

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PERCEPTION ON SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG PUBLIC MAINTENANCE WORKERS

FATORES ASSOCIADOS À PERCEPÇÃO DE APOIO SOCIAL ENTRE FUNCIONÁRIOS PÚBLICOS DA MANUTENÇÃO

FACTORES ASOCIADOS A LA PERCEPCIÓN DE APOYO SOCIAL ENTRE EMPLEADOS PÚBLICOS DE MANTENIMIENTO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the social health of the organizational environment in a maintenance sector using as an indicator the perception on social support of the workers and the possible influences from the socio-demographic characteristics. **Method:** a cross-sectional quantitative study with 72 maintenance workers of a public university in the inland of São Paulo (BR). A socio-demographic data questionnaire and Social Support Perception at Work Scale (SSPWS) were used. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, association tests and logistic regression analysis. **Results:** emotional support at work was the least perceived among the workers and no factor was identified as associated with it. Socio-demographic gender and position factors were associated with the informational and instrumental dimensions. The number of children was associated only with the informational dimension. Individuals with more schooling years reported less perception for the informational support. **Conclusion:** the importance of a well-established social health diagnosis in the organizational settings is highlighted. And to such an effect, the nurse plays a crucial role due to their competencies for developing prevention and promotion activities for the worker's health, which may directly influence the perception on social support.

Keywords: Social Support; Workers; Job Satisfaction; Occupational Health.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a saúde social do ambiente organizacional de um setor de manutenção utilizando como indicador a percepção de apoio social dos trabalhadores e as possíveis influências das características sociodemográficas. **Método:** estudo quantitativo transversal, com 72 funcionários da manutenção de universidade pública do interior paulista. Foram utilizados questionário de dados sociodemográficos e Escala de Percepção de Suporte Social no Trabalho (EPSST). A análise dos dados foi realizada utilizando-se estatística descritiva, testes de associação e análise de regressão logística. **Resultados:** o apoio emocional no trabalho foi o menos percebido entre os trabalhadores e não foi identificado fator algum associado a ele. Os fatores sociodemográficos sexo e função foram associados às dimensões informacional e instrumental. Número de filhos foi associado apenas à dimensão informacional. Os indivíduos com mais anos de estudo referiram menos percepção do apoio informacional. **Conclusão:** salienta-se a importância de um diagnóstico de saúde social bem estabelecido nos ambientes organizacionais. E nesse sentido o enfermeiro tem papel crucial devido às suas competências para o desenvolvimento de atividades de prevenção e promoção à saúde do trabalhador que poderão influenciar diretamente na percepção de apoio social.

Palavras-chave: Apoio Social; Trabalhadores; Satisfação no Emprego; Saúde do Trabalhador.

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la salud social del ambiente organizacional de un sector de mantenimiento usando como indicador la percepción de apoyo social de los trabajadores y la posible influencia de las características sociodemográficas. **Método:** estudio cuantitativo transversal con 72 empleados de mantenimiento de una universidad pública del interior del estado de São Paulo (BR). Se utilizaron el cuestionario de datos sociodemográficos y la escala de percepción de apoyo social en el trabajo (EPSSST). Los datos se analizaron con estadística descriptiva, pruebas de asociación y análisis de regresión logística. **Resultados:** el apoyo emocional en el trabajo fue el menos percibido entre los trabajadores y no se identificó ningún factor asociado. Los factores sociodemográficos sexo y función se asociaron a las dimensiones informacional e instrumental. Cantidad de hijos se asoció a la dimensión informacional. Los individuos con más años de instrucción mencionaron menos percepción de apoyo informacional. **Conclusión:** se realiza la importancia del diagnóstico de salud social bien establecido en los ambientes organizacionales. El enfermero desempeña un papel crucial por sus competencias para desarrollar actividades de prevención y promoción de la salud del trabajador, que podrán repercutir directamente en la percepción de apoyo social. **Palabras clave:** Apoyo Social; Trabajadores; Satisfacción en el Trabajo; Salud Laboral.

