# THE ILLNESS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND THE FAMILY IMPACT

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## ABSTRACT

The study is characterized as a qualitative-quantitative research, with the objective of exploring the psychosocial impacts on university students who reconcile academic, professional and family journeys. Through a sample of 65 students, sociodemographic, academic, occupational and family aspects were investigated, evidencing the high rate of stress and anxiety. The results indicate that the overload of multiple responsibilities compromises mental health, highlighting the role of Moscovici's theories of Social Representations and Dejours' Pleasure-Suffering as fundamental for understanding the dilemmas faced. It was observed that family support is a crucial emotional anchor, but in cases of family misunderstanding, students report a negative impact on relationships. The analysis reveals that the conciliation of work and academic demands generates a cycle of emotional and physical exhaustion. The study concludes that there is a need for institutional and family support networks to mitigate the effects of mental illness, proposing interventions that promote balance and well-being.

**Keywords:** Illness. University Students. Family Impact. Mental health. Work.

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# INTRODUCTION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between pleasure and suffering in university students who, in some cases, face the difficulties of work, which accumulate with the tasks of reception, family care, paid work and managing expenses. These factors are added to personal and social renunciations, such as distance from family members, change of residence, isolation, abdication of a life with leisure and the absence of a close support network.

It is worth noting that, as Silva, Ghizoni and Cecchin (2022) emphasize, the student condition can be equated to that of a worker. In this context, the student not only engages in specific activities, but also engages in a journey full of meaning and values. This active participation contributes not only to the formation of their identity, but also plays a crucial role in valuing the student as a subject. Through this, a field research was carried out in a University Center that offers undergraduate courses in the area of human sciences of health and education in the city of Vitoria-ES.

This research addressed three different strands of psychology: a) Theory of Social Representations with the concepts of anchoring and objectification; b) Pleasure - Suffering at work based on the writings of Dejours. These strands were chosen to answer the research question: What are the socio-emotional impacts of university students who accumulate working hours, academic tasks and family care?

To this end, the objective was to comprehensively research the emotional, social and psychological implications that arise from the duality of these roles. By addressing this complex dynamic, it was intended to obtain significant insights that contributed to a broader understanding of the challenges faced by these students and, thus, provide subsidies for the development of support strategies and appropriate interventions. Specifically, the study sought: To understand the application of the Theory of Social Representations (anchoring and objectification) in the lives of university students; to map aspects that may be of pleasure or suffering based on Dejours' theory in the dynamics of academic and family relationships of graduates; elucidate how socio-emotional aspects interfere in the quality of life of workers who study.

The growing incidence of illness among university students has aroused substantial concerns in the academic community. The transition to university life often brings with it not only academic challenges, but a complex web of responsibilities and pressures, transforming the environment into a space that, for many, becomes hostile and

unwelcoming. In this scenario, students, who, in some cases, assume the role of providers in their families, face a crossroads of demands that go beyond the search for knowledge (Souza; Caldar; De Antoni, 2017).

In the context of illness among university students, Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid modernity offers an insightful lens through which to understand the complexities of this reality. According to Bauman (2001), we live in times characterized by the liquidity of social relations, where traditional and lasting structures have been replaced by more fluid and ephemeral forms. This liquidity is reflected in the university experience, where academic challenges are intertwined with a network of responsibilities, transforming the environment into something volatile and sometimes hostile.

The transition to university life, from the perspective of liquid modernity, can be seen as a leap into a terrain where certainties are scarce and pressures are abundant. Bauman (2001) highlights how fluid social relationships, the lack of solid support structures and the need for constant adaptation can contribute to the psychological suffering of these individuals.

The present work explored the relationship between pleasure and suffering in the experience of university students, particularly those who face difficulties in reconciling work and study, distance or family conflicts, expense management, and who are faced with considerable personal and social renunciations. It is essential to understand the factors that contribute to the illness of these students, since this phenomenon not only affects their academic and professional development, but also reverberates significantly in family dynamics.

Thus, the research analyzes the relationship between satisfaction and illness in the experience of these students, in line with Bauman's central concern with the effects of liquid modernity in the individual sphere. The psychosocial approach of the research aimed to unveil the complexities underlying the illness of these students, not only as a consequence of academic challenges, but as a phenomenon intrinsically linked to the fluid and often unstructured dynamics of contemporary life.

The relevance of this research is anchored in the realization that the academic environment, far from being a facilitator of integral growth and development, often becomes a battleground for the mental and emotional health of students. By investigating the psychosocial implications of this reality, the data from this investigation signal the need to implement preventive and support strategies that can minimize the adverse effects of

illness, thus promoting a healthier academic environment that is conducive to the integral well-being of students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of mental health transcends the individual sphere and encompasses several factors that are interconnected, such as biological, financial, socio-emotional, and hereditary factors. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her capabilities, overcomes the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and contributes in some way to his or her community" (2013, p. 3). A person's well-being is closely linked to a variety of fundamental conditions, which include psychological aspects. In addition to individual factors, mental health is also influenced by social factors and has biopsychosocial characteristics. Therefore, it is worth noting that mental health results from the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.

Mental health means a healthy *socius*, it implies employment, job satisfaction, meaningful daily life, social participation, leisure, quality of social networks, equity, in short, quality of life. As much as the end of utopias and the crisis of values are decreed, one cannot escape, the concept of mental health is linked to an emancipatory agenda of the subject, of an unappealably political nature (Filho, Coelho; Peres, 1999).

