



Burnout and Work-Family Conflict in Portuguese Teachers

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Received: 📅 January 12, 2024

Published: 📅 January 22, 2024

Abstract

This paper aims to understand the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout in teachers. Studying and understanding this problem, which is worsening in society with negative repercussions, is extremely important. To go beyond empirical evidence, we created a questionnaire for teachers to get a more personal perspective. In this way, we obtained a total of 65 participants, all of them teachers in Portugal. Descriptive statistics were carried out on the questions asked, and it can be concluded that Portuguese teachers have high levels of burnout, which causes them excessive physical and mental tiredness, insomnia, and fatigue. The leading causes are the excessive workload and the number of pupils in each class. Teachers also said that their work interferes with their professional life.

Keywords: Burnout; work-family conflict; teachers

Introduction

This essay aims to investigate the connection between teacher burnout and work-family conflict. Researching and comprehending this issue is becoming worse in society, and having detrimental effects is crucial. In order to support and understand the causes of this problem, we have used the news item “Workpace and intellectual demands: civil service workers face serious psychological risks” from the newspaper Expresso, which took place last year - where it is mentioned how civil service workers are constantly dealing with serious risks, e.g. work pace and cognitive and emotional demands, and the President makes a warning of the Order of Psychologists about the urgency of changing measures [1]. We also refer to the article “Work-family Conflicts, Cognitive Appraisal, and Burnout: Testing the Mediation Effect with Structural Equation Modelling” by Simões et al. [2].

Literature Review

Education professionals have recently been subject to various economic and structural changes that have made them more vulnerable to stress and burnout [2]. In this profession, there needs to be an investment of emotional, mental, and physical energy. If this does not happen, it is normal for work-family conflict to arise, leading to a lack of control and burnout [2]. According to the news story chosen for this work, a study carried out in partnership with the OPP (Portuguese Psychologists’ Association) revealed that, currently, the professional activity of the civil service “is perceived as being developed at a fast and demanding pace, sometimes without breaks”. The psychosocial risks assessed in a study promoted by the Directorate-General for Administration and Public Employment were also mentioned. These risks include work/family

conflict, burnout and stress [1]. Burnout is a phenomenon that occurs because of prolonged exposure to stressful and exhausting conditions in the workplace and is characterized by a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. In teachers, burnout can hurt several aspects, such as low job satisfaction, mental health problems, and low quality of education [2]. In an article in the newspaper O Regional this same year, a study revealed that more than 80% of teachers are “emotionally exhausted and more than half want to retire, even though they are only 30 years old”. This confirms that these professionals face significant stress and dissatisfaction levels [3].

According to Greenhaus & Beutell [4], Work-Family Conflict is “a form of inter-role conflict in which the pressures of work and family roles are mutually incompatible in some respect. In other words, participation in the work (or family) role is hindered by participation in the family (or work) role”. Thus, we can conclude that this conflict arises when work interferes negatively with a person’s personal life [2]. According to the introductory article, there is a transactional approach to stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman; it is not the situation itself that determines the degree/level of stress but how everyone interprets the situation. It is therefore crucial to understand how people evaluate the situations that cause them stress (known as primary cognitive evaluation) and what resources they use to deal with the situation (known as secondary cognitive evaluation) [2]. There are indications that cognitive variables (e.g. thinking, perception) are crucial for better understanding how work-family conflicts can lead to burnout. However, so far, research has focused on analysing the effects separately. It is, therefore, essential to begin to consider a more complete and joint understanding of these two processes to understand the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout. Thus, the first hypothesis of the article’s study suggests how threats and challenges are understood, how the ability to deal with them is assessed, and how the sense of control plays an essential role in the connection between work-life conflict and professional burnout. In this way, it has been shown that perceptions of threat, challenge and coping potential mediate the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout [2]. The study focused on variations in the experience of stress and burnout among teachers, especially about the gender and age criteria. However, so far, there is no evidence that the gender and age of the participants have a moderating effect on the three variables studied: stress, cognitive evaluation and burnout. Thus, it is assumed that gender and age should not affect the relationships between these variables, as it is believed that stress is related to burnout, and cognitive appraisal plays a mediating role in this relationship, regardless of the personal characteristics of the participants, as has already been suggested in previous research on adaptation to stress. It was also found that the direct effect of work-family conflict on burnout is significant, which suggests that as this conflict increases, so does the feeling of exhaustion in teachers [2].

