



## EMPLOYMENT PROFILE OF PHARMACY AND PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN THE SOUTH OF SANTA CATARINA

PERFIL LABORAL DE ESTUDANTES DE FARMÁCIA E FISIOTERAPIA DE UNIVERSIDADE SULCATARINENSE

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**ABSTRACT:** Many university students combine studies with work, representing a challenge, especially in bachelor's degrees in health, which require study and dedication. This can influence educational performance or drop out of graduation, leading to dropout rates. This study aimed to analyze the characteristics of the occupations of Physiotherapy and Pharmacy students at a University in Southern Santa Catarina. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense under opinion 6,678,390. The study population was 577 students. The sample calculation considered an error of 5% and confidence of 93%, determining the sample to be 159 students. Female students predominated, working under a formal regime (CLT), with a workload of 40 hours or more, especially in health, administrative services and commerce in general. The students' perception indicated that 68.6% reported a fair or poor perception regarding concentration for studying.

**KEYWORDS:** Education. Occupational health. University. Work.

**RESUMO:** Muitos universitários conciliam estudos com trabalho, representando um desafio, especialmente em formações de bacharelado na saúde, que exigem estudo e dedicação. Isto pode influenciar no desempenho educacional ou na desistência da graduação, gerando evasão. Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar as características das ocupações de estudantes de Fisioterapia e Farmácia de uma Universidade do Sul Catarinense. A pesquisa foi aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa (CEP) da Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense sob o parecer 6.678.390. A população de estudo foi de 577 estudantes. O cálculo amostral considerou erro de 5% e confiança de 93%, determinando a amostra em 159 estudantes. Predominou estudantes do sexo feminino, trabalhando em regime formal (CLT), com carga horária de 40 horas semanais ou mais, especialmente na saúde, serviços administrativos e comércio em geral. A percepção dos estudantes indicou que 68,6% referiram percepção regular ou ruim quanto à concentração para o estudo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação. Saúde do Trabalhador. Trabalho. Universidade.

## INTRODUCTION

Work plays a central role in shaping society and in the constitution of individuals. It represents the means by which human beings use their physical and mental capacities to meet their own needs and to contribute to collective needs. In addition to social visibility, the value of work is also linked to elements such as personal fulfillment, the social meaning of the activity performed, and the compensation received for the tasks carried out<sup>3</sup>.

From sociological and phenomenological perspectives, work appears as one of the fundamental dimensions of human existence, involving challenges that each individual must confront in their professional relationships. It also encompasses the internal aspects of work itself, which place the worker in a position to reaffirm their uniqueness in the tasks they perform, representing yet another complex element of the work environment<sup>3</sup>.

Throughout history, work has been associated with a variety of meanings linked to the organization of different societies. It meets the need to produce for one's own living conditions, contributes to collective organization, and supports the historical and cultural development of societies. Thus, work is viewed as an ethical commitment that shapes one's way of living and acting<sup>4</sup>.

Over time, work has continued to represent a unique movement within human reality, marked by constant transformation. Accompanying technological development, it demands increasing professional competence so that workers can quickly adapt to the changes brought about by technological advancements<sup>7</sup>.

In this context, the distinction between formal and informal work lies in their purposes: formal work is understood as a collaborative activity within organizations, while informal work is viewed as an activity performed independently for individual purposes<sup>8</sup>. Historically in Brazil, a significant milestone in the recognition of labor occurred on May 1st, 1943, with the creation of the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), which compiled existing legislation and incorporated new laws that reflected the social and economic changes of the time. Its main purpose was to maintain social order and to reinforce respect for Brazilian workers<sup>9</sup>.

However, the CLT not only served as a compilation of labor laws but also embodied the moral reasoning of the period, in which the ideal worker was someone who aligned with the standards expected of both employers and employees, in accordance with the values and work ethic promoted<sup>10</sup>.