INTRODUCTION

The work is considered by some authors as an important element related to people's health, for providing a self-realization feeling, income to provide for the material needs and because it is constituted as a means to set up social interactions.¹

On the other hand, work has also been described as a risk factor for several physical and mental health conditions, positively or negatively influencing the worker's quality of life, both in the workplace and in the social, personal and psychological contexts.² This influence is due to the various transformations arising from the globalization process and the emergence of new needs on the part of the employers in relation to their workers, as a requirement for more qualification and more commitment with the company.²

Given this scenario, social support at work has been highlighted as an important protective factor for the negative consequences of the organizational environment, since that it contributes to well-being and to mitigating stress-related effects, as well as to providing advantages for the institution, such as, increased worker's commitment and more job satisfaction.^{3,4}

Social support is a multidimensional concept that refers to resources derived from interpersonal relationships that can help the subject in different situations.⁵⁻⁷ Such resources can be classified into several types, according to the function they exert in the life of the individual, such as: emotional, instrumental and informational support. It is understood that such support

may come from different sources, such as: family, friends, neighbors, co-workers and supervisors.^{8,9}

The existence or availability of these resources implies on the subject's perception that there are people they may rely on, that such relationships provide a sense of valuation, enhance communication, and aid in intermediating other resource sources. That is, social support is mediated by a process where the individuals manage the psychological and material resources made available by the interactions existing in their social networks. Thus, social support is essential to cope with stressful events^{5,7} and is described as one of the main indicators for the social health of individuals or groups.¹⁰

Social health can be summarily described as the part of health that concerns human interaction sphere. It is based on the evidence that well-integrated people in their communities tend to have better health indicators, that is, it is the dimension that studies the influence of relationships on people's physical and psychological well-being.¹⁰ Such a sphere is found at the intersection between the psychological, the biological and the social, and nursing plays a key role in this area, since it is capable of developing health assessments and enabling actions under the aegis of comprehensive care under different contexts.¹⁰

Studies on social support accomplished with workers have been developed in several countries, such as, Brazil,^{2,3,5,6} Switzerland,⁸ Taiwan,¹¹ China,¹² United States of America,¹³ Romania¹⁴ and South Korea.⁹ These researchers have addressed issues related to the organizational environment, highlighting the role of the supervisor,^{13,14} aspects related to satisfaction in the work.^{2,3,5,9,13,14} and the health and well-being of the workers.^{8,12} Of the specific studies on workers's social support, the most recent literature has considered different populations, such as bankers,^{3,8,14} nursing workers,² administrative area workers,⁵ teachers,^{6,9} penitentiary agents,¹³ domestic workers¹² and hotel chains workers.¹¹

It stands out, therefore, that no study was identified about this phenomenon with maintenance workers. It is understood that analyzing social support specifically for this group of workers assumes relevance, since it is a group that is more vulnerable in terms of devaluation and professional prestige and for which little attention has been paid to the planning of strategies for promoting health, improving performance and job satisfaction.

The possible influence of socio-demographic characteristics on workers' perception on social support has not been established by the researchers in the last years. It should be noted that some socio-demographic characteristics are not susceptible to intervention, such as gender, color, marital status, religion, etc. However, it is important to investigate about their influence, since it may indicate a confounding effect in the diagnosis of social health in certain groups. On the other hand, for other characteristics, such as position and income, once their

influences are identified, it is possible to provide a set of strategies that provide the worker with better coping with these conditions, in order to protect their health.

In view of the above, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- **hypothesis I** – Personal socio-demographic characteristics (gender, color, marital status, religion, and number of children, age and schooling years) are not factors associated with the perception on social support at work.
- **hypothesis II** – The socio-demographic characteristics related to work (position and income) are factors associated with the perception on social support at work.

The objective was to analyze the social health of the organizational environment in a maintenance sector using as an indicator the perception on social support to the workers and the possible influences from the socio-demographic characteristics.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional quantitative study carried out with the maintenance workers of a public university in the inland of São Paulo.

The sector is made up of 112 employees. The inclusion criterion was to have operated in the sector for at least one year. The exclusion criterion was being on vacation or other leave during the research's data collect period and being in a probationary period. Five workers were found in the exclusion criteria, all those eligible were personally invited and 35 refused to participate, constituting a sample of 72 workers.

For accomplishing the study, all the ethical aspects provided for by Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (approval by the Ethics Committee of the University 22074313.5.0000.5393) were taken into consideration. Data collect was undertaken by an under-graduating female student in Nursing course trained for applying the instruments. The questionnaires were applied in the participants's workplace, in a private room and at a time agreed with the sector's leadership.

A questionnaire with socio-demographic information (age, gender, color, marital status, schooling years, religion, position and income) and the Social Support Perception at Work Scale (SSPWS) were used to identify the perception on social support at work.¹⁵ It falls to mention that, although the scale uses the social backing term, in this study social support was chosen due to the standard proposed by the Health Sciences Descriptors (DECS).

