Article

Interventions in a humanistic-phenomenological occupational health clinic: a study in public universities in the northeast of Brazil

Intervenções em clínica humanista-fenomenológica do trabalho: estudo em universidades públicas nordestinas

Intervenciones en la clínica humanístico-fenomenológica del trabajo: un estudio en universidades públicas del Nordeste de Brasil

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Highlights

Occupational health clinics are social clinics that promote the expansion of the worker's power to act.

Faced with precarious labor conditions and relationships, collective action is needed to promote mental health.

Interventional phenomenological research with university groups promotes teachers' mental health.

Abstract

The aim was to describe group processes in a humanistic-phenomenological occupational health clinic, discussing the meanings of the experiences lived and the results obtained by teachers and postgraduate students from public universities in the northeast of Brazil who participated in an interventional phenomenological study. The method used was collaborative hermeneutics. Each group met weekly for two hours. The instruments used were: Expression of Meaning (a brief written account by the participant after a meeting); records in medical records and logbooks produced by the facilitator. It was mainly understood that, for the participants: the university can generate illness because it is contradictory and conflicting; there was recognition of a life beyond work, awareness of attempts at self-care to minimize impacts on mental health, questions about personal responsibility in the face of reality and the need to break paradigms; and the intervention groups were humanized, welcoming spaces that fostered the expansion of bonds. We therefore recognize the importance of these groups for promoting mental health in public universities.

Resumo | Resumen

Keywords

Work. Education professionals. Educational institutions. Qualitative research. Phenomenology.

| Introduction

The *Cínica Humanista-Fenomenológica do Trabalho* [Humanistic-Phenomenological Occupational Health Clinic] (CHFT) is based on the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and is influenced by some concepts of Carl Ranson Rogers (1902-1987). Recently, its proponent theoretically systematized the concepts of this approach and the method used: collaborative hermeneutics (Macêdo, 2024).

For the author, working implies that the person imposes their mark on the world and appropriates their modes of subjectivation (being, feeling, thinking and acting); the meaning that social reality has for the subject occupies a central place in the relation between subjectivity and work; and the contemporary worker in the culture of high performance may not allow themselves to assume their weaknesses and suffer for fear of being excluded. They can face the unbearable reality of existential suffering, dealing with fierce competitiveness, the failure of bonds and solidarity, and being doomed to a collective inability to find meaning in their work. Occupied with reaching ever higher levels of productivity, the subject may be afraid of failure, impose self-blame, feel isolated, silence their suffering, and not seek help, even resorting to medicalizing this suffering as if it were an illness (Macêdo, 2018).

Given this scenario, the main duties of a psychologist in CHFT are: facilitating interventional group processes with workers who share the same social reality, enabling spaces for listening and speaking, promoting solicitous and welcoming alteritarian encounters, as well as allowing historical rescue, broadening consciousness, and care that instigates the production of new meanings. To this end, supervision by a more qualified professional is essential, as the clinician, who is also a worker, opens up to a dialogical intersubjective experience and discusses meanings, values, and interests that can also affect that professional. Therefore, "it must critically assume its preconceptions, revise its tradition and understand its actual history" (Macêdo, 2024, p. 103).

It is believed that these interventional processes are significant for promoting change in the face of the contemporary culture of high performance and the precariousness of work situations. In these scenarios, precarious workers have emerged, individualism has been exacerbated, competitiveness has intensified, and human subjectivity has been hijacked (Macêdo, 2020). The precarious worker may therefore be afraid, anxious, and/or fearful of the possibility of exclusion, going through the process named by Linhardt (2009) as subjective precariousness, feeling unable to master their work and cope with the demands, and avoiding taking physical and psychological risks.

Several authors (e.g., Hoffmann et al., 2019; Macêdo & Falcão, 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2020; Romanini, 2021; Souza et al., 2017) have studied job insecurity, workers' mental health, and/or subjective precariousness in Brazilian public universities, which have been affected by the "importation" of the managerial model of private

organizations and have emphasized neoliberal meritocratic logic, which has intensified individualism, competitiveness, overtime, and academic productivity.

Faced with quantitative metrics from the institutions that govern and evaluate their work, teachers can feel pressured to increase the amount of scientific production and guidance at the postgraduate level. Without an increase in their working hours, they can subordinate themselves to capitalist logic (Rodrigues et al., 2020), value the extension of their currículo (resume) Lattes, want to publish in highly qualified and competitive journals, and devalue colleagues who do not achieve such feats (Romanini, 2021), which implies physical, affective and cognitive risks (Hoffmann et. al., 2019).

It is also worth remembering that, while in universities this scenario alienates colleagues, often creating fertile ground for moral harassment, intellectual vanity, the weakening of collective struggles, and the constant need for individual coping strategies (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Romanini, 2021); st the government level, there are insufficient incentives for teachers, who often face social stigma due to the low status of their profession (Souza et al., 2017).

This situation also affects, for example, postgraduate students, since at this level of education in Brazil, students, as well as teachers, are under a lot of pressure to be productive, making them more prone to mental disorders than the general population, a reality that constitutes a serious public health problem (Campos et al., 2022).