Currently, studies conducted by the Ministry of Labor in Brazil reveal that informality continues to grow at a faster pace than formal employment. One of the Ministry's findings highlights the fragility of social protection mechanisms within the labor sphere, as well as the increase in informal labor, which has grown substantially in recent years, leading many workers to choose informal work arrangements<sup>11</sup>.

In general, self-employed workers in Brazil have sought higher education as a means to improve their qualifications and, consequently, increase opportunities for better income and improved working conditions. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in the second quarter of 2021, 34.6% of self-employed workers had completed elementary education, 33.5% had completed secondary education, and 33.5% had completed higher education<sup>12</sup>.

The rapid changes in work demands and the shifts in labor dynamics over the last century have caused structural changes in family and professional life<sup>13</sup>. The pursuit of immediate autonomy and education are strongly associated factors that have contributed, in recent years, to an increase in informal work activities in Brazil. This sector often does not represent a life perspective or a deliberate choice for many individuals, as they leave school and university because they need to work to ensure their livelihood. These individuals become workers without formal education, which may prevent them

from obtaining formal employment. On the other hand, many university students balance their study routines with formal employment, which can influence their academic performance and even lead to withdrawal from their undergraduate program. There is a shortage of studies exploring this population, especially students in health-related fields, except for Nursing, which traditionally and frequently includes a significant proportion of individuals who come from technical Nursing programs and continue such activities during their undergraduate studies. The other fields remain uncertain, except for Medicine, in which curricular structures and full-time routines make it unlikely for students to engage in work concurrently with their educational training. Thus, the present study aims to analyze the characteristics of the work activities of university students enrolled in on-campus undergraduate programs in Physiotherapy and Pharmacy.

## METHODS

This is an exploratory field study with a cross-sectional and quantitative approach. The research included undergraduate students from the Pharmacy and Physiotherapy programs of a higher education institution in southern Santa Catarina, from all academic terms, who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Participants who did not work were excluded from the research; this criterion was clearly stated both in the explanatory text and invitation addressed to potential volunteers, as well as in the content of the Informed Consent Form.

The study population (N), considering the aforementioned programs at the institution, consisted of 577 students. Based on this scenario, the sample size calculation was performed using the formula proposed by Medronho (2009, p. 419), considering a sampling error of 5% and a confidence level of 93%. The target sample (n) was determined to be 159 students. Once this sample size was reached, data collection was stopped and considered complete.

The application of the questionnaire and data collection took place after authorization from the research site and approval by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Universidade do Extremo Sul Catarinense, under approval number 6.678.390. The study was conducted according to ethical principles established by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council. The information obtained through the questionnaire is confidential and accessible only to the researchers directly involved in data collection.

Data collection was carried out using an electronic Google Forms questionnaire, which began with the presentation of the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE), allowing volunteers to agree or decline participation, while ensuring the protection of participants' privacy and anonymity with regard to all documents and information obtained during the study.

## RESULTS

The study included students from the Pharmacy and Physiotherapy programs at a University in Southern Santa Catarina who met the inclusion criteria established in the preliminary screening. During the data collection period, 159 students participated in the study. Based on the collected information, it was possible to analyze and outline the work profile of these students. The sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. It is observed that the majority of the sample is composed of female students (86.2%), while 13.8% are male, with a predominant age range of 18 to 21 years (44.7%).

Most of the participating students attend classes in the evening period (83%), with 73% enrolled in the Physiotherapy program and 17% enrolled in the Pharmacy program.

**Table 1.** Distribution of data referring to the sociodemographic characteristics of Pharmacy and Physiotherapy students at a University in Southern Santa Catarina.

	n(%)
	n=159
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	137 (86,2)
Male	22 (13,8)
<b>Age (years)</b>	
18 to 21 years	71 (44,7)
22 to 25 years	60 (37,7)
26 to 29 years	17 (10,7)
29 to 33 years	1 (0,6)
Over 33 years	10 (6,3)
<b>Which course are you enrolled in?</b>	
Pharmacy	43 (27)
Physiotherapy	116 (73)
<b>In which period do you mainly attend classes?</b>	
Morning	27 (17)
Evening	132 (83)

Source: Research data, 2024.

