

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

Acceptance date: 16/04/2025

WELL-BEING AT WORK FOR LIBRARIANS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Júlia Angst Coelho

Librarian. Specialist in
Organizational Psychology
Master's student in Organizational
Psychology at Must University
Federal University of Rio Grande
do Sul, School of Engineering
Must University, Porto Alegre - RS
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6775-8851>

All content in this magazine is
licensed under a Creative Com-
mons Attribution License. Attri-
bution-Non-Commercial-Non-
Derivatives 4.0 International (CC
BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: Well-being at work is a concept that goes beyond the mere absence of tiredness or illness, involving satisfaction, engagement and purpose in the professional environment. This study explores the well-being of librarians in federal university libraries, highlighting challenges such as poor infrastructure, scarce resources and high demands. Based on a literature review, the paper proposes interventions to improve the conditions of these professionals, such as ergonomic readjustment, continuous technological training, mutual support networks and professional recognition policies. Although limited by the lack of empirical data, the study reinforces the importance of well-being as a key element for workers' health and the quality of the services provided. Investing in the well-being of librarians contributes to the success of libraries as knowledge centers, promoting innovation, engagement and support for education and research.

Keywords: Well-being at work. University libraries. Quality of life

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the concept of "well-being at work" has become of interest to everyone. Beyond the limits of job satisfaction, this concept also includes physical health, mental health and fulfillment in private life. In federal university libraries, the importance of staff well-being goes hand in hand with the very importance of libraries - spaces for preserving and democratizing knowledge and supporting education and research. Despite this known importance, the well-being of librarians in this context is still uncertain, partly due to the situation of high demands and limitations in which they find themselves. For these professionals in particular, there are various and constant obstacles, including precarious infrastructure, scarcity of resources and often unfavorable ergonomic conditions (Souza & Silva, 2007; Mendes & Bergiante, 2018).

Studies on well-being at work in university libraries show that an ergonomic environment and adequate organizational support are fundamental to keeping these professionals healthy, engaged and able to provide a quality service (Garcez et al., 2018; Neis, 2015). Why, then, is the opposite so often observed? The literature indicates that in contexts of limited resources, librarians' dissatisfaction increases and the quality of the service they offer is compromised (Wellichan & Santos, 2017). This *paper* seeks to present a concept of well-being at work applied to the environment of federal public libraries, while proposing alternatives to strengthen the quality of life of these workers.

The well-being of librarians involves issues such as belonging and encouraging professional development, as well as ergonomics and infrastructure. With this in mind, this *paper* will look at practices that could be adopted to guarantee the integral health of these professionals, such as strategies to prevent occupational illnesses and the implementation of daily activities and adaptations to the environment.

In terms of methodology, this research is a bibliographical study that analyzes texts on well-being and texts on university libraries. In development, we will first deal with the general concepts of well-being, and then discuss the specific situation of librarians and, based on this, propose interventions.

WELL-BEING AT WORK

Well-being at work doesn't just mean the absence of tiredness or illness. This type of well-being implies a positive, almost intangible experience that involves satisfaction, engagement and a sense of purpose in the professional environment. In organizational psychology, well-being at work arises when other factors come into play, in addition to a light and pleasant environment. The thrill of facing and overcoming challenges, of feeling oneself grow personally and professionally

and of seeing one's skills and values come to fruition on a daily basis play an important role in this scenario (Soraggi & Paschoal, 2011).

Well-being at work is about the quality of the worker's experience in the workplace itself and the meaning they find in their activities - which, surprisingly, can happen even in situations where other living or health conditions are sub-optimal (Silva, 2022), as it is linked to the prevalence of positive emotional states and the absence of negative ones, such as stress and discouragement. Social support and suitable ergonomic conditions act as antidotes to any wear and tear, creating an environment where satisfaction and engagement are natural and not forced (Maia & Maia, 2019; Mendes & Bergiante, 2018). In this scenario, the question arises as to why well-being still seems so distant for many workers. In the context of federal university libraries, factors such as the pressure to serve highly qualified users combined with the need to deal with scarce resources come into play, making well-being something unusual. The limitations and great responsibilities leave professionals at the mercy of physical and emotional exhaustion, a scenario that, paradoxically, seems almost normal for those who work in these spaces (Wellichan & Santos, 2017).

With this understanding, this study analyzes well-being as something that goes beyond mere "comfort" for library professionals: it is fundamental to transforming the environment and guaranteeing a meaningful experience.

LIBRARIES AT FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES

University libraries are linked to educational institutions such as universities and federal institutes. They play a fundamental role in supporting university activities, as well as actively participating in the process of promoting and democratizing information and knowledge. In this sense, libraries not only preserve accumulated knowledge, but also facilitate access to academic sources that are fundamental to the development of science in a country (Reis, 2017). Their role today extends to providing important spaces where students, researchers and teachers can interact, collaborate and produce new knowledge. In addition, federal university libraries often act as public libraries in their surroundings, thus representing a place for recreational reading and internet access for the community in general. In a context of growing availability and use of digital technologies, many of these libraries have adapted to offer, in addition to physical collections, a range of electronic resources, such as e-books, digital journals and remotely accessible databases (Neis, 2015).