The SSPWS contains 18 items, with four possible responses, in a likert-type scale, being: 1 = totally disagree, 2 = just disagree, 3 = just agree and 4 = totally agree. For analysis purposes, the following was considered as "yes": perceiving social support

(mean scores ≥ 3); and as "no": not perceiving the social support (mean scores ≤ 2), following the authors' guidelines.¹⁵

The scale has three domains corresponding to the three different social support types: perception of social informational support at work, defined as the employee's beliefs that the employing organization has a common communications network that provides accurate and reliable information (items 8, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17 and 18); perception of socio-emotional support at work, defined as the employee's beliefs that in the employer organization there are people who can be trusted, who are concerned with each other, value themselves and like each other (items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 15); and the perception of instrumental (material) social support at work, which includes the employee's beliefs that the employing organization provides them with material, financial, technical and managerial inputs (items 4, 5, 10, 11 and 14).¹⁵

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, in order to verify the association for the different types of support with the socio-demographic variables. The Mann Whitney test was used for the years of study (which did not show a normal distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, $p = 0.002$), considering the perception outcome variable of the social support (yes/no).

Student's t-test was used in relation to age to compare the averages (with a normal distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, $p=0.295$), having as outcome the perception on the social support (yes/no).

In addition, a multiple logistic regression analysis was performed, with the perception of the social support outcome (yes/no) of the informational, instrumental and emotional domains of the SSPWS. The independent variables analyzed were age (years old), gender (male/female), color (white/other), marital status (with/without partner), scholarship (years), religion (with or without religion), number of children (none or one child/two or more), position (operational/administrative) and family income (one to five minimum wages/above five minimum wages). The program SPSS, version 22, was used in the analyses.

By using the established strategy of associations between the dimensions studied (socio-demographic characteristics), three explanatory models of binary logistic regression were developed, introducing the variables in the form of blocks, remaining in the subsequent model only those that had statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) in the previous model. The exit criterion for all variables introduced in each model was $p < 0.10$. At the end, a final regression model with only the variables with a more statistical significance was reached. The method used to introduce the variables into the models was forward stepwise. The significance level adopted was $\alpha = 0.05$ and the 95% confidence interval (CI), with calculation of adjusted odds ratios. Analyses were performed with the aid of a statistician.

RESULTS

In relation to the socio-demographic profile, it was identified that the majority of the participants was white, male, manual workers and had a spouse or a partner; 43.1% were in the age group 46 to 55 years old, 27.8% had eight schooling years or less and 48.6% had more than 20 years of profession.

Concerning the perception on social support at work, 65.3% (47) of the participants perceived the informational support, 34.7% (25) the emotional support and 61.1% (44) the instrumental support.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 display the percentage of response for each item between those who perceived and those who did not perceive each social support type. All items were mentioned in the item informational support at work by more than 50% of the participants. Thus, in the emotional support at work, the items trust in people (38.9%) and sharing personal problems (36.2%) were the least mentioned. Financial reward was the least mentioned (34.7%) in the instrumental support type at work and the fulfillment of the financial obligations by the institution was mentioned by 98.6% of the participants.

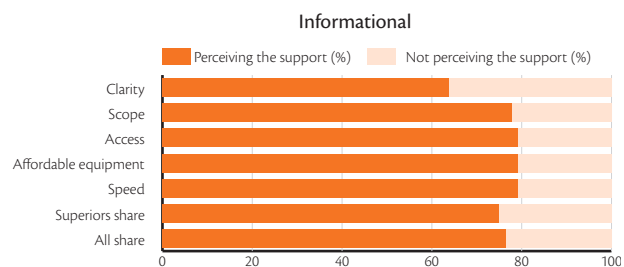


Figure 1 - Perception of employees about social support in the different items that make up the informational domain. *Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2015 (n=72).*

Source: created for the purposes of this study.

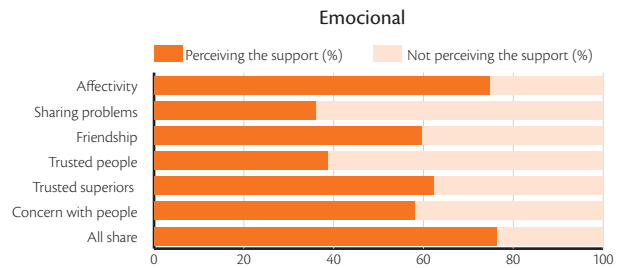


Figure 2 - Perception of employees about social support in the different items that make up the emotional domain. *Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2015 (n=72).*

Source: created for the purposes of this study.

