

# The purpose of nursing job in a day-to-day professional view

**RESUMO** | Objetivo: Identificar quais os sentidos do trabalho atribuídos às enfermeiras em suas rotinas diárias de atuação. Método: A abordagem do estudo apresentou-se de forma qualitativa e, a coleta de dados, procedeu mediante entrevistas individuais com nove participantes no período de abril de 2019. As categorias de análise foram compostas no eixo dos sentidos do trabalho e seus seis constructos (utilidade social, oportunidades de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento, autonomia, cooperação e relacionamento com os demais colaboradores). Resultados: Os seis constructos foram identificados e correlacionados com a rotina de trabalho de cada profissional. Os resultados indicaram que o sentido do trabalho para cada profissional possui características polissêmicas e, muitas vezes, confrontantes. Conclusão: Esta pesquisa contribui com as discussões a respeito da sensibilização dos profissionais enfermeiros quanto aos sentidos do trabalho e a essência do cuidado à profissão.

**Descritores:** Educação Permanente em Saúde; Sentidos do Trabalho; Enfermagem.

**ABSTRACT** | Objective: Identify the meanings of work attributed to nurses in their daily work routines. Methodology: The study approach was presented in a qualitative way and data collection proceeded through individual interviews with nine participants. The analysis categories were composed in the work senses axis and its six constructs (social utility, learning and development opportunities, autonomy, cooperation and relationship with other employees). Results: The six constructs were identified and correlated with the work routine of each professional. The results indicated that the meaning of work for each professional has polysemic and often confronting characteristics. Considerations: This research contributes to discussions regarding the awareness of professional nurses about the meanings of work and the essence of care for the profession.

**Keywords:** Continuing Health Education; Directions of Work; Nursing

**RESUMEN** | Objetivo: Identificar los significados del trabajo atribuidos al enfermero en sus rutinas laborales diarias. Metodología: El enfoque del estudio se presentó de forma cualitativa y la recolección de datos se realizó a través de entrevistas individuales con nueve participantes. Las categorías de análisis se compusieron en el eje sentidos del trabajo y sus seis constructos (utilidad social, oportunidades de aprendizaje y desarrollo, autonomía, cooperación y relación con otros empleados). Resultados: Se identificaron los seis constructos y se correlacionaron con la rutina de trabajo de cada profesional. Los resultados indicaron que el significado del trabajo para cada profesional tiene características polisémicas y muchas veces enfrentadas. Consideraciones: Esta investigación contribuye a las discusiones sobre la conciencia de los profesionales de enfermería sobre los significados del trabajo y la esencia del cuidado para la profesión.

**Palabras claves:** Educación Continuada en Salud; Direcciones de trabajo; Enfermería.

**Ana Claudia Delfini Capistrano de Oliveira**

PhD in Political Sociology, Professor, Itajaí (SC).

ORCID: 0000-0002-7154-9020

**Mayara Ana da Cunha Kersten**

Doctor in Education, Teacher, Itajaí (SC).

ORCID: 0000-0002-6460-5207

**Rafaella Rebello**

Master in Education, Nurse, Teacher, Coordinator of the Health Axis of the National Service for Commercial Learning (SENAC), Itajaí (SC).

ORCID: 0000-0002-8684-5981

**Sandy Aparecida Pereira**

Doctoral Student in Education, Professor, Porto Belo (SC).

ORCID: 0000-0001-7504-6765

**Tania Regina Raitz**

Doctor in Education, Teacher, Itajaí (SC).

ORCID: 0000-0002-4698-6077

**Received:** 10/12/2021

**Approved:** 07/01/2022

## INTRODUCTION

Nursing is recognized as a profession in the health area that has in its essence the care for the human being. There are multiple conditions that involve the work of this professional, in which a comprehensive area of expertise allows him to develop his skills and abilities required in various health sectors. These attributions are based on the axes of assistance, teaching, research and management, provided for in the Professional Practice Law No. 7,498 of June 25, 1986. (1)

Deep transformations occurred in the labor market from the year 1990, especially due to the new methodology

of its organization, with the productive restructuring and new technological advances, such as cybernetics, computerization and the internet. Such changes are part of the globalization process, which provoked new demands on the profile of professionals from different areas and their professional practices.