The second hypothesis suggests that the mediating influence of cognitive evaluation on the relationship between work-family

conflict and burnout is consistent, considering gender and age to be irrelevant factors. The study’s results supported the hypothesis, showing that the partial mediation model was positively adjusted, regardless of the gender or age of the participants. This indicates that cognitive evaluation plays a significant role in the experience of burnout for both young and older teachers, regardless of gender [2]. In addition, the results of the study also support the meta-analysis conducted by García-Arroyo & Segovia [5]. This analysis suggests that demographic factors (gender and age) do not predict burnout. Although teaching is a profession in which most teachers are women, and women may face more work-family conflicts and experience more burnout, the research is inconclusive [2]. Given the uncertainty regarding the impact of gender on burnout, the authors point out the importance of considering the environmental and cultural conditions in which teachers find themselves. Clearly, the tasks placed on teachers’ shoulders are significant, and the consequences they suffer are worrying. The burnout and emotional exhaustion experienced by teachers is not only detrimental to their well-being and hurts their family relationships and the education they can provide for their pupils. It should also be noted that there are indicators that age can be positively associated with increased levels of burnout, particularly in the context of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization [2]. The results highlighted by the article emphasize the importance of work-family conflict as a significant cause of occupational stress with severe implications for mental health, making it essential for work organizations to take preventive measures regarding teacher burnout. Thus, as a group, we believe that a work environment more aligned with teachers’ family responsibilities should be created that prioritizes the implementation of more flexible schedules, less bureaucracy, greater autonomy, reduced workload, better conditions inside and outside the classroom and school hours; support from supervisors; support strategies; job security, among others [2]. Given the above, schools, educational institutions and governments must recognize this problem and implement support strategies, such as: workload management; supportive culture among teachers; Occupational Health assessment; Individual and/or Group counselling. Such organizational and health interventions will contribute to a healthier working environment in education and thus preserve the dedication of teachers, offering high quality education for the next generations [2]. In line with this problem, Inácio et al. [6] carried out a study to develop a mindfulness program for education professionals to reduce occupational stress levels and understand how it significantly affects sleep quality and perception. Thus, in the first evaluation, the results show that occupational stress significantly negatively affects sleep quality in terms of excessive workload. After the program, the participants showed lower levels of occupational stress regarding bureaucratic workload, student motivation, overwork, and student indiscipline. About sleep quality, the results showed no statistically significant differences.

Furthermore, in the article by Ornaghi et al. [6], the connections between stress in the professional sphere, work involvement and burnout were addressed, considering the possible influence of

socio-emotional competence in reducing the negative effects of stress on burnout. This study's sample consisted of 275 Italian teachers active in the profession. Participants completed self-report questionnaires that assessed stress, socio-emotional competence, work engagement and burnout. The results showed that teachers' socio-emotional competence reduced the effect of stress. Interventions have therefore been proposed that aim not only to reduce stress, but also to improve teachers' socio-emotional competence, to maintain a high level of involvement at work and minimize the impact of stress on burnout. Finally, Mariano et al. [7] considers regular physical exercise crucial for promoting mental health. They therefore studied teachers who teach the first six years of school in Portugal and Brazil. To this end, they carried out assessments before and after the intervention to analyse how a physical exercise program affects stress levels and motivation to exercise frequently.

Method

Data collection procedure

Sixty-five individuals took part in this study, all of them teachers in schools located in Portugal. The researchers designed the questionnaire used in this study. It was uploaded to the Google Forms platform. Before starting to answer the questionnaire, the participants had to read the informed consent form and if they agreed, they then went on to answer the questions. The confidentiality of the answers given by the participants was also guaranteed. Data collection process was non probabilistic, intentional, and followed snowball sampling [8].

Participants

This study's sample consisted of 65 participants, most of whom were female (Figure 1).