Table 2 refers to the work-related aspects of the participating students. Regarding the employment arrangement, 61.6% of the sample reported working under a formal employment regime, while 15.7% stated they were informal workers, 3.1% statutory workers, and 3.8% workers in their own business. Additionally, 15.7% of the sample indicated internship as their type of work. With respect to weekly workload, 25.8% and 28.3% of the participants reported working 40 hours per week and more than 40 hours per week, respectively. Conversely, 10.7% of participants reported working fewer than 20 hours per week, with most participants having worked in their role for 1 to 5 years (52.2%).

According to the Annual Social Information Report (RAIS), Santa Catarina currently presents a ranking of the most common occupations. Among these, and according to the sample, 42% of participants are employed in the Health Services sector, while 25.8% are in the Administrative Services sector and 21.4% work in the Commerce sector.

**Table 2.** Distribution of data regarding the Work Profile of Pharmacy and Physiotherapy students at a University in Southern Santa Catarina.

	n(%)
	n=159
<b>Under which employment arrangement do you work?</b>	
Formal worker (registered/CLT)	98 (61,6)
Informal worker (self-employed)	25 (15,7)
Statutory worker	5 (3,1)
Worker in own company (CNPJ, Ltda, MEI)	6 (3,8)
Internship	25 (15,7)

<b>What is your weekly workload?</b>	
Less than 20 hours	17 (10,7)
20 hours	24 (15,1)
24 hours	6 (3,8)
30 hours	20 (12,6)
35 hours	6 (3,8)
40 hours	41 (25,8)
More than 40 hours	45 (28,3)
<b>How long have you been in this role?</b>	
0 to 6 months	32 (22)
7 to 12 months	25 (15,7)
1 to 5 years	83 (52,2)
6 to 9 years	12 (7,5)
10 years or more	4 (2,5)
<b>In which sector do you work according to the most common occupations in Santa Catarina? (RAIS, 2022)*</b>	
Textile/Clothing Industry	3 (1,9)
Plastic Industry	0
Paints and Solvents Industry	0
Coal Industry	1 (0,6)
Construction Industry	2 (1,3)
Ceramic Industry	2 (1,3)
Commerce (salesperson, cashier, attendant)	34 (21,4)
Health Services	67 (42,1)
Education Services	9 (5,7)
Administrative Services	41 (25,8)

\*Annual Social Information Report. Source: Research data, 2024.

The behavioral data related to the participants' work profile were presented in Table 3. With regard to the evaluation of workload, 49.1% of the participants considered the workload to be moderate, followed by 25.2% who reported experiencing overload. Concerning satisfaction with their work role, 54.7% of the sample stated they were satisfied, while 24.5% did not consider themselves either satisfied or dissatisfied. Regarding concentration during the workday, most participants rated it as good (58.5%). However, during their study period, the sample rated their concentration as poor (36.5%), followed by fair (32.1%). Concerning their current physical health status, 41.5% of the sample perceived it as fair, 31.4% rated it as good, and 17.6% as poor. As for current mental health status, 44% of participants reported a fair status, 24.5% a poor status, and 5.7% a very poor status.