The challenges facing university libraries have been increasing over the years. They mainly concern the scarcity of financial resources, which consequently leads to severe infrastructure limitations. These problems impact both the services provided to users and the working conditions of the professionals who manage them (Garcez et al., 2018). The dependence on public budgets, which are often insufficient for the constant need to update the collection (physical and digital), to expand and improve the physical space or to implement technological improvements, often puts libraries in a critical situation. In addition, the high demand from users, which includes a range as wide as newly graduated undergraduate students, postgraduate students and renowned researchers, often puts

these spaces under constant pressure, increasing the demands on librarians (Mendes & Bergiante, 2018).

The challenge of managing and balancing physical and digital collections is also quite significant. Investing in digital technologies has become increasingly necessary in an academic environment that is becoming progressively digitalized. And precisely this gradual replacement of physical collections with new technologies requires not only financial resources, but also training and capacity building for librarians, who need to master new tools to better serve users (Reis, 2017).

It can be seen that there is a complexity involved in the issue of federal university libraries, as well as a combination of factors that transform these units into dynamic environments, in which the roles of professionals go beyond traditional technical tasks, increasingly incorporating the use of technologies and pedagogical support strategies.

WELL-BEING OF LIBRARIANS IN LIBRARIES

The university library environment is very dynamic. On a daily basis, librarians have to reconcile technical organization, preservation and restoration, collection development, service and people management, and service and support for students, teachers and the community in general. This variety of tasks brings them face to face with a series of challenges that have a direct impact on their well-being. In universities and federal institutes, in particular, librarians face a particular demand that causes the most distress: that of innovating in an environment of often scarce resources, while maintaining high standards of service for a diverse and demanding community (Mendes & Bergiante, 2018). Such pressure raises important questions about the working conditions and well-being of these professionals

Studies show that the presence of ergonomics, social support and adequate resources has a positive effect on the health and satisfaction of these professionals, while the absence of these factors can generate discomfort and progressive wear and tear (Wellichan & Santos, 2017). In other words, the well-being of librarians is strongly influenced by the physical and organizational conditions of the environment in which they work. For many, the reality of university libraries is made up of poor infrastructure, ergonomic challenges and a lack of recognition, generating what Garcez et al. (2018) describe as a cycle of attrition, where well-being is sacrificed in the name of organizational demands. The impacts here are twofold: they affect not only librarians' physical health, but also their motivation and engagement.

This negative situation is exacerbated by the constant need to adapt to new technologies. With each advance, such as the increasing purchase and use of e-books - especially during the pandemic - and online databases, there is a demand for new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Recycling, training and mastering new knowledge are always challenging stages in a worker's life, but they are even more so for those who don't always have access to regular training (Reis, 2017). This lack ends up affecting professionals' perception of well-being, because without the necessary knowledge, anxieties increase: many librarians feel pressured to fulfill new functions with little or no support. This highlights a critical need: that of structures that encourage continuous development and provide resources to face technological changes in a sustainable way (Neis, 2015).

As with any activity that involves working with the public, librarians' frequent interactions with users also have the potential to cause stress and anxiety. Despite the drastic changes brought about by the digital information

age, librarians are often still seen as the “guardians of knowledge”. This “power” over knowledge can lead them to play roles in their daily lives that go beyond what is expected, helping users to locate information, solve technical queries and explore the digital collection (Souza & Silva, 2007). In university libraries, where the volume - as well as the demand - of services is high, this interpersonal aspect can be a source of fulfillment, but also of anguish, especially when the demand exceeds the available resources.

Librarians’ frequent interactions with different types of users can be rewarding, but they also have the potential to cause emotional pressure, stress and anxiety. Although the digital information age has brought with it drastic changes in users’ relationship with knowledge, librarians are often still seen as the “guardians of knowledge”. This “power” over knowledge can lead them to play roles in their daily lives that go beyond what is expected, helping users to locate information, solve technical queries and explore the digital collection (Souza & Silva, 2007). In university libraries, where the volume - as well as the demand - of services is high, this interpersonal aspect can be a source of fulfillment, but also of anguish, especially when the demand exceeds the available resources.

PROPOSALS FOR LIBRARIAN WELL-BEING PROJECTS

Given the structural and emotional challenges faced by librarians in federal university libraries, wellness projects that address both physical conditions and psychosocial support are essential. Below we suggest some interventions that seek to transform these spaces into environments that promote librarians’ health, satisfaction and professional fulfillment, consolidating them as places conducive to innovation and sustainable productivity.

First of all, thinking about physical spaces is essential. Therefore, projects aimed at the ergonomics and physical health of librarians - and of course, other staff - are essential. An ergonomic readjustment program, for example, could include the evaluation and updating of furniture, workstations and the installation of adjustable equipment to prevent injuries resulting from inappropriate postures and repetitive strain (Wellichan & Santos, 2017). A simple strategy, but one that can have a big impact and positive results, is to take regular breaks from work with low-intensity physical activities, such as stretching or gymnastics. These activities help to reduce physical stress and increase mood throughout the day (Souza & Silva, 2007).