According to the WHO (2022), the incidence of anxiety and depression has increased by 25% due to the pandemic. In Brazil, 26.8% of the population is diagnosed with anxiety, while 12.7% has symptoms of clinical criteria for the diagnosis of depression. This incidence requires attention especially when referring to the mental health of university students, considering that every day society moves towards an ultra-positivist, ultra-individualistic dimension that places the subject in a situation of chronic illness in the face of emergencies in current times. A study called the *World Mental Health Survey*, released by the WHO in 2022, revealed that approximately 35% of university students face mental health problems. The main concerns among this group include anxiety and depression. In addition, the survey showed that the Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the population and psychological symptoms, also influencing Brazilian academics, who had to make several adaptations to their routines, such as studying remotely, among other stressful factors. It is important, therefore, to pay attention to students who, in view of the above, are in a situation of vulnerability to mental illness due to academic challenges

that go beyond the search for knowledge and the overload of triple shifts. Such challenges are part of the realization of a dream and a project that can trigger situations of pleasure and suffering.

Pleasure and suffering are terms postulated by French psychiatrist and researcher Christophe Dejours, who offers a perspective on how these phenomena impact the human experience in the workplace. According to this author, pleasure is what makes us feel good, being one of the fundamental dimensions of life, along with work and love, and can also be conceptualized as the result of success in mastering challenges and meeting expectations. Suffering, according to Dejours, is what makes us feel bad, a warning signal from the body to tell us that something is wrong, that we are in danger or that something is not right (Dejours, 1988). In Dejours' theory, pleasure is associated with the feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment that the subject experiences when performing his work activities in a creative and meaningful way. He argues that enjoyment at work results from the worker's ability to face challenges and overcome obstacles, utilizing their intelligence and skills to contribute effectively to the work environment. On the other hand, suffering, as conceived by Dejours, arises when there is a rupture between the demands of work and the individual's capacities to cope with them. This can occur when college students are faced with an excessive academic workload, unrealistic performance expectations, or a lack of social-emotional and structural support, along with the triple workday. As a result, they may experience symptoms of distress such as fatigue, tiredness, stress, physical and mental exhaustion that can trigger the onset of anxiety and depression at pathological levels, affecting not only their own well-being but also productivity and balance, which can impact interpersonal relationships and the functioning of their families.

The relationship between work and mental health is a topic of growing importance and interest in contemporary discussions about well-being in the professional environment. Work not only provides a source of economic sustenance, but also plays a key role in shaping identity and the sense of personal fulfillment. Considering that study, from the perspective of this work, is a type of work, based on the above considerations, several factors are relevant for the development of the sense of accomplishment, such as the family dynamics experienced by the individual.

According to Oliveira (2009), in recent decades the family has been transforming, and it is not possible to understand it in a single model. It is demonstrated in different types of arrangements in the family structure, and in these trajectories of transformations it is not

possible to draw a single profile of families, both in terms of their configuration and structure, the current diversity of family nuclei, such as single-parent, mosaic, homoaffective families.

According to the literature review published by Dessen and Szelbracikowski (2004), family dynamics refer to the way individuals within a family interact with each other, and, depending on the interactive functionality that may or may not be healthy, influences the entire structure and relationships between members. Therefore, the set of this family dynamic and other values that are part of the life of families, even in a world of rapid transformations, make the family an important place, not only for welcoming and the possibility of educating children, for experiences and learning that will guide the life of each one, providing growth, maturity and personal success. According to Sigolo (2004), the family is conceived as the first system in which a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relationships are experienced by the developing person and whose exchanges provide the basis for the study of the individual's development. Therefore, the family nucleus acts as a support in facing the challenges that university students have in the task of reconciling the triple shift.

From the perspective of Osório and Valle (2011), the family is the oasis for any individual, it is his safe haven, it is in it that he finds what he needs to satisfy himself. In this way, the family is a reference for children to be successful in adulthood and their future development process. When the university is part of this path, the subject experiences a new process of socialization of interactions with other individuals and establishes new affective and social relationships that will guide his trajectory in this new social group in which he is inserted.

In the academic context, the first year of university can be challenging for students of any social origin, facing the unknown world, challenges, psychological pressures, competitiveness and social differences and can result in failure or abandonment of the course, causing situations of mental illness to emerge in university students. This illness can be accentuated in subjects who intersperse academic dynamics with work activities and family responsibility (Galvão et al., 2021). In this perspective, added to the family constitution and the relationships that build the social reality of individuals, the theoretical support in the Theory of Social Representations (SRT) was used as fundamental tools to understand the family context, recognizing the family as the basis of social organization, possessing various configurations in response to social demands, and inserted in the

context of the individual and his interactions. SRT, according to Moscovici (2015), proposes to study the way that the individual understands, his beliefs, ideas and explanations. However, representations are created by human beings so that they learn the world around them, due to the need for behavior, information, physical and intellectual mastery of the world. In this way, SRT works with two socio-cognitive processes that act dialectically in the formation of social processes, anchoring and objectification.