According to the National Association of Postgraduate Students (ANPG, 2018), which conducted a study at the University of Brasilia, the postgraduate scenario in our country is characterized by excessive pressure and loneliness, which are demotivating factors for students. The study revealed that 90% of these subjects reported feeling anxious; 71.6% felt discouraged; 59.1% stated they had low motivation; 73% believed that factors inherent to the university discouraged them from continuing with the course, with 55% of these being associated with interpersonal relationships. It is therefore necessary to intervene in this context, creating dialogic spaces to deconstruct the meritocratic logic and transform the reality of teachers and students, especially regarding their mental health (Campos et al., 2020; Macêdo, 2023; Macêdo et al., 2021a; Macêdo & Falcão, 2024).

Given the above, the question was posed: in the context of precarious working relationships and conditions in public higher education institutions, how can the clinical practice of CHFT enhance mental health and quality of life for teachers and postgraduates? Given this research problem, therefore, this article aims to describe interventions carried out in CHFT in groups conducted with teachers and postgraduate students from public universities in the northeast of Brazil, as well as to discuss the meanings of the experiences lived by the group participants and the results obtained in the group processes.

Methodology

The research was submitted to *Plataforma Brasil* under CAAE 73124423.9.0000.5537 and approved by the Central Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, through opinion No. 6,299,164, dated 09/13/2023. Following this approval, the study was publicized on social media and via email to managers, coordinators, teachers, and postgraduate students at public universities in the northeast who provided a letter of consent, intending to reach potential participants. After contacting those interested in participating, groups were formed based on the availability of days and times for potential participants and previously scheduled rooms in the Integrated Subsystem for the Health Care of Public Servants (SIASS), whose units were located in different states in the Northeast, where the research was conducted.

This was a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, phenomenological, interventional, and collaborative study. It focused on the production of shared meanings among people in the productive context of public universities in the northeast of Brazil, and it was up to the researcher, as a group facilitator, to follow the path of a phenomenological understanding based on the analysis of intersubjective experiences shared in group processes (Macêdo, 2015, 2024).

The method used was collaborative hermeneutics, through which a psychologist articulates clinical action and research, promoting a dialogical space among subjects inserted in a common social reality for sharing experiences, reframing existential suffering, producing new meanings, and jointly constructing coping strategies (Macêdo, 2015, 2020, 2024; Macêdo et al., 2021b). The research was therefore conducted simultaneously with intervention groups involving teachers and postgraduate students, facilitated by the researcher.

Despite widespread publicity and the registration of professors and postgraduate students from seven public universities in the northeast (five federal and two state), only 38 people registered. However, 20 subjects effectively participated in the first meeting, comprising four groups: G1 (five teachers and one postgraduate student), G2 (four postgraduates), G3, and G4 (five teachers). However, for the purposes of the research results, only the data from G1 and G2 will be considered in this article, as the G3 and G4 processes were affected by the national strike of teachers and administrative technicians from several Brazilian federal universities, which took place randomly between March and July 2024 and led to a standstill and/or consecutive absences by several participants, preventing the processes from being read.

These groups included permanent faculty members from undergraduate and postgraduate programs at public universities, regardless of gender, age, length of service, program, or degree; and *Lato* (similar to a graduate program) and *Stricto Sensu* (similar to a graduate degree) postgraduate students from public universities, regardless of gender, age, and level/type of program.

Each group meeting took place weekly and lasted two hours. G1 had eight registrations and six permanent participants, all from federal universities, three of whom had been referred by SIASS with a history of absence from work due to depression. One of the participants was an administrative technician in education and a doctoral student. The process took place over seven meetings. G2 had nine registrations and four actual participants, from both federal and state universities, all postgraduates, only one *Lato Sensu*. The process took place over four meetings, due to some of the participants' difficulties in extending the process over more meetings, such as traveling to collect data and selecting jobs.

Before starting the first meeting of each group, the participants voluntarily signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF). We attempted to utilize devices suggested by Macêdo (2024) to facilitate the dynamics of the meetings, always with flexibility, depending on the specificities of each group process and the decisions made in supervision, which took place between meetings.

Throughout the processes, to discuss the possible results achieved, we used the Expression of Meaning (Versão de Sentido [VS]), an instrument proposed by Amatuzzi (2008). This instrument consists of a brief report, written immediately after a meeting, in which the participant records what was most significant to them. When read, an Expression of Meaning (VS) encourages those involved to discuss the meaning of an experience until they reach a shared understanding of the meanings they have experienced.
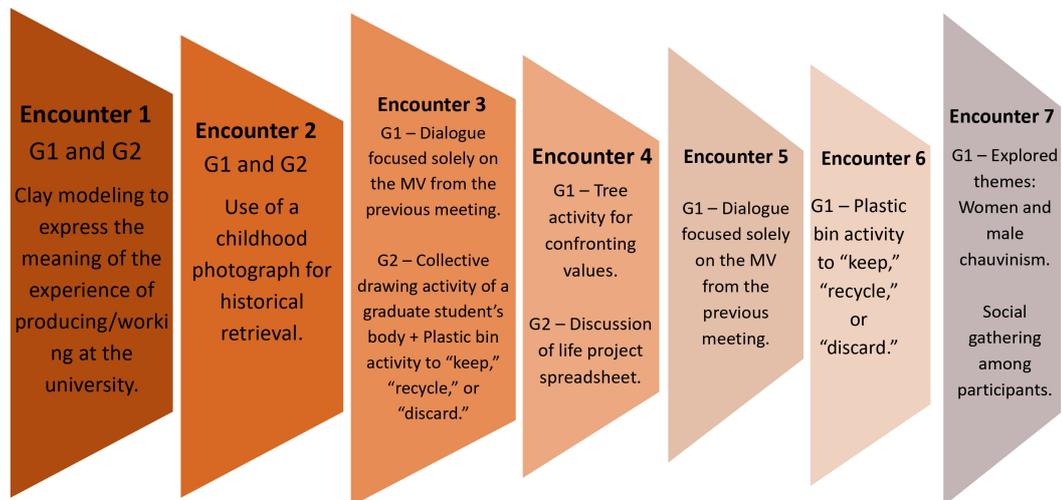
The researcher (facilitator) then asked each participant to write down their Expression of Meaning (VS) at the end of each meeting and read it aloud at the next meeting. After the first meeting, the rest of the time was divided into: reading and exploring the Expression of Meaning (VS); the day's activities; in the final five minutes, writing the other VS, which was read at the next meeting (successively, until the last meeting, when each person was asked to talk about their process in the group or read all their VS). The dialog sparked by the Expression of Meaning (VS) readings was the basis for understanding the process experienced by each participant and the group at each meeting, as well as the ongoing process experienced by each participant and the group (Macêdo, 2024).

