

## Schoolteachers' health in Brazil

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This *Supplement* of CSP provides an overview of schoolteachers' health in Basic Education (K-12) in Brazil. Education, work, and health are interconnected dimensions in the studies discussed in the following articles. The authors share concepts and research methods from the field of workers' health to examine the connections at the macro level between the educational sector and the unique level of the health-disease process<sup>1</sup>.

The quality of educational services is related to schoolteachers' working conditions, although the assessments of the current crisis in learning in Brazil tend to focus on the curriculum guidelines or the teachers' motivations and training. In fact, the school is a space where the work of classroom teaching converges with the spaces where pupils learn that which they would not have the opportunity to know if it were not for schooling. To reduce school dropout, improve performance indicators, expand the school day, induce greater teacher retention at the same school, and open new learning opportunities are the educational sector's current targets that depend on situations in which teachers' activities coincide with the process by which the students develop the necessary skills for their future as citizens. These ideas explain why teachers are valued as "an integral part and link in the National System of Education", whose parameters for working conditions at the national level are essential<sup>2</sup>. The results of the Educatel Study, which analyzed a probabilistic and representative nationwide sample of the school-teaching profession, with 1,789,651 female teachers and 439,618 male teachers<sup>3</sup>, revealed gaps in the fulfillment of plans and guidelines as regards the relevance of valuing teachers for the school systems objectives<sup>4</sup>. Second, increasing the level of schooling with quality and access for all contributes to achieving public health objectives as well. Studies show that individuals with more schooling tend to enjoy better health status, since in addition to increasing their odds of joining the labor market and obtaining better income, they benefit from a wider range of cognitive, emotional, and interactional resources to develop more effective strategies to cope with adversities<sup>5</sup>.

As for teachers' absences from work, the research techniques used by the authors allowed avoiding the traditional single-cause approach, rather acknowledging the multidimensional nature of the phenomena<sup>1</sup>. There is substantial evidence to consider absenteeism rates an indicator of workers' health and wellbeing<sup>6</sup>. The factors related to the risk of

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missing work at school were found to be related to the characteristics of the technical and organizational environment, contrary to the view that blames individuals themselves for their absences. The latter view not only reinforces the feeling, for the teachers, of “being under suspicion”<sup>7</sup>, but also expresses the representation of disease as an individual process, experienced as a personal inadequacy or difficulty<sup>8</sup>. In fact, the evidence indicates the collective nature of illness in Basic Education in Brazil, since it is associated with a certain configuration of the teachers’ work. Worldwide evidence confirms this assertion<sup>8,9</sup>. The results of the Educatel Study as a whole identify not only the limited success of measures to value Brazilian schoolteachers, but also non-compliance with legal obligations in this regard<sup>10</sup>.

What can explain the weak repercussions of the knowledge on Brazilian schoolteachers’ health in the institutions and in society at large, which insist on the teachers’ individual responsibility for guaranteeing quality education in the schools, without including in that discourse the existing needs in the schoolteachers’ workplace<sup>8,9,10</sup>? Various processes influence the separation of knowledge on workers’ health from the actual definition of public policies. Did the confinement of the scientific discourse<sup>11</sup> exert an influence on the invisibility of schoolteachers’ illness? CSP is taking its first steps in the opposite direction.

The concepts of gender relations and sexual division of labor at least partially elucidate why schoolteachers’ precarious working conditions and illness are taken for granted<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the gender dimension should be included alongside the interconnected dimensions of education, work, and health. Importantly, the subject matter in this special thematic edition “is vast, complex, and with a huge diversity of practical situations”, so two observations by Ferreira<sup>9</sup> stand out, among others: the unavoidable need to hear the teachers themselves and the essential care to avoid over-generalizations.

## Additional information

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