In addition, with the anguish generated by the lack of adequate knowledge in mind, the continuous training of librarians in the use of new technologies should be incorporated into any well-being project. The galloping advance of digital technologies over the last two decades justifies the pressure that many professionals feel to master tools for which they have not received specific training. Professional development proposals that offer regular training in technologies such as digital databases and collection management software can alleviate this pressure and make adapting to the digital world more fluid and efficient (Neis, 2015; Reis, 2017). A little further than superficial training, the ideal would be to provide experiences, real immersion in technologies, so that intimacy with them grows: it is necessary to remember that the majority of the student body is born and raised in the digital age, and therefore their literacy and fluency in technologies end up being greater than those of the professionals who are supposed to guide their journey. Finally, training professionals and ensuring a constant learning environment helps to reduce stress and increase self-confidence and autonomy.

Another viable, low-cost proposal would involve strengthening support networks and encouraging communication. Librarians could, through self-management, organize meetings to exchange experiences, challenges and solutions, in which feelings of belonging and mutual support would emerge. Sharing various issues through words creates a sense of belonging and mutual support (Garcez et al., 2018). In the same vein, use could be made of the large human resources structure of universities by creating a psychological support system, with the aim of strengthening a safe channel for professionals to deal with stress and other emotional demands that arise on a daily basis.

Finally, the creation of a policy to recognize and value the work of librarians would have little financial impact and would be of great impact. Such a project could include symbolic award programs for achieving goals, incentives to participate in scientific meetings, as well as the promotion of librarians' contributions on institutional social networks. Simply recognizing the value and impact of these professionals increases their well-being, but also inspires greater commitment and engagement with the mission of libraries.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This *paper* sought to present well-being at work as applied to professional librarians in the context of federal university libraries. It first describes the concept of well-being, then goes on to characterize the type of library in question and the well-being of librarians in the context.

A very complex scenario was identified in the federal university libraries, which is generally repeated throughout the public service: budget constraints, pressure to update technology and high demand from users are constant challenges to the well-being of workers. As a way of tackling these issues, a series of projects were suggested, including physical adjustments to spaces, training programs, the creation of mutual support networks and professional recognition policies. It is hoped that these initiatives will change the experience of librarians for the better, so that they can perform their duties with greater satisfaction and engagement. Although some of the proposals involve financial costs, most can be put into practice with little or no money.

The fact that this *paper* is a literature review is one of its limitations. In addition, the proposals presented have not been tested in practice, even though they are based on theory. Finally, the topic of well-being at work is broad, covering aspects that could be further explored in future studies, including field research investigating the validity of the suggested interventions.

The conclusion is that the well-being of librarians is essential for their health, and that investing in projects that promote it is a strategy that benefits both workers and the academic community.

REFERENCES

- Garcez, L., Antunes, Christianne Bastos Leduc, & Zarife, Pricila de Sousa (2018). Bem-estar no trabalho: revisão sistemática da literatura brasileira. *Aletheia*, 51(1-2), 143-155. Disponível em: https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S1413-03942018000100013&lng=pt&nrm=iso&tlng=pt
- Maia, T.S.T., & Maia, F.S. (2019). Bem-estar no trabalho: em foco os antecedentes e as consequências. *Revista Gestão & Sustentabilidade*, 1(1), 352-366.
- Mendes, L.H.D., & Bergiante, N.C.R. (2018). Promoção da qualidade de vida no trabalho em bibliotecas universitárias através da aplicação da ergonomia. *Brazilian Journal of Development*, 4(6), 2774-2793. doi: <https://doi.org/10.34117/bjdv4n6-291>
- Neis, M.O. (2015). *Aspectos ergonômicos no ambiente de trabalho dos profissionais da biblioteca universitária: um estudo na biblioteca setorial da Educação/UFRGS* (trabalho de conclusão de curso de graduação). Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre.
- Reis, J.M. (2017). *O uso dos e-books por professores de universidades federais: novos olhares sobre as bibliotecas* (dissertação de mestrado). Centro Universitário La Salle, Canoas.
- Silva, J.R.S. (2022). Bem-estar no trabalho: um estudo de associações com a qualidade de vida e a marca empregadora (trabalho de conclusão de curso de graduação). Universidade de Brasília, Brasília.
- Soraggi, F., & Paschoal, T. (2011). Relações entre bem-estar no trabalho, valores pessoais e oportunidades de alcance de valores pessoais no trabalho. *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia*, 11(2), 614-632. Disponível em: https://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1808-42812011000200016
- Souza, F.C., & Silva, P.S. (2007). O trabalho do bibliotecário e os riscos potenciais a sua saúde integral: considerações em torno do campo da Ergonomia. *Em Questão*, 13(1), 127-146. doi: Disponível em: <https://seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/EmQuestao/article/view/34>.
- Wellichan, D.S.P., & Santos, M.G.F. (2017). Qualidade de vida em bibliotecas universitárias: como a ergonomia e a ginástica laboral contribuem para rotinas mais saudáveis. *Revista ACB: Biblioteconomia em Santa Catarina*, 22(3), 611-625. Disponível em: <https://revista.acbsc.org.br/racb/article/view/1377>