The researcher also kept records of the group processes and the individual progress of the participants in each group, as prescribed by Resolutions 07/2003, 001/2009, and 06/2019 of the Federal Council of Psychology (CFP). In addition, they produced logbooks, discussing the processes involved in the groups, the intervention actions, the procedures used, and their personal/professional impressions, which complemented the main research instrument, the Expression of Meaning (VS), especially when a participant wrote only one word to convey the meaning of the meeting.

At the first meeting of each group, after signing the ICF, a coexistence contract was established, with rules written on cardboard (which was brought to all other meetings to be remembered): avoid cell phone use, punctuality (with a tolerance of up to 10 minutes late), attendance (limit of two absences for G1 and one absence

for G2), commitment to the process, respect for differences, non-judgment, confidentiality regarding the meetings, and silence to listen. Figure 1 shows the sequence of meetings with the respective devices used, according to the guidelines contained in Macêdo (2024):
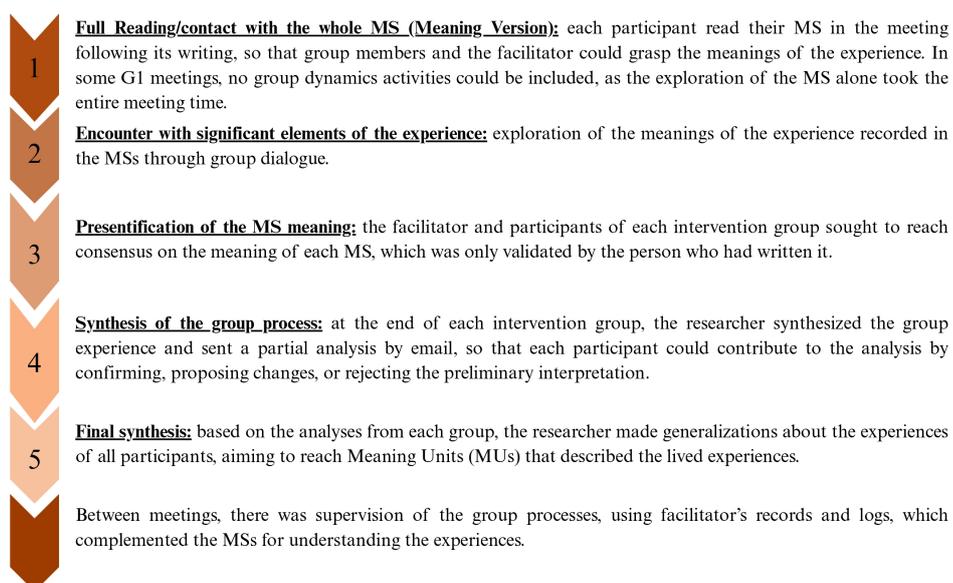
Figure 1
Sequence of meetings and devices used in G1 and G2

Encounter 1
G1 and G2

Clay modeling to express the meaning of the experience of producing/working at the university.

Encounter 2
G1 and G2

Use of a childhood photograph for historical retrieval.

Encounter 3
G1 – Dialogue focused solely on the MV from the previous meeting.

G2 – Collective drawing activity of a graduate student's body + Plastic bin activity to "keep," "recycle," or "discard."

Encounter 4
G1 – Tree activity for confronting values.

G2 – Discussion of life project spreadsheet.

Encounter 5
G1 – Dialogue focused solely on the MV from the previous meeting.

Encounter 6
G1 – Plastic bin activity to "keep," "recycle," or "discard."

Encounter 7
G1 – Explored themes: Women and male chauvinism.

Social gathering among participants.

Source: prepared by the authors.

The Expressions of Meaning (VS) were analyzed using the following steps (Macêdo, 2024):

Figure 2
Expressions of Meaning Analysis Steps

1. **Full Reading/contact with the whole MS (Meaning Version):** each participant read their MS in the meeting following its writing, so that group members and the facilitator could grasp the meanings of the experience. In some G1 meetings, no group dynamics activities could be included, as the exploration of the MS alone took the entire meeting time.