Anchoring is the process that transforms something strange and disturbing, that intrigues us, into our particular system of categories, and compares it with a set of a category that we think is appropriate (Moscovici, 2015). Therefore, anchoring is the process through which the individual integrates what is strange, be it ideals, events, relations or objects, into a pre-existing system of social thought, whose old representations welcome the new ones, leading the unfamiliar to become familiar (Farr, 2009). Anchoring consists of bringing the subject closer to the object, between individuals and the members of a certain group to which he belongs, strengthening the group identity.

Objectification, according to Moscovici (2015), is the process that transforms something abstract into something almost concrete, transferring what is in the mind into something that exists in the physical world. Abstract notions are transformed into something concrete, visible, materializing the word. Objectification means reproducing the concept of an image, transforming notions, ideas and images into concrete things, into reality.

Anchoring and objectification are important concepts in the context of college students' lives, especially when it comes to achieving academic and personal success. For college students, anchoring can be related to various areas of life, such as feeling grounded when they are aligned with personal values, healthy relationships with family, friends, mentors, or partners can serve as an emotional anchor for college students, offering emotional support and a support network. When goals are clear and meaningful, it can serve as a powerful anchor in academic life. Anchoring operates by integrating the stranger into the pre-existing social thought system, the challenges faced by university students, such as academic overload, performance pressure, and the triple shift can be interpreted and assimilated in the light of social and family expectations, making them part of the academic routine.

Objectification can be applied in a variety of ways to this population, such as setting specific goals related to academic performance and as career planning – defining long-

term career goals and creating an action plan to achieve them, which can include internships, volunteer work experiences, participation in relevant student organizations, among others. Objectification transforms the abstract into concrete, reflecting how the notions of academic success and personal fulfillment are materialized and sought in the university context, often generating a tension between individual yearnings of what will come after graduation and family demands.

The understanding of these socio-cognitive processes allows a more comprehensive analysis of the dynamics that permeate the mental illness of university students, highlighting the influence of the family and society in the construction of their representations and in the way they deal with academic challenges. The importance of studies on social representations on this theme is verified, as it is understood that the process of living in a family and family bonds contribute to the construction of knowledge and the understanding of its members (Silva et al., 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

This research is characterized as qualitative-quantitative – this type of research uses the triangulation of data to understand a given phenomenon in detail. Considering that quantitative research may not include individual variations and qualitative research may not visualize the phenomenon from a general aspect, the use of both methodologies has been used more frequently in the humanities and social sciences, in order to describe the data in the most complete way possible (Schneider; Fujii; Corazza, 2017). Therefore, in this investigation, open and closed questions and different types of analysis were asked.

As for its object, this research can be defined as descriptive because it will establish a relationship between the issues in the analyzed object of study (Lakatos; Marconi, 2010). This type of research requires from the investigator a series of information about what he wants to research, since he intends to describe the facts and phenomena of a given reality (Triviños, 1987). This project was submitted to the FAESA Research Ethics and Ethics Council with CAAE registration: 79678224.8.000.5059 and Consolidated Opinion number: 6.823.439 on May 14, 2024.

This study included university students over 18 years of age (N=65), enrolled in on-site undergraduate courses and who had attended at least 50% of the course. Students with intellectual disabilities that prevent the understanding of the instrument, enrolled in distance learning and graduate courses, did not participate in this study. The coordinators

of the college's courses helped in contacting students, either through contact with class leaders, emails or *Whatsapp* groups. In this way, students received the link through emails, messages in class groups and could also access through *QR code* on posters in classrooms.

The students who agreed to participate in this study answered the instrument composed of 06 parts and 59 questions that contemplate the following aspects: a) individual; b) psychosocial; c) working conditions; d) family dynamics; e) academic performance; f) quality of life; and g) psychosocial support offered by the university. The participant was informed that there are no validations in the answers, which have a subjective character and that they will be used only for the purposes of the research. To proceed with data collection, the link to the form was sent, available in electronic format at the virtual address. Before the questions, the text of the Informed Consent Form for electronic signature (ICF) was made available with the possibility of receiving it electronically in the participant's e-mail. For the data analysis of this study, a file was created in Microsoft Excel in its 2019 version to perform descriptive statistics and production of graphs that allow better visualization of the data. Thus, the data analysis combined descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis, relating the data to the theories of Social Representations, by Moscovici, and Pleasure-Suffering at work, by Dejours. This research, as it involves human beings, can bring risks to the participants, for this it was sought to be based on the General Law for the Protection of Personal Data (LGPD) No. 13,709/2018 (Brasil, 2018) and Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council (CNS) on research involving human beings being subject to risks (Brasil, 2013). In this sense, this study may present risks, such as situations in which the subjects may show signs of embarrassment or discomfort during the interviews and the application of instruments to collect the necessary data. Seeking to remedy this limitation, the researcher will verbally clarify the objectives of the research in the initial contact with the participants, seeking to provide tranquility, leaving no possible doubts about their participation in the research, guaranteeing the same security, who, if they do not agree, is free to refuse participation. In the event that there is an offense or refusal of the participant with some emotional damage, the researcher will make a referral for psychological follow-up at the FAESA School of Psychology Clinic, highlighting that this referral will have no cost for the participant. It should also be noted that at no time will there be the identification of any personal data that makes it possible to identify the participant. The information collected

will be stored in a folder that will be under the responsibility of the assistant researchers. The database will be stored on an external hard drive, under the responsibility of the advisor, and these data will be used exclusively for the purpose of disseminating results in journals and/or scientific events.