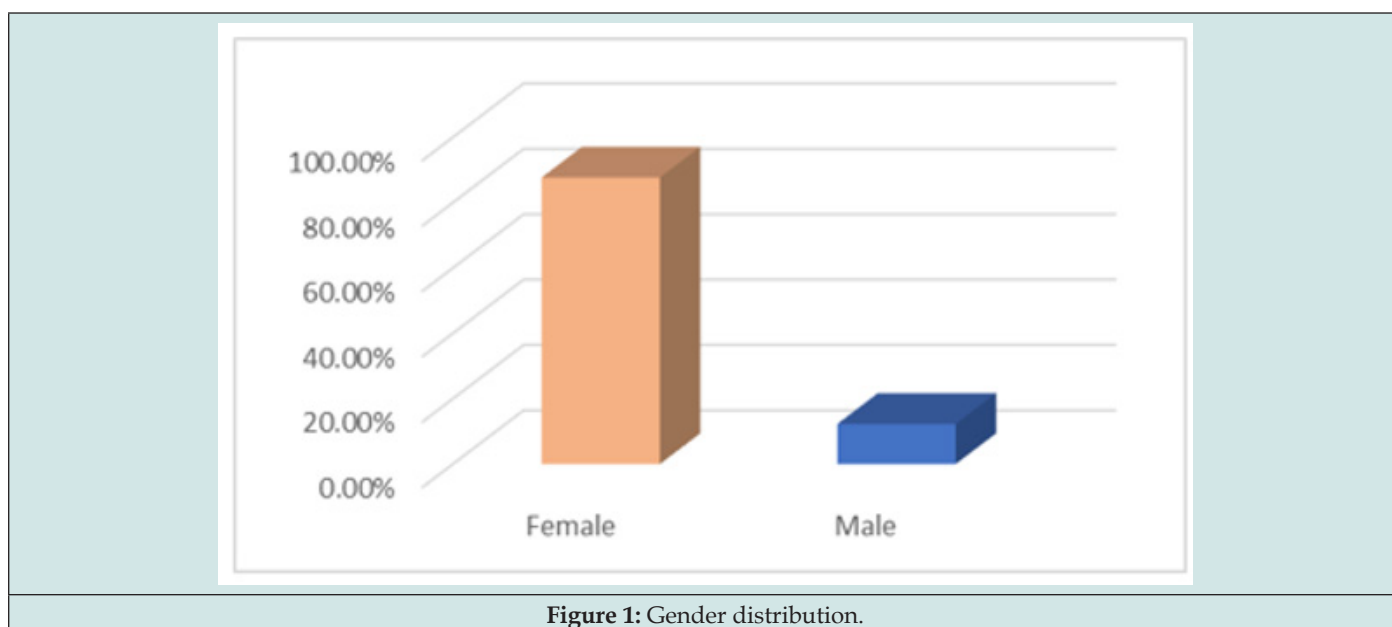


Figure 1: Gender distribution.

As far as age is concerned, most of the participants are over 40 (Figure 2).

Most participants have worked in the sector for over 20 years (Figure 3).

Most teachers teach in primary and secondary schools (Figure 4).

As for the number of hours they work, most of them work up to 35 hours (Figure 5).

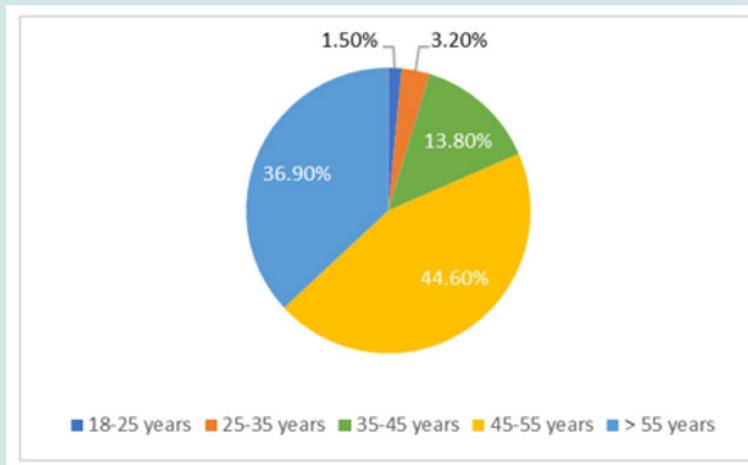


Figure 2: Age distribution.