2. **Encounter with significant elements of the experience:** exploration of the meanings of the experience recorded in the MSs through group dialogue.

3. **Presentification of the MS meaning:** the facilitator and participants of each intervention group sought to reach consensus on the meaning of each MS, which was only validated by the person who had written it.

4. **Synthesis of the group process:** at the end of each intervention group, the researcher synthesized the group experience and sent a partial analysis by email, so that each participant could contribute to the analysis by confirming, proposing changes, or rejecting the preliminary interpretation.

5. **Final synthesis:** based on the analyses from each group, the researcher made generalizations about the experiences of all participants, aiming to reach Meaning Units (MUs) that described the lived experiences.

Between meetings, there was supervision of the group processes, using facilitator's records and logs, which complemented the MSs for understanding the experiences.

Source: prepared by the authors.

Results and discussion

To preserve the identity of the participants, pseudonyms referring to historical pioneers (G1) and medieval warriors (G2) were used, as they were facing impasses and challenges in the productive context, resisting the adversities of everyday academic life, just as those characters faced adversity with strength and resistance to the dominant and oppressive system of their times.

Below are two tables containing the sociodemographic data of the participants in the two groups, along with comments on the possible influence of this data on the relation between work, subjectivity, and mental health.

Table 1
Sociodemographic data of G1 participants

Pseu-donym	Age	Training*	Marital Status	Chil-dren	Who you live with	Years of work at the institution	Years in Teaching
Emma	54	Agricultural Sciences	Married	2	Husband and chil-dren	15	20
Frida[1]	43	Linguistics, Literature, and Arts	Divorced	-	Alone	10	20
Jane[2]	55	Applied Social Sci-ences	Divorced	1	Daugh-ter	15	-
Malala[1]	45	Humanities	Single	1	Parents and daughter	14	24
Tarsila[1]	50	Humanities	Divorced	1	Son	13	23
Teodoro	53	Humanities	Married	2	Wife and children	19	24

*According to the Capes classification of major areas.
[1] The person was absent from work due to depression.
[2] Postgraduate students, TAE employees.
Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 1 shows that female teachers participated in the survey in greater numbers, perhaps because women tend to perceive the impact of work on their mental health more than men, as they are more exposed to gender inequalities and injustices (Hoffmann et al., 2017) or participate more in studies focusing on mental health and teaching (Hoffmann et al., 2019; Lima & Poloski, 2024).

There is also a similar number of children to that found in the study by Silva et al. (2019) conducted with female university professors who are mothers (one to two children), although the data in Table 1 contrast in terms of marital status, age, and length of teaching experience, since the majority of that study was with married women with an average age of 36 and 5 to 10 years of teaching experience. In

contrast, the majority of women in the present study were divorced, with an average age of 50 or older, and more than 20 years of teaching experience.

It is interesting to note in Table 1 that divorced female teachers over the age of 50 still lived with their children, denoting the reconciliation of the roles of worker, housewife, and mother, which is common in Brazilian society, which is predominantly patriarchal and imbued with structural machismo. This is a risk factor for the mental health of these workers, as pointed out in the studies by Castro (2021), Macêdo (2024), and Macêdo et al. (2021a). It is worth noting that three of the participants were referred by SIASS for having developed depression and consequent absence from work, corroborating how Common Mental Disorders (CMD) have been the main illnesses affecting university teachers (Campos et al., 2020; Lima & Poloski, 2024).

Table 2
Sociodemographic data of G2 participants

Pseudonym	Age	Training*	Marital Status	Children	Who you live with	Postgraduate level	Postgraduate Semester
Arthur	28	Humanities	Single	0	Alone	Doctorate	5th
Brynjar	26	Health Sciences	Single	0	Alone	Doctorate	4th
Joan of Arc	32	Humanities	Married	3	Husband and children	Specialisation	1st
Sigmund	24	Agricultural Sciences	Single	1	Mother	Master's Degree	1st

*According to the Capes classification of major areas.
Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 2 shows a higher participation of single men, with an average age above 20, enrolled in *Stricto Sensu* postgraduate programs and halfway through their studies at federal universities. Given the age of these young postgraduates, it appears that there has been an uninterrupted continuity in their academic life between completing their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The research by Artes (2018), which aimed to highlight social markers of gender and race in Brazilian postgraduate education and was based on the gender parity index, found that, in recent decades, parity between men and women has been gradually becoming disproportionate, especially in the Northeast, contrary to basic, elementary, and higher education, where there are more women than men. The author pointed out that, despite all the progress, postgraduate studies in the Northeast have historically still been restricted compared to the Southeast and South, but that there are also more male postgraduate students and postgraduates in the Northeast.

On the other hand, the data in Table 2 also show that the only woman among the G2 participants is older than the men, married, and a mother. Considering what she revealed in the group, these data point to her difficulties in pursuing her career, mainly because she is an atypical mother. According to the results of the study by Aguiar and Pondé (2019), atypical motherhood alters the routine of women, some

of whom have to stop working and/or studying, compromising their professional and/or academic projects, as well as their mental health. In this sense, and in light of the research conducted by Artes (2018), the question remains whether, beyond the job market, there is also gender inequality or sexual division in Brazilian postgraduate academic life.