Work, therefore, is "a process that simultaneously alters nature and self-transforms the working being itself". (2) The meaning of work is "a personal production resulting from the individual apprehension of collective meanings, in everyday experiences". (3)

The meanings of work refer to different values and conceptions about it. Currently, studies on the meanings of work have a multidisciplinary scope, from different theoretical points of view, in a multidimensional, dynamic psychological construct resulting from

the interaction of different variables. (4) There are six constructs that determine the meaning of work (5): 1) social utility; 2) learning and development opportunities; 3) autonomy; 4) cooperation and relationships with colleagues; 5) recognition and; 6) moral righteousness. Some authors emphasize the enriching possibility of studying the six constructs of the meanings of work in other areas, which reinforces the need for new studies, including in the area of Nursing. (6)

In everyday nursing, we can verify these dimensions of the six constructs interacting with each other and, considering the scientific and social relevance of Nursing work in health services. Therefore, the guiding question on which the research was based was: what is the meaning of work for nurses at the children's hospital?

#### METHODS

A qualitative methodology was used to analyze the meanings of work attributed by nurses who worked in a hospital in the southern region of Brazil, constituting, therefore, an exploratory descriptive study. Data collection took place through documental survey, application of a questionnaire for socio-economic survey of professionals and individual semi-structured interviews with the participants, agreed between them and the institution, through a pre-booking schedule. The ethical aspects of research involving human beings were observed, following the guidelines of Resolution n. 466/2012, from the National Health Council and was approved by the local Research Ethics Committee (under number 3,097,649, CAAE: 008113318.5.0000.0120).

The research was carried out in a reference children's hospital in the region of Foz do Rio Itajaí Açú, located in the southern region of Brazil. The interviewees' inclusion criteria were: all professional nurses who worked at the



In everyday nursing, we can verify these dimensions of the six constructs interacting with each other and, considering the scientific and social relevance of Nursing work in health services. Therefore, the guiding question on which the research was based was: what is the meaning of work for nurses at the children's hospital?



institution for at least one month and professionals who did not comply with this minimum time were not included in the research (exclusion criterion).

The definition of questions included in the interview about the meanings of work to nurses were predetermined based on the six previously described constructs (5) (social utility; learning and development opportunities; autonomy; cooperation and relationship with colleagues; recognition and; moral rectitude) and, from then on, a questionnaire with seven open questions was developed, as follows: 01) What is work for you?; 02) What is your perception regarding the usefulness of your work for people?; 03) What has marked your life in terms of learning opportunities at work? Give us some examples. 04) Comment how you see your autonomy in your work. 05) How do you experience cooperation and relationships with your co-workers?; 06) What is your perception on the issue of recognition of your work?; 07) How do you experience the ethical dimensions in your work environment?.

The interviews, carried out by the researcher in charge in April 2019, covered the morning, afternoon and night shifts and were conducted in appropriate places within the hospital itself. The nurses' identities were preserved and named as E01 (Nurse 01), E02 (Nurse 02) and so on. We consider it pertinent to discuss the meanings of work in the pre-Covid-19 pandemic phase, being one of the justifications for submitting such a study, allowing it to contrast with current realities and other studies on the subject.

#### RESULTS

The children's hospital in which the professionals worked provides care for children from zero to fourteen years of age through the SUS, or through agreements (private and private) and is classified as a medium-sized institution, with

93 beds for hospitalization. In total, 17 nursing professionals worked at the hospital in question, in the following sectors: Care Unit A and B; surgery Center; Emergency Room; intensive care unit; hospital infection control committee and; Nursing management in the morning, afternoon and evening shifts. After individual presentation of the research and the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICF) and the Consent to Participation, nine professionals agreed to participate in the research.

The results indicated a socioeconomic profile of professionals aged up to 40 years old ( $n = 6$ ) (ranging from 33 to 50 years old), female gender ( $n = 9$ ), most of them married ( $n = 6$ ), white ethnic self-denomination ( $n = 6$ ), residents of Itajaí ( $n = 5$ ), with an average of two children who only studied. The age profile of the nurses interviewed in our research corroborates the literature (age range from 30 to 40 years). (7) The predominance of female professionals is in accordance with the latest database of the Federal Nursing Council, which identified 86% of female professionals and only 13% male (8), not far from the data presented.

The predominance of recently graduated professionals in our study corroborates the literature (9) (average training time of seven years) and the search for specializations denote their concern with improving their skills.