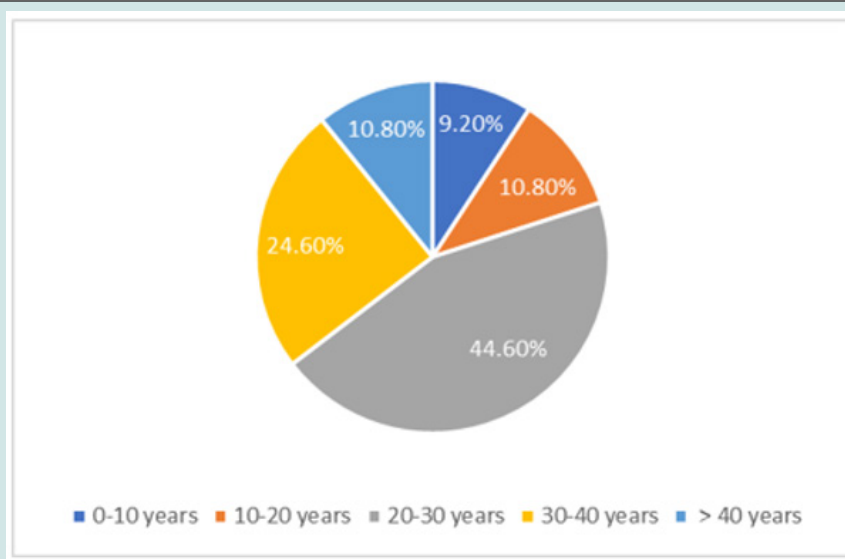


Figure 3: Distribution of seniority in the sector.

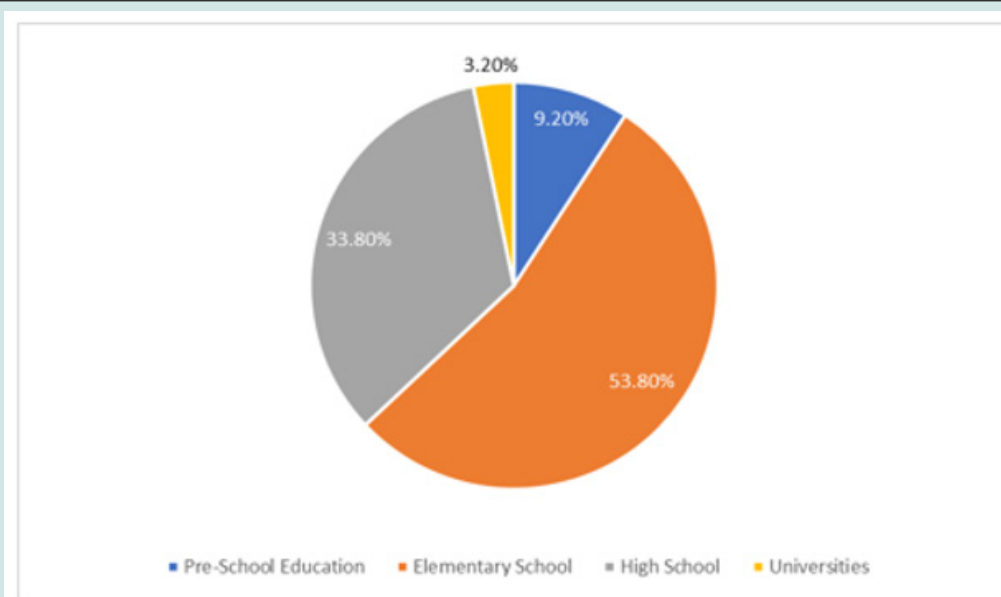


Figure 4: Education level distribution.

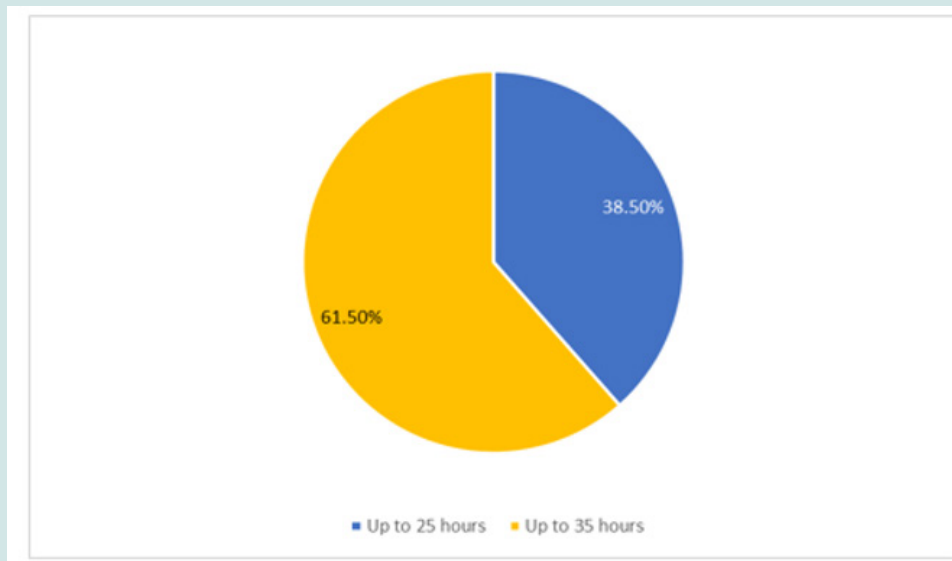


Figure 5: Distribution of working hours.