The group processes and the US understandings are described and discussed below, highlighted in bold italics.

Three participants attended the first G1 meeting. Teodoro modeled a smaller and a larger brain with the clay. He said that for him, producing at the university promotes the expansion of knowledge. Malala made a revolver and said: "To be at university is to live constantly with a gun to your head". She revealed that she could no longer stand "having to do things" (sic), bureaucracy, conflicts between colleagues, and the lack of sensitivity to the students' limiting social conditions, which she did not know how to help. Jane created several mathematical symbols to represent the amount she had invested in her doctorate.

The dialogue revolved around the impasses experienced during and after the pandemic, the power struggle, and the difficulty of witnessing the institution fading away and falling apart. They emphasized what each person did in this scenario. Teodoro said he cherished the sincere friendships he had formed at the institution over the past 20 years and enjoyed walking, running, and cooking. Malala said she was fragile, and Jane said she was looking for ways to practice self-care and preserve herself, although she believed that the changes also needed to be collective.

Given this, US1 – ***Awareness of self-care attempts to minimize impasses and impacts of the university on mental health*** – was understood, represented by Teodoro's Expression of Meaning (VS) ("I found the meeting very interesting I was able to talk about aspects that bothered me and ways I found to minimize their impact") and Malala ("I am leaving sad. I had prepared myself to show more strength and positivity, but I went back to emphasizing only what saddens me about the university").

Four participants attended the first meeting of G2. Initially, only four meetings were agreed upon, as all parties had projects that prevented additional meetings. Joan of Arc kneaded clay without shaping it; Arthur molded a path with stones and referred to his difficulty in conducting his project and the conflicts with the pressures of his advisor; Brynjar made a brain with many holes, revealing the limitations in conducting his current research and his mental health, which had been weakened by years of pressure to produce results, being far from home, and lacking a support network, as his colleagues were very competitive. Sigmund made a set of several balls, representing his research group.

While Joan of Arc mentioned her difficulties in pursuing her career due to atypical motherhood and that perhaps because she was so focused on her son, she could not see the point of pursuing a postgraduate degree; the others revealed: difficulty

balancing work and studies and meeting deadlines; loneliness due to being away from family; and the importance of support from colleagues/teachers in facing the adversities that everyone experienced, to a greater or lesser extent, although the reasons were different.

The Expression of Meaning (VS) of Joan of Arc and Brynjar below even reveals everyday violence at the university:

> The meeting made me reflect on my uncertainties about postgraduate school at such a difficult time in my life. Although I love my son, I need to take care of my life beyond him. I cannot do it alone. Am I in the right place? I want to gain knowledge, but is knowledge worth anything without heart? Will the male teachers understand my situation? These thoughts occurred to me during this meeting. I had not thought about it yet (Joan of Arc).

> Here, I was able to reflect on the fears I have: of not being able to cope, of the demands, of those who can and do not even see me or are intolerant of me, and of my stability in the job market by pursuing this course. I have been feeling alone with these fears. I realized that at this meeting (Brynjar).

Given this description, we understand that in the first meeting, when they shared the meaning of producing/working at a public university, both teachers and postgraduate students perceived the **university as an uncomfortable, sad, and morally harassing place** (US2). Thus, pressures for production, conflicts between peers and with professors (for graduate students), and veiled perversion among colleagues were experienced as institutional and interpersonal insensitivity towards the personal and academic conditions of some. Despite being a place for expanding knowledge, universities were often perceived as places of bureaucracy and discord. Thus, US3 was understood as: *the University as an institution that can cause illness because it is experienced as contradictory and conflicting*.

Everything indicates, therefore, that some of the participants in this study were in a situation where they were vulnerable to having their mental health compromised. Campos et al. (2020) and Boehs et al. (2022) highlighted, respectively, that teachers and postgraduate students at public universities are experiencing high levels of distress, with conflictive relationships with coworkers being one of the main risk factors associated with CMD among them. Specifically regarding the G2 postgraduate student, it is believed that, for mental health prevention, a support network imbued with solidarity and sisterhood would be important, as proposed by Moraes and Nascimento (2021), when referring to the Rede Interdisciplinar de Mulheres Acadêmicas do Semiárido [Interdisciplinary Network of Academic Women of the Semi-Arid Region] (RIMAS) for those facing a countryside northeastern university, where, according to the authors, gender inequality is a strong social marker.

Regarding postgraduate students, it was possible to understand, already at the first G2 meeting, a reproduction of the high-performance culture and what has already been denounced by Pinzón et al. (2020): postgraduate studies are a place of competitiveness, work overload, and productivism; factors such as anxiety, stress, and depression are internal barriers to a postgraduate student's career, while time

and academic advisors are the most common external barriers, which intensify internal barriers and compromise students' mental health. In addition, the experiences shared in the interventional groups investigated here, which are expressed in the Expression of Meaning (VS) of the postgraduates written above, confirm what was found by Boehs et al. (2022): in postgraduate studies in Brazil there is pressure for productivity, tight deadlines to meet targets and conflictive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, generating feelings of self-depreciation and impotence in students, as well as social isolation and symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Only female teachers attended the second G1 meeting. The talk was about the university being a sad environment. Emma reported the experience of moral harassment she had suffered from a fellow manager. All of them revealed that moral harassment by male colleagues towards female civil servants in management positions is common. There were many reports of suffering and subjective mobilization when sharing experiences of being a woman at university.