The presence of two employment relationships was remarkable ( $n = 5$ ) and most of the interviewees had a monthly income of one to three minimum wages ( $n = 4$ ). According to some authors, the presence of a second employment relationship is justified due to low salary levels and the search for better living conditions. (10) The salary profile of the nurses interviewed is in agreement with data from the IBGE, which indicates an average monthly salary of R\$ 2,649.00 for professionals in the education, health and social services sectors. (11)

## DISCUSSION

### First Construct - Social Utility of Work

When we ask the question "What is work for you?" The restlessness was present, mainly, in the body expression of the nurses. In a study involving 14,700 individuals in eight countries, they were interviewed and asked this same question, and the answers generated positive, negative or neutral conceptions. (12) The central ideas of the responses of some interviewed nurses hired from a children's hospital located in the southern region of Brazil related to question 01) "What is work for you?" are described below:

[...] it is an activity where I exercise some, some form of... how can I say... to solve an issue, some situation. (E01)

[...] It is to raise awareness of what we need on a daily basis with ethics and respect. (E03)

[...]work is the practice of both practical and technical activities and especially when we learn at graduation. (E05)

[...] work in the first place is occupation [...] there is no way to acquire something if you are not working. (E06)

[...] work is a responsibility [...] there are people who think it's just money. (E07)

[...] it is the possibility that I have to enrich my knowledge, the possibility that I have to relate to others [...] it makes me feel professionally fulfilled, right? (E09)

The meanings of the work were mixed in the diversity of the speeches: in the same subject, several meanings

appear. The attribute of work as an activity for sustenance, survival and income was also present.

In this socio economic scenario, where women need to remain in more than one employment relationship to have an increase in income, we must ask: If this category had good salaries, would this work bias linked to income exist? Survey participants (13) understand the work through its instrumental and financial aspect, being one of the first aspects pointed out. However, in a similar study (14), the financial issue was mentioned by all the participants, always accompanied by another element that complements the work, however, none of the interviewees related the perception of low remuneration to the lack of meaning of work.

The central ideas of the answers of some nurses interviewed regarding question 02) "What is your perception regarding the usefulness of your work for people?" are described below:

[...] I think it's fundamental because here we welcome children very well, being a critical sector of fear, insecurity [...] it's the first time I work with children and I really like it, I'm even thinking about doing pediatrics. (E01)

[...] [...] It is very important in relation not only to the team and more to the patients, they are here because they need it and I always have to give my best. (E04)

[...] management yes, in the management of the unit, this issue of bed management mainly. (E05)

[...] I do not know how to answer. (E06)

[...] The usefulness of my work in my perception for people is for their well-being, both individually and collectively [...] in the broad-

dest sense, we go beyond health care, right, we take care of the person. (E09)

The nurses interviewed in our study define the “Social Utility of Work” construct as important, with consequences for humanization, reception and recognition. Recovery, protection, prevention and the well-being provided for each patient attended is clearly mentioned by E09's answer.

### Second Construct - Learning and Development Opportunities

Learning and development are presented by some authors (14) as important in the individual dimension in the construction of the meanings of work and, that meaningless work does not explore the potential and there is no growth of those who exercise it. The central ideas of the responses of the nine nurses interviewed regarding question 03) “What has marked your life in terms of learning opportunities at work? Give us some examples.” The most striking speeches of some nurses are described below:

[...] I always had to look, right, nothing came like that and it wasn't even offered, you know, I think that the opportunities are better now than before, when I graduated [...] there wasn't this range of graduate studies that you have today. (E01)

[...] When I graduated I came here from another state just to work and started to work in the rescue [...] I worked 10 years in this rescue so for me it was a learning experience. (E02)

[...] the mothers' pain marks me a lot, when they arrive here with the child very sick, that face, I don't even know how to put the words, asking for help in the look and



*[...] the mothers' pain marks me a lot, when they arrive here with the child very sick, that face, I don't even know how to put the words, asking for help in the look and then leaving here with that smile and thanks, this is very gratifying, it marks people's lives. (E03)*



then leaving here with that smile and thanks, this is very gratifying, it marks people's lives. (E03)

[...] as a nurse it's my first job. What stood out in the other institution where I worked (as a nursing technician) is that there was a lot of continuing education there. (E05)

[...] today I am a Nurse but I have been a Nursing technician for 20 years. So when I started my career at the hospital, then there began a learning opportunity that helped me a lot during the journey for me to get to college and have a little more understanding, because I was already inserted into the work process. (E09)

When we asked nurses about learning opportunities at work during their professional careers, many cite institutions that they have already worked as a reference and the college itself.