Result

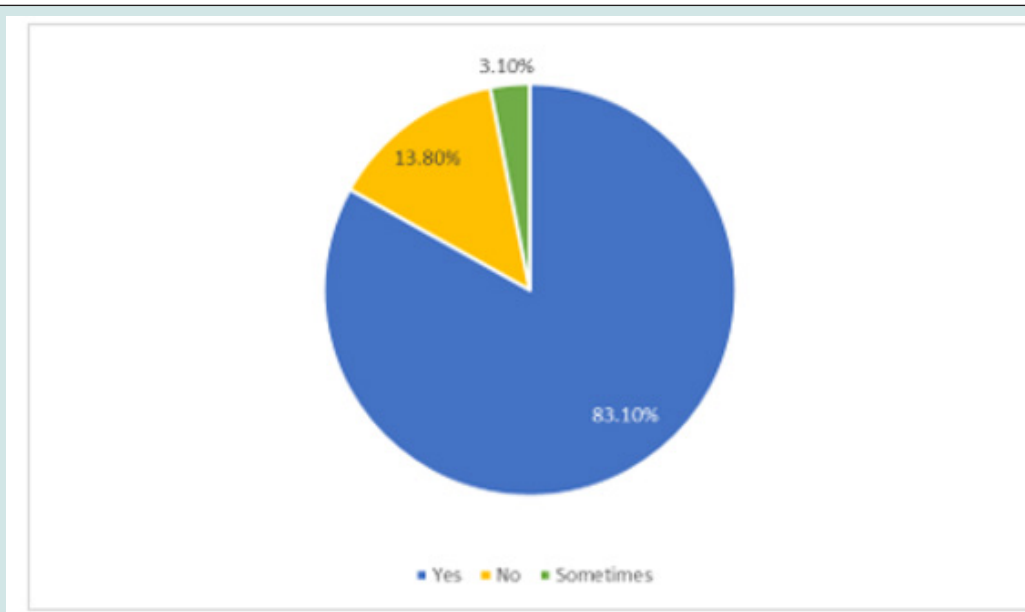


Figure 6: Responses to the question "Have you often felt exhausted by your work?"

To the question, "Have you often felt exhausted by your work?" 83.1% of the participants answered yes (Figure 6).

On a scale of 0 to 5, on the question "How often do you feel, or have you felt a lack of energy to deal with work situations?" the number on the scale with the most votes was 4 (Figure 7).

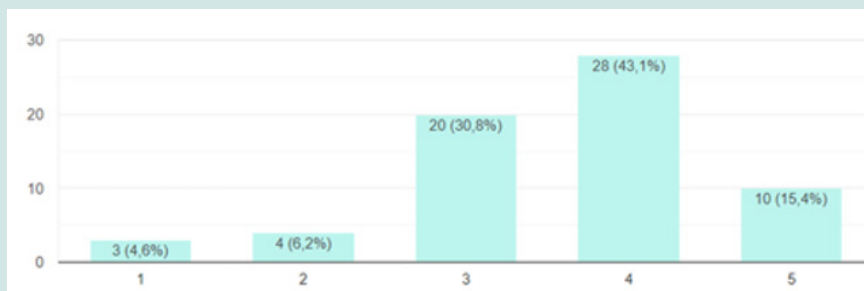


Figure 7: Distribution of answers given to the question "How often do you feel, or have you felt a lack of energy to deal with work situations?"

According to our questionnaire, on a scale of 0 to 5, the frequency with which teachers have felt overloaded due to the demands of the job points to 4 as the highest number (Figure 8).

In addition, the teachers had to mark the options that best describe the symptoms they have experienced, and the results indicate that the three most experienced symptoms are: excessive physical and mental tiredness (81.5%); insomnia (61.5%) and

fatigue (64.6%). As for the factors in the work environment that contribute to this stress and exhaustion, the three most voted options were: excessive workload (83.1%), classes with too many students (61.5%) and lack of recognition and appreciation (56.9%).