These reports reveal that female researchers still face moral harassment related to cisheteropatriarchal machismo in the public universities where they work, marked by exclusion, sexual division of labor, and asymmetrical hierarchical relationships, which lead them to feel psychological distress in the face of competitiveness, lack of recognition, injustices, and disqualification by their male colleagues (as can be seen in the studies by (Ferreira et al., 2022; Moraes & Nascimento, 2021; Silva et al., 2019; Souza et al., 2021).

During this meeting, photos from the past were shared, evoking memories of experiences with family, friends, and loved ones. This increased their awareness that their lives did not end at university. They also had family, friends, and loved ones. The facilitator asked them to individually write a letter from the girl/teenager of the past to the woman of the present. When they produced and read their letters, they were moved and realized how many lessons the person from the past could give to the person from the future. They rethought their roles as women in the institutions where they worked. There was a consensus that it was not the university, but culture in general, that was making people ill, and that in the welcoming group space, there was a re-signification of feelings and thoughts, as evidenced by the Expression of Meaning (VS) below:

> Today's meeting was very meaningful, mainly because I was able to express myself openly; to express my feelings, my reality, and, in writing the letter, I was able to see that what I am lacking is self-affirmation, recognizing myself (Emma).

> Today's meeting brought confirmation that universities are exacerbating people's mental suffering. However, at the same time, it also brought me well-being, in a space of listening and welcoming (Jane).

In this sense, it was possible to see that the teachers in G1 did not focus only on the negative aspects of the university, but also perceived positivity in their lives, reframing their suffering by broadening their awareness that their experiences at the university were not unique, as they **recognized that there was life beyond work**

(US4), linked to the perception that their experiences at work were not unique to them, as it is something experienced by many people in different institutions.

In the second G2 meeting, when they shared their childhood experiences, the postgraduates realized that they had faced adversity with greater courage, having fought hard to get where they are. They recognized that they had a life before and beyond postgraduate school. As Macêdo (2024) argues, the use of childhood photos as a device to enable historical recovery allows "the subject to integrate their history and, what is more, broaden their awareness of the present moment and launch themselves into future changes" (p. 86). See the Expression of Meaning (VS) below:

> It was very important to share the past, expectations, and desires. This calms our hearts and reduces our fear of the challenges and obstacles ahead. I have never been fearful; where has my courage gone? (Joan of Arc).

> Remembering our roots and realizing the struggles to get where we are will help me a lot in the face of my anxiety about the future (Arthur).

At the third G1 meeting, Emma, Frida, Jane, and Tarsila arrived very spontaneous and smiling. This was emphasized by the other members, who once again engaged in a heated debate on the issue of the university being an unhealthy environment. Some of the speeches revolved around the participants' scientific knowledge of the history of universities in Brazil and education. They reflected on toxic relationships and that everyone felt like "the ones that flew over the cuckoo's nest" (sic) because they envisioned other types of relationships, education, and work.

There was a re-signification of the experience, especially by Emma, who cried and, at the same time, smiled, reading her Expression of Meaning (VS) and saying how meaningful the previous meeting had been for her. There were reflections on topics such as friendship versus work, education versus the role of universities and public service, and what was being done to maintain values and actions to change reality. Here are some Expression of Meaning (VS):

> What/how do you do to change the "system"? Sickening relationships at work are greater than the desire to see public educational institutions operate "outside" the socially structured molds (Frida).

> How good it is to talk about it! Today, I leave this meeting feeling hopeful and believing that it is possible to change by having the space and direction to deal with the chaos and build a new university and new relationships (Malala).

In the third meeting of G2, with only male postgraduates, the assembled body had a very large head, a torso with a large heart and a small stomach, hands full of internet symbols, and feet turned backward. Arthur said his head was exploding with ideas and exhaustion; Brynjar emphasized that he was only continuing because he loved the possibility of being a researcher in his field, but that sometimes his stomach could not handle so much financial hardship, the "many bitter pills to swallow and punches in the stomach" (sic) he received from his advisor;. At the same time, Sigmund revealed that, despite being very productive, he was moving in the opposite direction from his colleagues.

The facilitator, realizing the participants' need to find possibilities for change in the face of the broadening of consciousness that was taking place in the meeting, suggested the garbage can activity, which consists of reflecting on what the meetings and the group process helped them to think about what they could keep, recycle or throw away (Macêdo, 2024). This made it easier for them to move away from a discourse of passivity in the face of the system's impositions and to build coping strategies to retrace their steps. Here are a few Expression of Meaning (VS):

> This meeting allowed me to reflect on how I can change things in my favor, because I now realize that I end up reproducing what they want me to be (Brynjar).

> Being accepted for what I can do and what I am capable of is very rewarding. So I am on the right track! I need to believe in it and invest in it (Sigmund).

Considering what happened in the third meeting of the two groups, it is understood that US5 would be: ***questions about personal responsibility in the face of reality, combined with hope for change***. This US is very representative of what Macêdo (2024) refers to as becoming aware of individual shielding, which occurs in CHFT intervention groups. During the process, "between suffering by complaining and finding a favorable path for change" (p. 114), the participants recognized that they tended to shield themselves, thereby opening themselves up to possibilities for change.