The benefits of this research are for students and professionals in the field of psychology, the availability of information that allows them to know the vast field of research in psychology to evaluate, intervene and improve the production of care, providing psychology students, research space and other participants, with an improvement in their mental health. The results may serve health professionals with objective data and more recent studies, with the aim of supporting and conducting their performance, in all areas, in order to minimize the effects on prevention.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of this study are presented in five aspects: sociodemographic, academic, occupational, family, possibilities of intervention and their correlations. The analysis of the results allowed the identification of the factors that contributed to mental illness, as well as the positive and negative influences of the family and academic environment, providing a comprehensive view of the place of the family, studies and work in the lives of the participants. To facilitate understanding, the results are presented in categories such as: gender, age group, marital status, occupational status and family dynamics, demonstrated in tables, graphs and detailed descriptions that illustrate the main findings.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The field research had the participation of 65 individuals, of which 75.4% correspond to the female gender. Regarding the age group, 52.3% of the participants are between 18 and 24 years old, while 26.2% are in the age group of 25 to 34 years old. With regard to marital status, 53.8% of the respondents are single and 30.8% are married. Regarding family composition, 73.8% of the participants do not have children. In terms of housing, 40% of the interviewees own their own home, 33.8% live with their parents and 21.5% live in a republic, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Sociodemographic Data

| | Sex | | Age group | | Marital status | | Has offspring | | | Residence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | 18-24 | 25-34 | Single | Married | Yes | No | Own | Country/Republic | Other |
| % | 24,6 | 75,4 | 52,3 | 26,2 | 53,8 | 30,8 | 26,2 | 73,8 | 40 | 21,5 | 38,5 |

**Source:** Survey data

ACADEMIC DATA

The survey covered a diverse sample of students, with most of the participants being from the courses of Psychology (55.4%), Veterinary Medicine (13.8%) and Dentistry (12.3%). Participation was significant in both the morning and evening periods, with students in the 6th and 9th periods in the morning and the 7th and 9th periods in the evening showing greater involvement. The courses of the participants and the number in each are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Participants' courses

| Course | No. | % |
|---|---|---|
| Psychology | 36 | 55,40% |
| Information System | 1 | 1,50% |
| Architecture | 2 | 3,10% |
| Computer Science | 1 | 1,50% |
| Right | 8 | 12,30% |
| Nursing | 3 | 4,60% |
| Environmental engineering | 1 | 1,50% |
| Mechanical engineering | 3 | 4,60% |
| Veterinary medicine | 9 | 13,80% |
| Pedagogy | 1 | 1,50% |
| **Total** | 65 | 100% |

**Source:** Survey data

When asked about the availability of time to complete academic activities within the deadlines, 55.4% of the students stated that they have some time for this, while 35.4% indicated that they have little time available (answer options between "I have time", "I have some time", "I have little time" or "I don't have time"). Regarding the organization of time to study, 43.1% of the participants reported that they study whenever they find free time, while 46.2% dedicate themselves mainly to studies during the weekends. Compared to the other options, it is difficult to organize, since only 15.4% of the answers were for "I establish and comply with fixed times for study" and 26.2% "I use time management techniques". Regarding the period in which they study the university contents, the most marked answer (63.1%) indicated that they carry out their university studies on their days off. In addition, 38 participants (58.5%) reported that they study after working hours.

## OCCUPATIONAL DATA

Regarding the occupational situation, the survey revealed that among the respondents, 27.7% are employed without a formal contract, 24.6% have a formal job with a formal contract and 16.9% are self-employed. Regarding the workload, 44.6% of the participants work part-time, 26.2% have flexible work schedules and 21.5% work full-time.

## FAMILY ASPECTS

The analysis of the collected data highlights the crucial importance of family support in the lives of university students who face the double journey of studies and work. Of the 65 participants in the survey, 61.5% highlighted financial support as a positive factor in the relationship between academic and family life, while 50.8% highlighted emotional support as essential. These results are consistent with Moscovici's SRT (2015), which proposes that social representations help individuals cope with the world around them, allowing family support to be internalized as an anchor that offers stability amid academic and professional pressures. In the context of this study, family support acts as an anchor that stabilizes the student in the midst of academic and professional demands, allowing him to internalize the support received and use it as a basis to face challenges.

However, the data also reveal a more complex aspect of these relationships: 35.4% of the participants reported a worsening of the family relationship since the beginning of their undergraduate studies, suggesting that the overload of academic and professional responsibilities can generate significant tensions within the family nucleus. Oliveira (2009) points out that contemporary families are subject to continuous structural changes, which can aggravate the difficulty in providing the necessary support in times of high pressure, such as during university studies. The lack of understanding on the part of family members about academic demands was identified as an obstacle by 35.4% of the students, highlighting the need for greater awareness of the challenges faced by these individuals. Academic pressure and the overload of responsibilities often generate family conflicts, especially when family members do not fully understand the demands faced by students. In this sense, the family, which should be a space of support, can become an additional source of stress, exacerbating the challenges that the student already faces. A summary of the occupational and family data is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Occupational and family data

| | Labor situation | | | Family aspects | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Type of employment contract | | | Workload | | | |
| | Employee | Autonomous | Employment | Middle | Flexible | Financial support | Emotional support |
| | CTPS | | Without CTPS | Period | | | |
| **%** | 24,6 | 16,9 | 27,7 | 12,3 | 18,5 | 61,5 | 50,8 |

**Source:** Survey data

## MENTAL ILLNESS

The data indicate that 60% of participants reported feeling "very stressed and anxious", an alarming sign of mental illness among university students. In addition, 72.3% of the interviewees identified the overload of responsibilities as the main cause of this illness, and 61.5% indicated the excess of academic demands as a contributing factor, as shown in Graph 1.