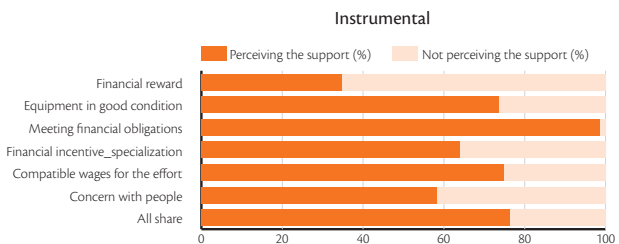


Figure 3 - Perception of employees about social support in the different items that make up the instrumental domain. *Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2015 (n=72).*

Source: created for the purposes of this study.

The socio-demographic factors associated with the different social support dimensions at work were schooling years, gender, number of children and position, as shown in Table 1. There was no significant difference in mean age between those who perceived and those who did not perceive the different studied social support types. The individuals with more schooling years reported less informational support at work.

Table 1 - Perception of the employees in the maintenance sector according to the socio-demographic characteristics. *Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2015 (n=72)*

Variables	Informational		Emotional		Instrumental	
	n(%)	p*	n(%)	p*	n(%)	p*
Age						
<i>Mean value (sd)</i>						
Perceiving support	50.57(9.202)	0.099	51.44(9.305)	0.150	49.09(8.773)	0.871
Not perceiving support	46.72(9.546)		48.06(9.396)		49.46(10.564)	
Schooling years						
<i>Rank average</i>						
Perceiving support	32.62	0.025	37.70	0.713	34.43	0.276
Not perceiving support	43.80		35.86		39.75	
Gender						
Male	47(65.3)	0.004	23(31.9)	1.000	44(61.1)	0.007
Female	0		02(2.8)		0	

Continue...

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Table 1 - Perception of the employees in the maintenance sector according to the socio-demographic characteristics. *Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2015 (n=72)*

Variables	Informational		Emotional		Instrumental	
	n(%)	p*	n(%)	p*	n(%)	p*
Schooling years <i>Rank average</i>						
Color						
Caucasian	26(36.1)	0.325	16(22.2)	0.624	24(33.3)	0.328
Black and/or brown	21(29.2)		09(12.5)		20(27.8)	
Marital status						
Living with a partner	38(52.8)	1.000	20(27.8)	1.000	35(48.6)	1.000
Living with no partner	09(12.5)		05(6.9)		09(12.5)	
Religion						
With religion	41(56.9)	1.000	21(29.2)	0.710	39(54.1)	0.728
No religion	06(8.3)		04(5.6)		05(6.9)	
Children						
None to 1	11(15.3)	0.015	07(9.7)	0.602	14(19.4)	0.800
2 or more	36(50.0)		18(25.0)		30(41.6)	
Position						
Manual worker	44(61.1)	0.027	20(27.8)	0.301	42(58.3)	0.011
Assistance	03(4.2)		05(6.9)		02(2.8)	
Family income						
1 to 5 minimum wages	18(25.0)	1.000	11(15.3)	0.614	17(23.6)	1.000
5 or more minimum wages	29(40.3)		14(19.4)		27(37.5)	

Source: created for the purposes of this study.

Notes: *Pearson's chi-square test or Fisher's exact test for the categorical variables and Student's t-test and Mann-Whitney test, respectively, for age and schooling years.

Table 2 - Predictive variables of instrumental and informational social support** among maintenance workers. *Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brazil, 2015 (n=72)*

Model	Predictors	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Informational support	Children	1.309	0.555	5.556	0.018	3.702
	Position	1.798	0.778	5.341	0.021	6.039
	Constant	-1.720	0.824	4.356	0.037	0.179
Instrumental support	Position	2.128	0.836	6.482	0.011	8.400
	Constant	-1.386	0.791	3.075	0.080	0.250

Source: created for the purposes of this study.

Notes: **It was not possible to elaborate an explanatory model for the "emotional support" outcome with the variables used in this study, that is, no variables included in the analyses displayed statistical significance.

Also, all employees who perceived informational and instrumental support were male and most were manual workers; the association between these variables was significant. The other variables did not show a significant association with the outcome variable.

