which may be insufficient for its fulfillment, given that there may be an excess of assigned tasks, which will make it very difficult to attend to them within the established work schedule.

Another factor is the demand of mental effort, concentration or the handling of detailed, excessive and often complex information, necessary to carry out a work activity, and sometimes with time constraints.

A psychosocial risk factor, mostly in university centers, is the risk due to emotional demands, in this section we take into account the affective demands that the worker must have with the environment. In the case of university teachers, they are often forced to have a maternal treatment with students, to consider their non-compliance, to not demand too much, all this in order to attract more students to the university, thus disrupting the quality of teaching and the ethical principles

of education. In addition, the frustration felt by teachers at not being able to perform their duties adequately creates high levels of stress that can affect their mental condition. Sometimes the teacher evaluation with a view to punish the professional, only leads to the formation of students unfit for the exercise of the profession and to stressed and pressured teachers.

Another important factor in many Latin American countries is the long working hours, in excess of the hours established in the contract, which influences the physical and mental exhaustion of the workers. As a result, the work performed is not done in the best way, thus affecting the company's production.

In addition to these there are also extra labor conditions that can affect people's health, in figure 4 you can see some risk factors that are outside the working day but that are related in an important way.

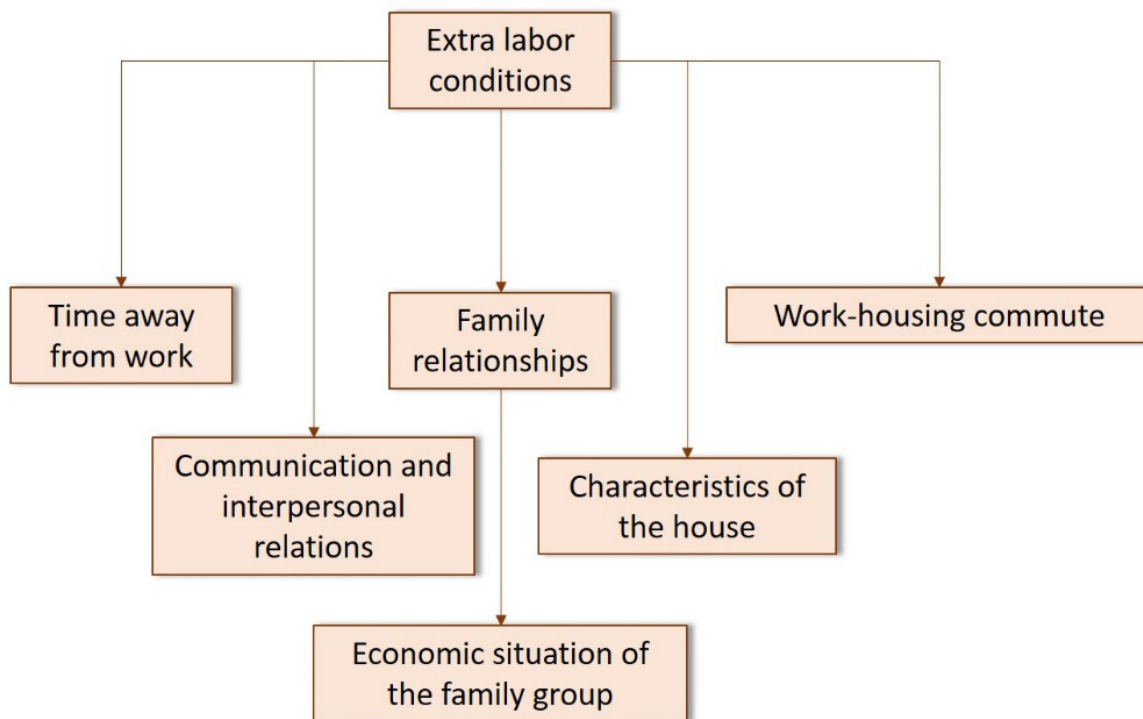


Fig. 4. Extra-occupational risk factors.

The need for leisure time is something natural for all living beings, especially for people who have family environments, recreational activities, or various needs. However, in many companies these free times are not considered, and the worker is subjected to long daily workdays, without rest, even breaking local laws. However, as the State policies are not usually firm for the application of the law, labor irregularities occur on a recurrent basis.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Following the academic and bibliographic review, it is possible to draw the following conclusions:

1. Psychosocial risks are present in all work environments, it is the duty of organizations to make risk reduction plans to preserve the health of their workers and avoid production risks.

2. Psychosocial risks can permanently affect people, since they influence their mood and emotional state, affecting their work, family and social life.

3. Psychosocial risks have increased in recent years, as a consequence of labor demands and the lack of compliance and rigor in national laws.

4. Psychosocial risks are greater in Latin America than in other more developed countries. This may be related to culture, social behavior, and national work policies.

5. A psychosocially positive work environment is be-

neficial for industrial production, for industrial growth and for the general work environment, interpersonal relations and relations with management.

6. Psychosocial risks in universities are highly sensitive, since they can affect working conditions in the classroom, significantly affecting students and the academic process, which can also have a damaging effect on the image and reputation of the institution.

7. Psychosocial risks in university teachers can affect the mental state of people, meaning permanent damage for the teacher and their families.

8. It is important to adequately manage psychosocial risks in order to maintain proper health and a harmonious social and family environment.

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