**Graph 1:** Do you believe that you are currently stressed and anxious?
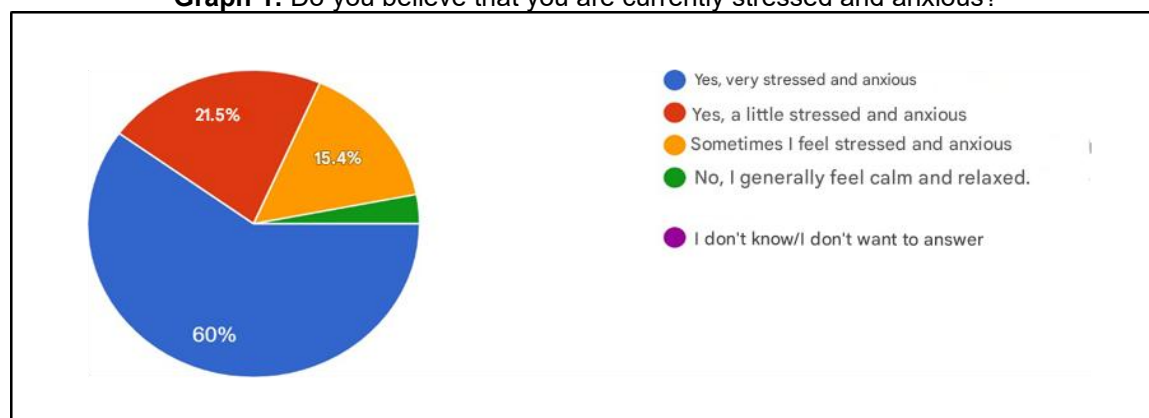


**Source:** Survey data

These data can be understood in the light of Dejours' Theory on pleasure and suffering at work. Dejours (1988) argues that suffering at work arises when there is a disconnect between the demands imposed and the individual's ability to cope with them, leading to a state of continuous malaise. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of university students who, in addition to academic requirements, carry family and professional responsibilities.
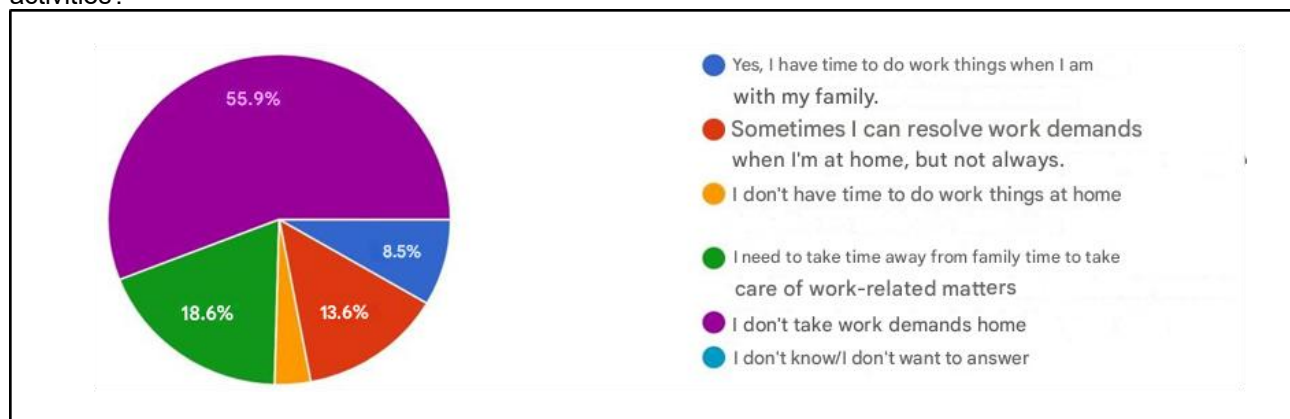
The impact of academic responsibilities is even more evident when we consider that 80% of participants reported significant changes in their routines after starting their studies and 60% experienced emotional overload due to the combination of work and study. According to Dejours, this dynamic can lead to a loss of balance between the spheres of

life, resulting in symptoms such as stress, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. These data reflect the complexity of the contemporary academic environment, where the pursuit of success often leads to emotional and physical exhaustion, exacerbated by a lack of adequate support.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASPECTS PRESENT IN THE FAMILY AND ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS

Reconciling family and academic responsibilities emerges as one of the main sources of stress for students. The data show that 40% of the participants reported that, depending on the urgency of the academic issues, they need to compromise the family dynamics. On the other hand, 58.5% stated that, in situations of family urgency, they end up compromising the dynamics of the studies. As illustrated in Graph 2, 52.5% of the participants reported that they need to be absent from family activities to meet academic demands, and 25.4% said that they are able to study while they are with their family.