Most of the participants perceiving informational support had two or more children (Table 1). As can be seen in Table 2, this association was also significant in the final logistic regression model, which indicated that those who had two or more children were three times more likely to perceive informational support. In addition, the position was identified as a predic-

tor for this support type, manual workers were six times more likely to perceive it. Position was also the sole predictor for the instrumental support, manual workers were eight times more likely to perceive the support.

Figure 4 synthesizes the achieved results. The dotted outline symbolizes that the participants had low perception on this support type. The socio-demographic characteristics whose association was identified only in the bivariate analyses are in orange; those whose association was identified in both bivariate and logistic regression analyzes are in green.

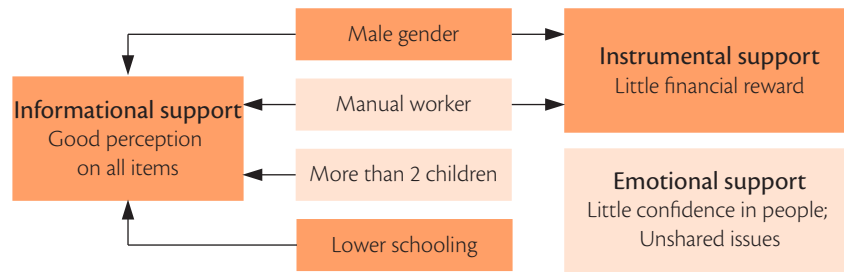


Figure 4 - Synthesis of the study's results.
Source: created for the purposes of this study.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the perception on social support at work among maintenance workers, it was identified that the most emphasized types of support were the informational and the instrumental ones, that is, emotional support was less perceived by the participants, corroborating a previous study developed with bank workers whose authors point out that the low perception of emotional support can be due to the existence of gaps in the social interactions, lack of trust, cooperation and support among workers.³

It was also identified in the present study that the items "trusting people" and "sharing personal problems" were the least mentioned by the employees, contributing to the low perception of emotional support. Considering that interpersonal relationships of both work and friends and family have been described as predictors for well-being and job satisfaction,^{8,9} such workers may be vulnerable in that sense.

It is noteworthy that men, culturally, tend to request less social support¹⁶ and do not share emotional experiences with their peers.¹⁷ Thus, since the sample was mostly composed of men, this behavior may have influenced the results, mainly because some authors suggest that modernity men have learned to regulate emotional and affective expression, given the incorporation of a dominant model that associates reason to masculinity and emotion to femininity.^{17,18}

There is a need for additional studies to analyze whether these individuals have other sources of emotional support or lack such support in general, as this may constitute an important risk factor for the physical and mental health of these workers, as well as for their performance.^{19,20}

It is understood that strategies that promote more personal interaction, such as social gatherings, group physical activities, organization of excursions or trips for the workers and their families, could be useful in the sense of strengthening social ties, expanding support possibilities which, in consequence, will protect physical health and increase the chances for satisfaction and better performance for these individuals.

In addition to being the most relevant support type (with good evaluation in all aspects on this factor), it was also the most

perceived (65.3%) by manual workers, followed by instrumental support (61.1% of the participants). Sharing, speed, clarity and access to information were widely reported by the participants.

With respect to the instrumental support, most participants emphasized that there is compliance with the institution's obligations, that is, there is no delay in payment. It is understood that this result is due to the fact that these participants are public officials. On the other hand, few mentioned that there is a financial reward from the institution, certainly also because they are public agency employees, as mentioned in a previous study carried out with the same worker category.⁶

Male gender and manual worker position were associated both to the perception of informational and instrumental support. A previous study with health workers showed that people who performed the same work tended to have a better relationship with each other, increasing the possibilities for mutual support.²¹ It is suggested that the greater perception on these types of support by the category of manual workers can be due to the closer and horizontal relationship between them since, in general, they carry out their activities collectively.

The fact that all manual workers are men may have influenced the perception on these two types of support, since this characteristic was also a predictor for both informational and instrumental support. Verifying also the reduced number of women in the sector and that all of them exercised administrative positions, it is understood that both the position division and the gender division may influence in the establishment and quality of the relations and, consequently, on the perception on social support.

It is known that women, even though they have achieved significant evolution in their rights, still suffer from prejudices and discrimination in the workplace,²² and this may contribute to being excluded also from the information in the organizational scope.