In our questionnaire, 92.3% answered yes to "Do you feel that your work has ever interfered with your family life?" (Figure 9).

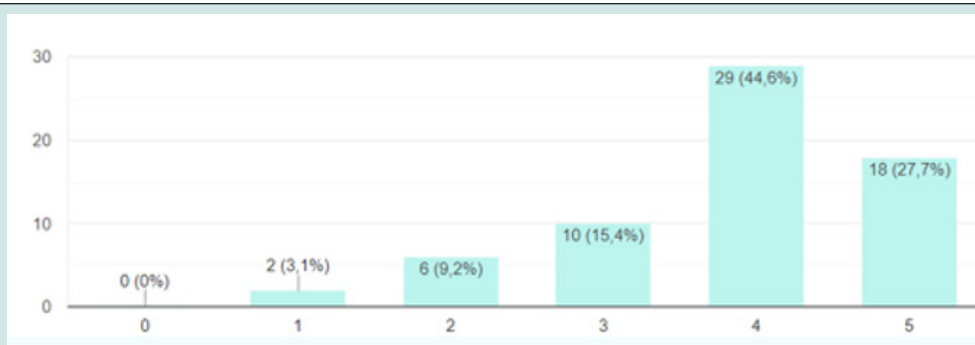


Figure 8: Distribution of how often they felt overworked.

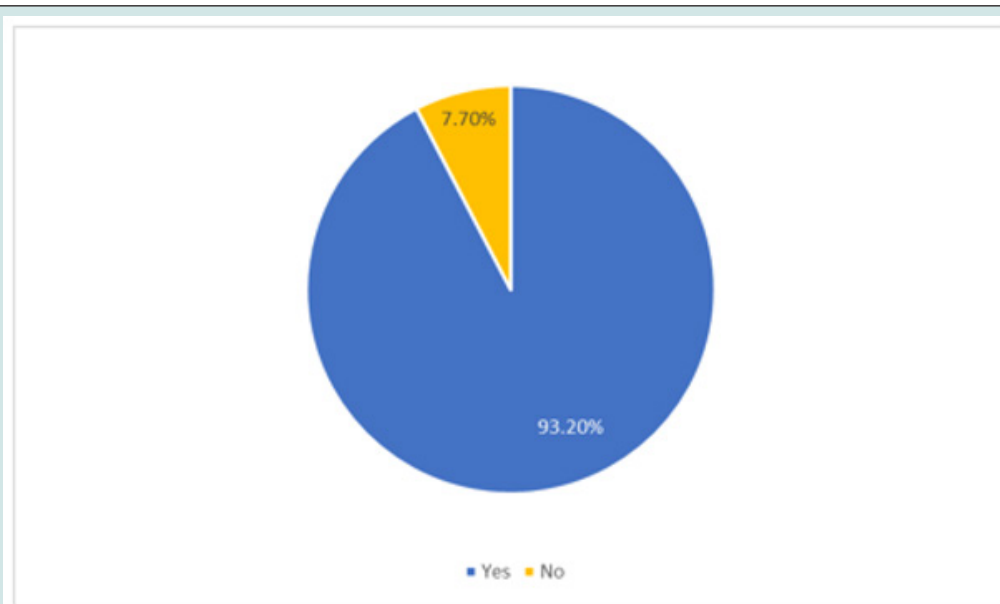


Figure 9: Distribution of answers given to the question "Do you feel that your work has ever interfered with your family life?"

And on a scale of 0 to 5, to assess the balance they establish between their professional and family responsibilities, the number with the most votes was 3 (Figure 10).

In the questionnaire, teachers were asked if they consider that the environment and conditions of teaching work promote a healthy balance between professional and personal life. The vast

majority answered no (Figure 11).

Therefore, if teachers are to stop experiencing stress and burnout in such a significant way, it is important to give them a voice. They were also asked if they felt comfortable communicating their needs to their superiors to establish a balance, and the vast majority said yes (Figure 12).