**Graph 2:** In the family, do you take work demands and are absent from family moments to carry out work activities?



Yes, I have time to do work things when I am with my family.
Sometimes I can resolve work demands when I'm at home, but not always.
I don't have time to do work things at home
I need to take time away from family time to take care of work-related matters
I don't take work demands home
I don't know/I don't want to answer

55.9%
8.5%
13.6%
18.6%

**Source:** Survey data

This conflict reflects the difficulty of balancing these two spheres, a challenge that, as pointed out by Moscovici, can generate an internal conflict in students between their responsibilities and their social representations of success and family responsibility. These representations, often internalized from social and family expectations, place students in a constant state of tension, where failing in one area means, in their minds, failing as a whole. However, 21.5% of the participants reported family conflicts arising from academic expectations and 27.7% mentioned family pressure for academic performance as a significant negative influence. These data reinforce the idea that the balance between

family and work is difficult to achieve, especially when family expectations are high, resulting in an environment conducive to mental illness (Rios et al., 2019).

Anchoring is the process by which individuals integrate new information (such as academic demands) into a preexisting system of thought, such as family values. However, when academic demands conflict with family values and expectations, as occurs with the 35.4% of participants who reported worsening family relationships, anchoring may be insufficient to mitigate stress, leading to mental illness. Objectification, in turn, transforms the abstract into concrete, and, in the case of students, academic, work, and family pressures become tangible, resulting in real and palpable tensions that affect their mental health. These pressures materialize in the students' daily lives, such as the constant need to balance multiple responsibilities. The requirement to reconcile strict academic deadlines with family and professional demands is a clear example of this process of objectification.

By dealing with frequent conflicts between these spheres — as shown by the percentage of students who are absent from family activities to meet academic requirements (52.5%) or compromise their study tasks due to family emergencies (58.5%) — social representations of success and responsibility become concrete and impose themselves as continuous sources of stress. This realization not only intensifies the perception of inadequacy when facing difficulties, but also reinforces the feeling of failure when not meeting socially anchored expectations, aggravating the impact on students' mental health and emotional well-being.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASPECTS PRESENT IN THE WORK AND ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENTS

Reconciling work and studies is a recurring challenge for many university students, especially those who need to work hard to meet academic and work demands. As illustrated in Graph 3, 43.1% of the participants stated that they do not have time to study at work, which reveals a significant difficulty in balancing responsibilities in both environments. In addition, 29.2% of students indicated that they are sometimes able to study at work, but not always, reflecting the inconstancy and difficulty of staying focused on studies while fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

**Graph 3:** At your job, do you have time to study the contents of the university or do you need to miss work to carry out academic activities?
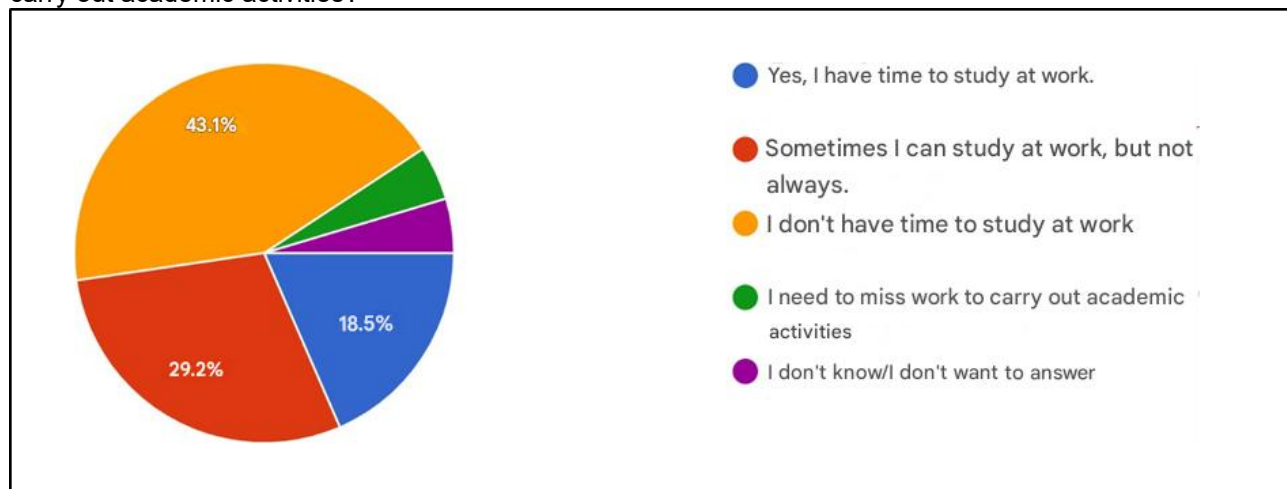


**Source:** Survey data

The data indicate that 40% of the participants do not have time to perform work tasks while they are at university, which reveals a significant difficulty in balancing responsibilities in both environments. This difficulty is reinforced by the fact that only 16.9% of students are occasionally able to balance their professional and academic activities, but not always, evidencing a constant state of tension between these two spheres.

In this study, the process of objectification makes visible the internal conflicts generated by these tensions. The difficulty of balancing academic and professional life, which could be an abstract idea of "lack of time", manifests itself in a concrete way in the inability to perform essential tasks in both environments. This internal conflict, exacerbated by objectification, can lead to psychological suffering, as pointed out by Christophe Dejours' theory of pleasure and suffering at work.