The number of children was a predictor for the informational support; workers with two or more children were three times more likely to perceive the informational support. It is supposed that the greater concern to supply the household, to guarantee the security and financial stability of the workers with more children, may influence the demand for some specific in-

formation on these issues in the work environment and, consequently, the perception of informational support in this group.

In addition, it is known that there is a greater network for support and information sharing between groups that have common goals;²¹ therefore, the fact that most participants have two or more children may have influenced the results.

Another factor that seems to influence the perception of informational support, according to the study's results, is schooling. It was identified that individuals with more schooling years perceived less informational support. Since information can be conceptualized as data that has been comprehensively processed and stored and has a perceived real value for the receiver's decisions,^{23,24} it is assumed that individuals with more schooling are more critical, demanding and/or selective in relation to what is really configured as relevant or useful information.

In addition, sharing information can be influenced by different factors, such as: hierarchical structure, power, *status* and politics in career advancement, since they can be understood as merit-related distinction points and promotions in the organizational scenario, sometimes leading to the understanding that information is power and that power can mean a great deal within the social importance that the organization represents.^{23,24} Such information sharing can be influenced by individual factors (motivation, trust, reciprocity and feeling of belonging) and organizational ones (organizational culture, nature of knowledge, sharing mechanism, prestige and awards).^{23,24}

In general, previous studies registered different social support types as a protection factor for health, satisfaction and worker's performance, but they fail to identify the socio-demographic aspects that could influence the perception of these individuals in relation to the available social support.

The study's results revealed the role of the manual worker as an important variable that influences the perception on social support in the studied group. Thus, it is recommended that future analyses on social health in organizational settings consider the possible confounding effect of the worker's position. That is, it is of utmost importance that such an analysis should take into account not only the social resources circulating in these environments, but also how different categories of professionals have access to such resources. Specific demands for each sub-group of this social network also seem to be crucial in the way access to such resources is perceived, which was evidenced by means of the significance for the following variables: number of children, schooling years and gender.

Additional studies are suggested that should also investigate whether these characteristics can act as mediators in the association between social support and other outcomes such as employee satisfaction and performance.

It is important to emphasize that nursing integrates the health area of the worker and has the field of practical action in

the Specialized Service of Safety Engineering and Labor Medicine (*Serviço Especializado em Engenharia de Segurança e em Medicina do Trabalho*, SESMT) of companies, performing activities, such as: epidemiological and health surveillance actions, promotion, protection and prevention of health, aiming at the recovery and rehabilitation of the worker in conditions of risks and harms.²⁵

Thus, nursing could act in a more incisive way in organizational environments, being able to work with the factors identified in this study, in order to mediate the relation between employees and management, observing if the organization directly affects worker's health and promoting activities that provide leisure, encourage physical activities and family participation in the company, among other activities that influence in improving social health in the organizational environment. And this will certainly impact worker's satisfaction and performance in your institution.

It should be added that this study has limitations that must be considered. The first concerns the size of the sample and the number of refusals. Secondly, it is worth highlighting the restriction of the quantitative method that makes it impossible to enter the universe of meanings of the participants in relation to the object of this study.

CONCLUSION

The objective was to analyze the social health of the organizational environment in a maintenance sector using as an indicator the perception on social support to the workers and the possible influences from the socio-demographic characteristics.

The results showed that the types of support that are most perceived by the workers were the informational and the instrumental ones. Emotional support, in turn, was the least perceived in the work environment, highlighting the lack of trust between people and little room for problem sharing.

The influence of gender and position was identified in the perception of instrumental support and financial reward was the least perceived item. Informational support was the most relevant in the perception of employees and was associated with gender, function, number of children and schooling years. Individuals with more schooling appear to be more selective in relation to what actually is settled as relevant information in the work environment.

Therefore, hypothesis I was refuted, since the results showed that the characteristics of personal character, gender, number of children and schooling years had a similar association with the perception on social support at work. On the other hand, hypothesis II was confirmed, since the position was associated to the perception on social support at work.

Emphasis is placed on the importance of a well-established social health diagnosis in the organizational settings and,

thus, nurses play a crucial role due to their competencies for developing activities to prevent and promote worker health. To such an effect, the relevance of the social support indicator is highlighted, as well as the possible confounding and/or mediating effects that some socio-demographic characteristics may exert in this analysis. In addition, the development of other studies that explore the role of social support at work in relation to outcomes such as health and quality of life may contribute to implementing strategies sensitive to the specificities of this population, whose context seems to be permeated by situations unique to the other groups of workers.

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