### Third construct - Autonomy

The decision-making power and problem solving linked to autonomy is essential in teamwork and in the professional practice of nurses. The central ideas of the answers of some nurses interviewed regarding question 04) “Comment on how you see your autonomy in your work.” are described below:

[...] I have autonomy, I really like working here [...] in other jobs, not always, it was very different. (E01)

[...] I have it because they leave it open for us to seek the resolution of problems and also pass our knowledge on to the employees. (E03)

[...] the morning shift is what I have lived with since the beginning. I have more autonomy in the morning, I live

with them longer, but with the afternoon shift it won't be much different. (E05)

[...] it is important, but all (other professionals) understand that there is a hierarchy [...] I don't need to tell them what to do, they respect me, I have no problem with that. (E06)

[...] at work, we are managers and not bosses [...] autonomy comes along with leadership, your activity, attitude, responsibility and, above all, with scientific technical knowledge during university. (E09)

Autonomy is the construct that gives work the ability to leave a good margin of freedom, independence and discretion to the person to determine the ways to perform it, bringing with it the feeling of responsibility for carrying out the tasks, that is, the work must invoke the decision-making capacity of the person. (12).

#### Fourth Construct - Cooperation and Relationship with Colleagues

Teamwork is part of the daily routine of Nursing and allows contact with different areas of health, constituting a multiprofessional and interdisciplinary team. Directly, the Nurse is the leader of the Nursing team, which is made up of Nursing technicians and assistants. We can observe the answers of some professionals below regarding question 05) "How do you experience cooperation and relationships with your co-workers?"

[...] Nursing is a more complicated area to work [...] we don't always find flowers on the way, but I think teamwork is what makes the thing successful. [...] you have to have a bond of respect. (E02)

[...] excellent, I have a very good

team, you know, they have respect for me, I try to have respect for them. (E03)

[...] I have good cooperation because most of the employees already have a good time here. (E05)



Teamwork is part of the daily routine of Nursing and allows contact with different areas of health, constituting a multiprofessional and interdisciplinary team



[...] a little difficult to work in a team because each person has a different way, a different character, a different attitude [...] In the work process, things don't always happen as we expect, it's never perfect, but when we work together and not alone, I think the end

result is positive. (E09)

Cooperation and relationships with co-workers are not always serene in the testimonies of the professionals interviewed (E02, E09). Relationships at work allow us to live different experiences and maintain social and affective bonds: they are encounters and disagreements in the construction of our professional trajectory.

#### Fifth Construct - Recognition

Regarding the "recognition" construct, different reports were observed and not all interviewees have their work recognized, either by the institution, family, patient or other professionals. Regarding question 06) "What is your perception on the issue of recognition of your work?" Some of the professionals' statements are described below:

[...] I believe it is still very flawed [...] no one comes to you and says wow, how good your work is, no one does that [...] a good attitude has to be reinforced and valued [...] makes a difference, the person works better. (E01)

[...] in general, in no institution, I mean in general, I think nurses are not well recognized. (E02)

[...] I expected more, but today I am satisfied with the few smiles and thanks I get. (E03)

[...] I expected more, but today I am satisfied with the few smiles and thanks I receive. (E03)

[...] it is not always recognized [...] we, as nurses, wanted it to be more, right, I would like the salary to be higher, to have more benefits, participation in the health plan. (E07)

It is possible to observe through

the nurses' statements that social usefulness is often conditioned to professional recognition: the professional feels useful when there is a counterpart from the institution, the patient, family or team in relation to the merit of their work. We found different positions of the nurses, some did not always feel recognized (E01, E02, E03, E07).

#### Sixth Construct - Moral Righteousness

The ethical dimensions have important developments in interpersonal relationships and in the work of Nursing itself. When asked about these issues in the work environment, the strangeness faced by question 07) "How do you experience the ethical dimensions in your work environment?" was present:

[...] it's a very complicated issue and you have to work hard. This continuing education is essential on top of the ethical part [...] it's no use having a professional who knows all the techniques but who doesn't have this ethical part involved. (E02)

[...] still has a lot to improve, one of the points to be improved. (E04)

[...] so this issue of ethics is very active in the health area [...] it needs to be applied at all times. It's not just with the other, right, with the patient that we understand, but with the co-worker as well. Because being ethical is when you are alone and you know you are doing something wrong and you are not doing it, because you know it is wrong. (E09)

In their unanimity, the nurses report the lack of ethics on the part of some professionals: The ethical dimension in the construction of the meanings of work is an activity that is part of the development of a society.