According to Dejours, pleasure at work is associated with the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that the individual experiences when overcoming challenges and using their skills effectively. However, when the demands of work (or study, in this case) exceed the individual's ability to cope with them, suffering emerges.

This suffering manifests itself not only in physical terms, such as fatigue and exhaustion, but also in psychological symptoms, such as stress and anxiety (Souza; Caldas; De Antoni, 2017).

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASPECTS PRESENT IN THE FAMILY AND WORK ENVIRONMENTS

As illustrated in Graph 2, repeated below, the survey revealed that 55.9% of respondents do not take work demands home, which may indicate an attempt to maintain a healthy separation between professional and personal life. However, 18.6% of the participants reported that they often need to be absent from family moments to resolve work-related issues, evidencing an overlap between these two domains.

**Graph 2:** In the family, do you take work demands and are absent from family moments to carry out work activities?
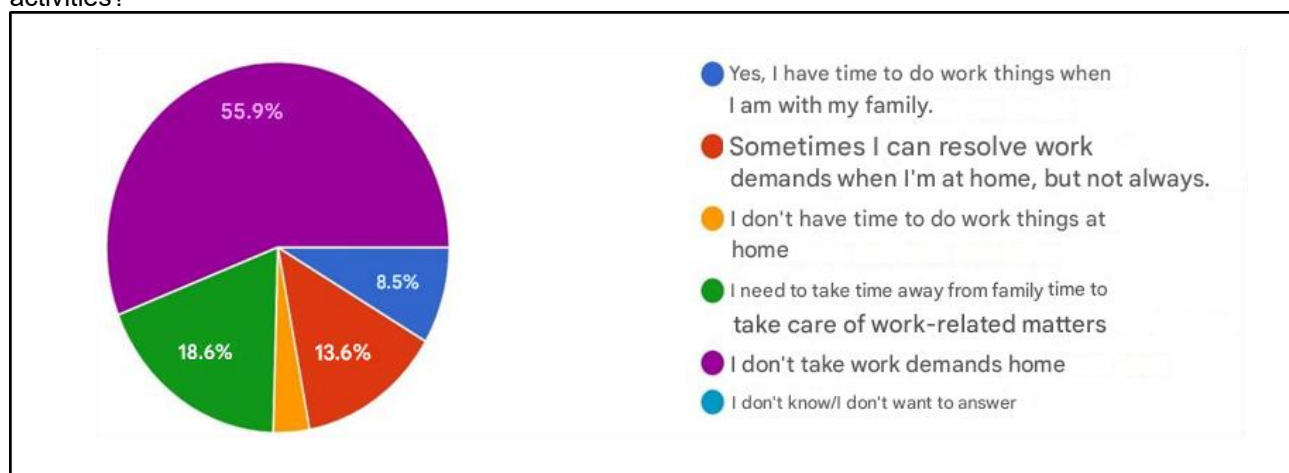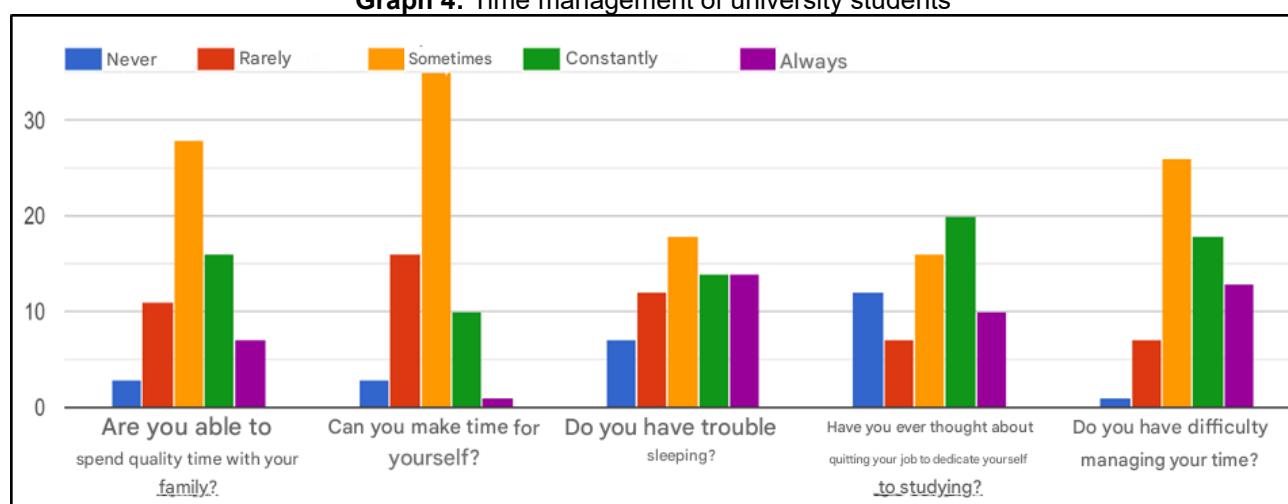


**Source:** Survey data

In the context of university students, the social representations associated with academic and professional success, as well as family responsibilities, can conflict, generating tensions that affect the well-being of individuals. The need to be absent from family moments to solve work issues, reported by a significant portion of the participants, shows the internalization of these conflicting social representations. On the one hand, there is the expectation of excellence and dedication to work, while on the other hand, there is the obligation to meet the demands and expectations of the family environment. When these representations conflict, students may feel pressured to prioritize one aspect over the other, which often results in stress and possible mental illness. Taking into account that the balance between family and work often becomes difficult to achieve, the internalization of conflicting expectations can create an environment conducive to stress and emotional overload, negatively impacting the health and well-being of students (Pereira et al., 2016).