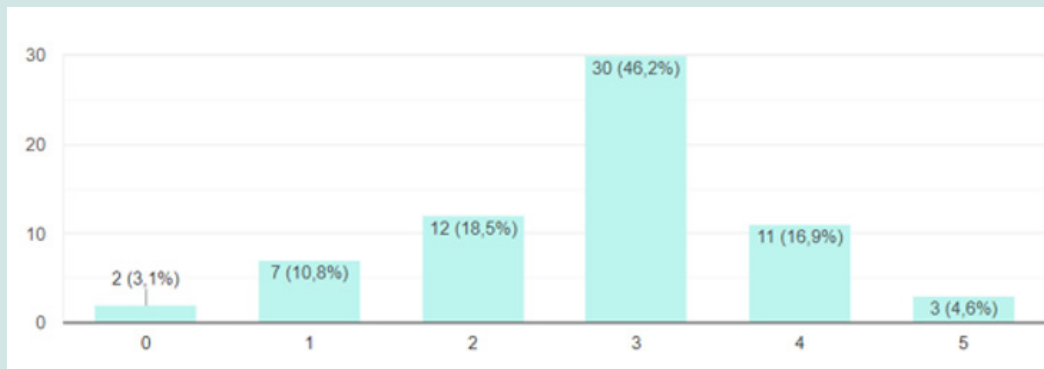


Figure 10: The balance they establish between their professional and family responsibilities.

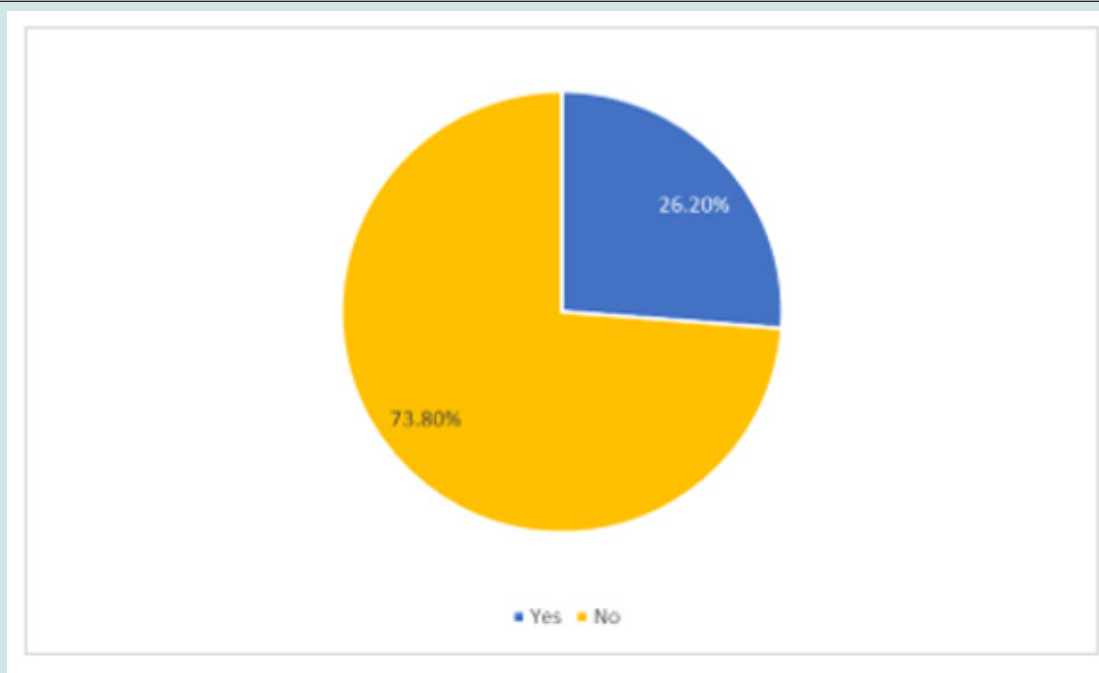


Figure 11: Answer to the question, "Do the teaching environment and working conditions promote a healthy work-life balance?"