#### CONCLUSION

Using the six constructs of the mea-

nings of work (social utility; opportunities for learning and development; autonomy; cooperation and relationship with colleagues; recognition and; mo-

“  
We ended this research leaving as an intentional proposal the exploration of the meanings of work in new scenarios in the area of Nursing: from basic health units to high-complexity hospital sectors; from teaching in universities to technical courses, as a way of keeping alive these reflections that bring the essence of care to the profession

ral rectitude) nine nurses with different professional and personal trajectories were interviewed in this study. The professionals' reports reveal that many of them started their experience in Nur-

sing through a technical course to later graduate in Higher Education.

The meaning of work for these nurses had polysemic characteristics. Nurses recognize the social utility of their work in the context of patient care, as an activity that benefits others and generates added value. Opportunities for learning and development are the construct closely linked to day-to-day experiences and reveal that they were interested in developing new skills that could be applied in their work routines, and the interviewees showed interest in the challenges related to this construct. Regarding autonomy, nurses are able to carry out their work with this principle in its entirety, despite the fact that many have worked for less than six months at the institution.

The construct of cooperation and relationship with colleagues showed an experience at work permeated by difficulties in dealing with people in the team, due to different positions taken. However, nurses recognize that multi-disciplinary work and the harmonious bond between all are essential in the development of work in the health area. Regarding recognition, we had different reports, where not all of them have their work recognized, whether by the institution, family, patient or other professionals. Many of the difficulties reported are related to the constructs of ethical dimensions at work. Concern about the lack of ethical support in certain activities and/or daily postures taken by some professionals was present in the speeches.

We ended this research leaving as an intentional proposal the exploration of the meanings of work in new scenarios in the area of Nursing: from basic health units to high-complexity hospital sectors; from teaching in universities to technical courses, as a way of keeping alive these reflections that bring the essence of care to the profession.

## References

- 1 Brasil. Lei No 7.498, de 25 de Junho de 1986. Dispõe sobre a regulamentação do exercício da enfermagem, e dá outras providências. Brasília;1986.
- 2 Antunes A. Os sentidos do trabalho: Ensaio sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho. Coimbra: CES/Almedina; 2013.
- 3 Tolfo SR, Piccinini Valmíria. Sentidos e significados do trabalho: explorando conceitos, variáveis e estudos empíricos brasileiros. *Psicol. Soc.* [online]. 2007, 19;pp.38-46. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-71822007000400007>.
- 4 Sá JGS, Lemos AHC. Sentido do Trabalho: Análise da Produção Científica Brasileira. *Revista ADM.MADE*.2017, 21(3):21-39. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21714/2237-51392017v21n3p021039>
- 5 Rodrigues AL, Barrichello A, Morin E. Os sentidos do trabalho para profissionais de enfermagem: um estudo multimétodos. *Rev. adm. empres.* 2016, 56 (2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-759020160206>
- 6 Schweitzer L, Goncalves J, Tolfo SR, Silva N. Bases epistemológicas sobre sentido(s) e significado(s) do trabalho em estudos nacionais. *Rev. Psi: Org e Trab R. Eletr. Psico.* 2016, 16(1):103-116.
- 7 Quintanilha FS. Programa de educação permanente e desenvolvimento organizacional e profissional de enfermagem no Hospital Universitário Onofre Lopes (HUOL) [dissertação]. João Pessoa (PB): Universidade Federal da Paraíba; 2014.
- 8 Conselho Federal de Enfermagem, Fundação Osvaldo Cruz. Pesquisa Perfil da Enfermagem no Brasil. Brasília: 2013.
- 9 Reisdorfer AP. Programa de Educação Permanente em Saúde para a equipe de Enfermagem da UTI adulto: cuidado ao paciente no pós operatório de cirurgia cardíaca [dissertação]. Porto Alegre (RS): Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos; 2016.
- 10 Lima JHV, Ésther AB. Transições, prazer e dor no trabalho de enfermagem. *Rev. adm. Empres.* 2001 41(3):20-30. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-75902001000300003>
- 11 Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. Síntese de indicadores sociais: uma análise das condições de vida da população brasileira. Rio de Janeiro; 2016.
- 12 Morin E. Os sentidos do trabalho. *Rev. adm. Empres.* 2001, 41(3):8-19. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-75902001000300002>.
- 13 Pereira EF. Sentidos do trabalho para servidores públicos federais afastados do ambiente laboral por estresse [dissertação]. Florianópolis (SC): Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina; 2014.
- 14 Morin E, Tonelli MJ, Pliopas ALV. O trabalho e seus sentidos. *Psicol. soc.* (Online). 2007, 19(1): 47-56. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-71822007000400008>.