## QUALITY OF LIFE

The quality of life of students is strongly influenced by the interaction between their academic, family and professional responsibilities. Returning to the WHO's concept of mental health, integrating several spheres and understanding the overcoming of stress in everyday life, it is perceived that many students are far from achieving this state of well-being. The survey showed that 89.2% of the participants consider the balance between personal and professional life as essential for quality of life and 86.2% indicated that physical and mental health is fundamental. However, 63% of the students reported difficulties in maintaining this balance, evidencing the overload of responsibilities they face.

The data collected, as illustrated in Graph 4, reinforce the complexity of the challenges faced by university students when trying to balance their various responsibilities. Notably, a large portion of participants reported frequent difficulties finding time for themselves and their families, with "sometimes" being the most common answer to both questions (about 35% and 45%, respectively). In addition, almost half of the students (47%) pointed out difficulties in managing their time, which may be directly related to the overload of commitments and academic pressure. These data corroborate the perception that work-life balance is essential for quality of life, but often difficult to achieve due to the lack of adequate support, both in the family and academic environments.

**Graph 4:** Time management of university students



**Source:** Survey data

When a student is absent from family moments to solve work issues, this concrete action reflects the objectification of social and academic pressures. Abstract expectations

of excellence and dedication to work and family become real, tangible demands, creating an internal conflict. Objectification, therefore, helps to understand how these students experience in practice the tensions between their responsibilities, leading to an environment conducive to stress, emotional overload, and even mental illness. This dynamic reveals how social pressures materialize in specific behaviors, such as the need to prioritize work to the detriment of family life, directly impacting the quality of life and mental health of students.

Baumann (2001), when discussing liquid modernity, describes a world in which social structures are increasingly fluid and less able to provide the necessary support for individuals to maintain a state of well-being. In the university context, this manifests itself in the lack of solid support networks and the constant pressure to adapt and thrive in multiple spheres. Liquid modernity contributes to an environment where social and academic expectations are high, but the support needed to meet them is insufficient. With 30.8% of participants rating the support offered by the educational institution as poor and 23.1% as very bad, it is clear that institutions also fail to provide the necessary support to help students maintain an adequate quality of life. This lack of support reflects the fragmentation of support structures that Baumann describes, where individuals are left to face significant pressures with limited resources. The lack of institutional support is a concern that directly affects students' ability to balance their various responsibilities. However, the willingness of 49.2% of participants to participate in university-offered activities to learn time management techniques suggests that there is an interest in improving this balance, provided that opportunities are adequately made available. Improving institutional support and promoting time management strategies can help students better balance their responsibilities and, consequently, improve their quality of life.

The research sought to answer the central question about the socio-emotional impacts faced by university students who accumulate their working hours with academic tasks and family care. The results indicate that this combination of responsibilities entails a series of emotional and psychological challenges, such as high levels of stress, anxiety, and conflicts in family relationships. The overload of functions affects the emotional balance and academic performance of students, often leading to mental illness.

On the other hand, the results also point out that family influences have a significant impact on the students' experience in higher education. Although the lack of financial and

emotional support, the pressure for academic and work performance, and family conflicts can intensify suffering, generating stress and academic difficulties, a supportive understanding family and work environment can transform difficulties into personal growth and fulfillment. The pleasure for the participants can be related to overcoming academic challenges and recognizing their efforts, which are valued both by themselves and by their families. Although suffering is present, the research suggests that the pleasure resulting from achievement and recognition can help in the development of resilience in the researched environments, work, family and university.

As a result, the socio-emotional impacts for the participants in this study are broad and complex, varying according to the quality of the support received and the individual ability to manage multiple demands. Adequate family support has the potential to transform suffering into an experience of growth and fulfillment, highlighting the importance of a sympathetic family, academic, and work environment for students' success and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

The research highlighted how the triple journey of university students, involving work, studies and family responsibilities, significantly impacts their mental health and emotional well-being. Overload of functions often results in stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, aggravated by insufficient adequate support at multiple levels. These challenges highlight the need for support networks that offer shelter and help in the management of demands.

Although difficulties predominate, overcoming challenges brings elements of personal and professional satisfaction. However, the maintenance of this balance remains fragile when effective interventions do not take place. Thus, the creation of institutional and family strategies becomes essential to promote healthy environments. It is suggested to deepen scientific investigations on mental health that seek solutions that transform academic experiences in less burdened trajectories.

Finally, the crucial importance of the psychology professional as a fundamental part in facing the challenges experienced by university students is highlighted. Psychology is essential in this context, as it offers tools and approaches that promote social-emotional well-being, strengthen resilience, and help students balance the multiple demands of their journeys. Through strategies that encourage socio-emotional strengthening and personal

development, psychologists play an educational role in building support networks, creating conditions for higher education students to achieve balance and well-being in their various responsibilities, in addition to opening space for actions that promote mental health, guide to balanced family life,  as well as success in work and academic environments.

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