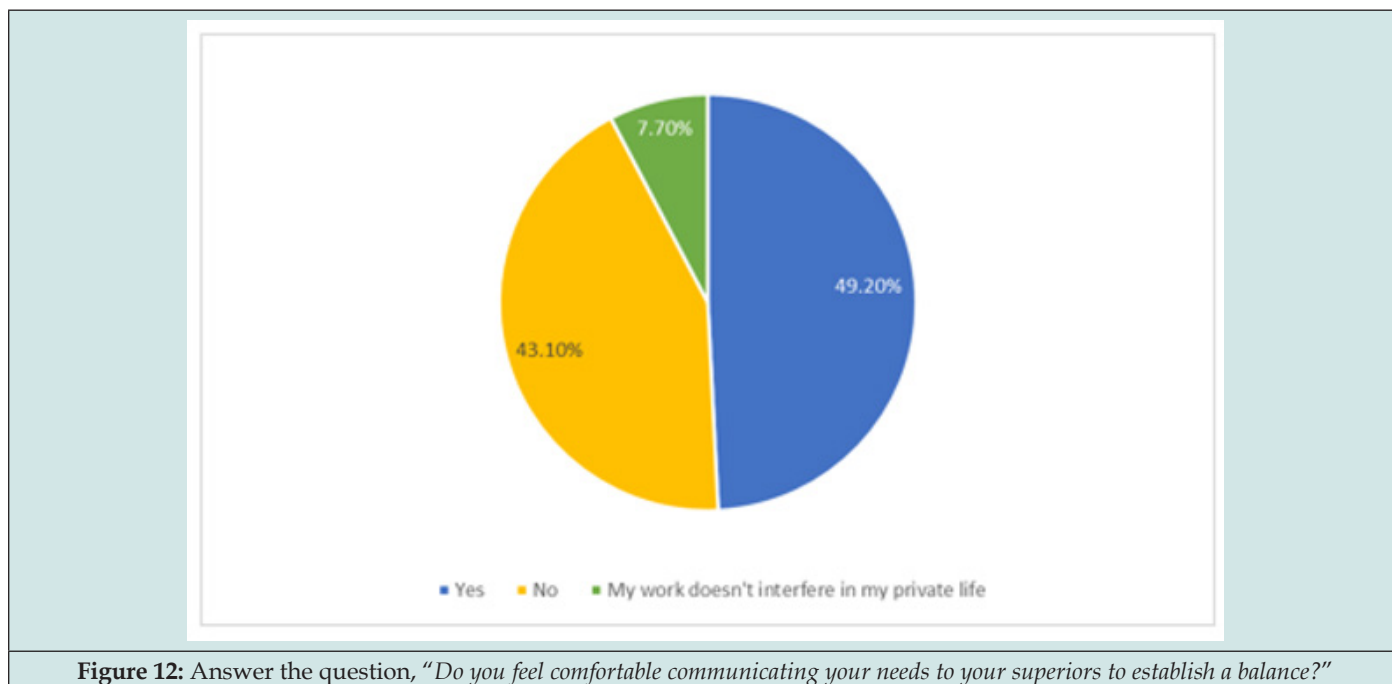


Figure 12: Answer the question, "Do you feel comfortable communicating your needs to your superiors to establish a balance?"

Regarding the answers given in the questionnaire about possible solutions to this problem, the teachers suggest implementing some measures, such as being stationed closer to home; better timetables, reduced class sizes and doing pedagogical work only in schools; more dignity at work, recognition, and appreciation; less administrative and bureaucratic work. Not least because, as the teachers say, teachers want to work with pupils, not paperwork.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the relationship between work-family conflict and burnout in teachers. A descriptive study of the variables under study was carried out. The researchers designed the questionnaire used. After analysing the data, it was concluded that Portuguese teachers have high levels of burnout, with the most frequent symptoms being excessive physical and mental tiredness, insomnia and fatigue. Among the factors in the work environment contributing to this stress and exhaustion, the three most voted options were excessive workload, classes with too many students and lack of recognition and appreciation. As far as workload is concerned, these results are in line with those obtained in the study, also with Portuguese teachers, carried out by Inácio et al. [9]. Most teachers feel that their professional life interferes with their personal life. These results are also in line with those obtained in the study carried out by Moreira et al. [10]. It was also found that the average age of Portuguese teachers is very high, which may contribute to increased fatigue.

Conclusion

To sum up, the theme developed in this work portrays a daily worsening problem with very negative repercussions. The questionnaire showed that most teachers feel the working

environment does not favour a healthy balance between personal and professional life. Schools, educational institutions, and governments must recognize this problem and adopt effective measures to create a healthier educational working environment.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

None.

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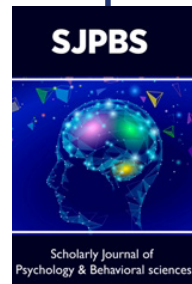
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DOI: [10.32474/SJPBS.2024.07.000275](https://doi.org/10.32474/SJPBS.2024.07.000275)



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