At the fourth G1 meeting, Malala revealed that she had remained silent at a recent meeting. She told herself she would not take part in it. However, she added that the problem existed and needed to be looked at and taken care of. Staying out of the discussion shielded her and made her feel good, but she knew that the problem had to be solved. She also said that perhaps she was too dreamy for her perfect vision of university to be possible.

Everyone reflected on how being armored is just about taking care of yourself. Teodoro said that there were disagreements in his course, but no dissensions or negative feelings. They were there to work, and that was that. Jane argued that it could not be like that, because people are affected and need to be listened to as well. The facilitator asked how to find a middle path. The focus has shifted to the way people relate to each other at university. When discussing their values, Frida mentioned her lack of hope, as her coworkers did not respect her. Even though I was cheerful, I changed negatively because of certain people. The meeting, permeated by Gadamerian dialogue, favored collaborative reframing of reality, joint negotiation, and the production of new meanings (Macêdo, 2024). Amid questions and answers, arguments and counterarguments, the group reflected on ways to cope with the reality of work and the need for change. Here are some Expression of Meaning (VS):

> A meeting to look more closely at herself. About the trajectory of life and the contributions of work in this journey, affirming the humanizing aspects in this process. It was also a time to reflect on one's responsibility in trying to change working environments, recognizing the limitations of this movement (Tarsila).

How to find the middle ground? I do not know how to answer that, but I leave here with a greater commitment to improving to achieve balance (Malala).

In G2, on the other hand, the fourth and final meeting focused on constructing life project spreadsheets and involved developing strategies to address the realities faced in various pillars. The academic/professional pillars were aligned with the intellectual, financial, and spiritual aspects. On the one hand, scholarship holders believed they had to produce more to maintain their scholarships, and non-scholarship holders considered how to continue working. They were all focused on time management strategies and psychological balance to cope with the pressures and complete their courses. They believed themselves to be intelligent people and had the support of a divine force. Ultimately, they pronounced the words' blessing,' 'peace,' 'renewal,' and 'welcome' to sum up the process, denoting the effectiveness of the meetings in promoting their mental health.

Given what has been discussed so far, it was understood that, for both groups, **rebuilding is essential, breaking paradigms is fundamental** (US6), since people recognized the importance of finding a middle path to commit themselves collectively and not just shield themselves individually from problems, but take responsibility for changes in the production environment. In this sense, it can be said that the intervention groups fulfilled their mission, as the power of the meetings favored the production of new meanings, awareness of individual shielding, and the joint construction of possibilities for coping, results that validate the importance of group interventions for promoting health among teachers and graduate students (according to studies, for example, by (Boehs et al., 2022; Campos et al., 2020; Campos et al., 2022; Macêdo, 2024), as well as allowing for the expansion of the power to act of the working subject (as proposed by Macêdo & Falcão, 2024).

At the fifth G1 meeting, only Malala and Tarsila attended. They discussed how they were managing the care of themselves and others in their lives. There was an interest in holding the next meetings in a pleasant, wooded place, without air conditioning. Thus, respecting the ethics of psychology and recognizing the need for flexibility in relation to the space for conducting groups, depending on the participants (Prates et al., 2015), the facilitator asked those who were absent via *WhatsApp* about the possibility of the meeting taking place outside the institution and outdoors. In the last two meetings, therefore, by sharing their experiences amid nature, on the banks of a river, in the shade of trees, in a secluded area, far from the aridity of relationships and the university environment, the participants opened up to the moment, the place, and the peace it brought.

At the sixth meeting, they discussed the aridity of the *campuses* where they worked, specifically the lack of trees. They remembered their childhood games and the universities where they studied. They reflected on how the aridity in universities was related to relationships, as new people found it very difficult to convey, bond, and commit. There was a tendency to blame the newcomers (teachers and students). The facilitator asked: "If we are older and had a different childhood, why do we tend to criticize younger people? What have we done to open them up to a different way of relating?" The group became reflective.

The facilitator asked them about what they liked to do and whether this carried over into the work context. Various non-traditional methods of education were discussed, utilizing the senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing, and touch, as well as taking students out of the classroom and into practical and real-life experiences. We talked about the role of the educator. It was no longer just about universities, but specifically about students. In the garbage can activity, they reflected on whether they should keep what was good or change the way they treated certain situations and people. They also discussed hope and dedication: continuing to dedicate oneself to one's beliefs and waiting for changes in the system to maintain conviction that things will improve, investing responsibility in this. At the end of the meeting, they revealed that they felt well-being, lightness, and peace when talking, listening, and interacting with each other, reframing these experiences by reflecting on what they needed to keep, recycle, and discard in their interpersonal relationships, both inside and outside of work. Some felt a sense of harmony and consensus, while others pointed out differences in perspectives and future decision-making. Here are some Expression of Meaning (VS):

> It was a very pleasant meeting, both for the outdoor setting and for the moments and experiences lived during it. I felt very light after talking and listening to my colleagues about the feelings and experiences that should be kept, recycled, or discarded, and how one person's experience can be different, and therefore lead to a different decision (Teodoro).

> Because it took place in a different environment, in an open area by the river, the conversation and the proposed dynamics flowed more freely, favoring interaction, activating memories, *insights*, and hopes (Tarsila).

In the seventh meeting, however, the facilitator found it more difficult to keep the group focused, both when exploring the Expression of Meaning (VS) and the life project worksheets. Being outside the intended research environment, accepting the Christmas get-together, while also being a university lecturer, made existential involvement possible, yet required her to distance herself reflexively, so as not to lose sight of her professional role as a researcher and facilitator. Her effort was to "be there, in solicitude and openness to the unexpected" (Macêdo, 2024, p. 103), attentive to the conversation and interactions taking place in the group.

The conversation about their Expression of Meaning (VS) and Jane's trip led us to consider retraining, as the teaching life had been prompting everyone to break their paradigms and become more flexible in their thinking about women, sexism, homophobia, religion, and racism. They stressed that they did not tolerate prejudice and became open to diversity. They talked about mental health and living with differences, about suffering being a part of life. At the end, Secret Santa gifts were exchanged, and a snack was served. In these moments, outside the context of an intervention group, people came up with the idea of meeting occasionally by the river and inviting other colleagues. As a result, their bonds with each other broadened beyond the confines of being participants in a mental health promotion research group. In this sense, the last US understood was the ***interventional group as a humanized space, welcoming individual differences, favoring the expansion of bonds, and promoting mental health*** (US7), which is consistent with what is proposed for interventional groups in CHFT (Macêdo, 2024).

Conclusions

The research conducted led to the conclusion that the northeastern universities in which the participants were enrolled appeared, in their view, to be unhealthy systems. Given this scenario, it was possible to understand how the production reality these individuals faced exposed them to risk factors for their mental health.

Thus, the importance of interventional mental health promotion groups along the lines of a CHFT in this scenario is recognized as a space for listening and speaking, which is significant for sharing life stories, bringing colleagues closer together, openly expressing feelings and thoughts, positively developing a sense of belonging, humanity, and sensitivity to others, as well as encouraging reflection on how individuals feel, think, and act towards themselves and others, and on the importance of self-knowledge and emotional strength for future well-being, especially for women who are suffering mentally due to a work environment permeated by structural sexism.

It was understood that in these groups there was spontaneous interaction and group cohesion between people from different backgrounds who felt, thought and acted differently when faced with the same problems; the participants came to believe in the possibility of building better interpersonal relationships; and they built coping strategies to improve their mental health, such as prioritizing conflicts, valuing life more, and maintaining good relationships with family and friends.

In this sense, we believe that the study enriches the field of knowledge of occupational clinics and the relation between mental health and work. However, to better validate the results found here, given the limitation of the study conducted with only two groups, further interventional research with other members of the academic community is suggested, including to promote mental health care for those most exposed to social markers of gender and race, such as LGBTQIAN+ and black people, as well as people with disabilities and outsourced workers, as this will be a step towards expanding the possibilities of a truly high-quality public university, with health and quality of life.

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Resumo

Objetivou-se descrever processos grupais em uma clínica humanista-fenomenológica do trabalho, discorrendo sobre os sentidos das experiências vividas e dos resultados obtidos por docentes e pós-graduandos de universidades públicas nordestinas que participaram de uma pesquisa fenomenológica interventiva. O método utilizado foi a hermenêutica colaborativa. Cada grupo realizou encontros semanais de duas horas. Os instrumentos foram: a Versão de Sentido (breve relato escrito pelo participante após um encontro), os registros em prontuários e os diários de bordo produzidos pela facilitadora. Compreendeu-se,

principalmente, que, para os participantes, a universidade pode gerar adoecimento por ser contraditória e conflitante. Houve reconhecimento de uma vida para além do labor, a conscientização de tentativas de autocuidado para minimizar impactos na saúde mental, questionamentos sobre a responsabilidade pessoal diante da realidade e necessidade de quebrar paradigmas. Além disso, os grupos interventivos foram espaços humanizados, acolhedores e favorecedores de ampliação de vínculos. Reconhece-se, portanto, a importância desses grupos para a promoção da saúde mental nas universidades públicas.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho. Profissionais de Educação. Instituições de Ensino. Pesquisa Qualitativa. Fenomenologia.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio fue describir los procesos grupales en una clínica de trabajo humanista-fenomenológica, discutiendo los significados de las experiencias vividas y los resultados obtenidos por profesores y estudiantes de posgrado de universidades públicas del nordeste de Brasil que participaron en un estudio fenomenológico interventivo. El método utilizado fue la hermenéutica colaborativa. Cada grupo se desarrolló en reuniones semanales de dos horas. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron: una Versión de Significado (un breve informe escrito por el participante después de una reunión); registros en historias clínicas y cuadernos de bitácora producidos por el facilitador. Principalmente se entendió que, para los participantes: la universidad puede generar enfermedad por ser contradictoria y conflictiva; hubo reconocimiento de una vida más allá del trabajo, conciencia de intentos de autocuidado para minimizar impactos en la salud mental, cuestionamientos sobre la responsabilidad personal frente a la realidad y la necesidad de romper paradigmas; y los grupos de intervención fueron espacios humanizados, acogedores, que propiciaron la ampliación de vínculos. Por lo tanto, reconocemos la importancia de estos grupos para la promoción de la salud mental en las universidades públicas.

Palabras clave: Trabajo. Profesionales de la educación. Instituciones educativas. Investigación cualitativa. Fenomenología.