**Table 3.** Distribution of behavioral data related to the work profile of Pharmacy and Physiotherapy students at a University in Southern Santa Catarina.

	n(%)
	n=159
<b>How do you feel about satisfaction in your work role?</b>	
Very satisfied	23 (14,5)
Satisfied	87 (54,7)
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	39 (24,5)
Dissatisfied	6 (3,8)
Very dissatisfied	4 (2,5)

<b>How do you evaluate your workload?</b>	
Light	28 (17,6)
Moderate	78 (49,1)
There is overload	40 (25,2)
Exhaustive	13 (8,2)
<b>During your workday, how do you evaluate your concentration?</b>	
Excellent	12 (7,5)
Good	93 (58,5)
Fair	44 (27,7)
Poor	8 (5)
Very poor	2 (1,3)
<b>During your study period, how do you evaluate your concentration?</b>	
Excellent	7 (4,4)
Good	37 (23,3)
Fair	51 (32,1)
Poor	58 (36,5)
Very poor	6 (3,8)
<b>How do you classify your current physical health status?</b>	
Excellent	10 (6,3)
Bom	50 (31,4)
Fair	66 (41,5)
Poor	28 (17,6)
Very poor	5 (3,1)
<b>How do you classify your current mental health status?</b>	
Excellent	5 (3,1)
Bom	36 (22,6)
Fair	70 (44)
Poor	39 (24,5)
Very poor	9 (5,7)

## DISCUSSION

According to the literature, the last decade has been marked by an expansion of opportunities for access to higher education in Brazil. The number of enrollments increased by 85.6%, reaching 12.6 million students enrolled in courses at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Brazil, according to the 2021 Higher Education Census<sup>14,15</sup>. Regarding the health field, interest and demand for such programs grew from 2021 onward, including the Pharmacy and Physiotherapy programs<sup>16</sup>. However, the health field is predominantly composed of women<sup>17</sup>. According to a survey conducted by the WHO in 2019, women represent seven out of every ten health professionals worldwide<sup>18</sup>. The trend of greater female participation in health-related careers also appears among younger age groups, with a higher number of women enrolled in these undergraduate programs<sup>19</sup>.

The number of university students pursuing their degrees while working has increased in recent decades. In Brazil, 58.8% of university students up to 24 years of age work, with or without pay<sup>20</sup>. However, as the number of working students has grown, so has the number of students enrolled in evening programs. Historically, evening higher education has served as an alternative for students who work<sup>21</sup>.

The evening period comprises the largest share of students—approximately 58% of the total—with potential for continued growth each year<sup>22</sup>. This number aligns with the proportion of working students found in the literature. Therefore, there is a clear association between employment status and the chosen time of study, with the evening period being predominantly composed of students who work.

Furthermore, the Brazilian labor market is shaped by two main employment arrangements: informal and formal work. A traditional classification in Brazilian literature identifies informal workers as those without a signed work card, while broader definitions also include self-employed workers<sup>23</sup>. Because their income depends on the buying and selling of goods and services, self-employed workers are more vulnerable to seasonal variations and income fluctuations<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, this may create uncertainty about their future financial situation and hinder investments, including the completion of a university degree.

On the other hand, formal employment generates legally regulated labor relations that guarantee several rights to workers, such as a stable monthly salary and social security benefits<sup>25</sup>. Although formal work offers greater security, this employment arrangement also carries characteristics that require higher performance demands within the employer–employee relationship. According to IBGE, in 2022 the number of informally employed individuals was nearly equal to the number of formally employed workers<sup>26</sup>. Regionally, however, the southern region of Brazil is characterized by a predominance of formal employment due mainly to its higher level of economic development<sup>27</sup>.

In analyzing the results, in addition to formal and informal workers, we also identified students whose work role is defined through internships. Internships integrate students into the labor market by providing opportunities for practical learning and scientific, cultural, and interpersonal development<sup>28</sup>. Research indicates that 65% of students who participate in internships continue working in the same field post-graduation<sup>29</sup>. Another study reports that 86% of students who underwent internships feel more confident entering full-time professional roles after graduating<sup>30</sup>.

However, the excessive workload experienced by students may lead to overload, as most university students work to pay tuition and student loan debts<sup>31</sup>. Professionals with longer working hours tend to report lower levels of job satisfaction regardless of profession<sup>32</sup>. From an academic perspective, excessive work hours can impair academic performance, as students struggle to maintain a study routine and often feel overwhelmed. Excessive work hours reduce students' available time and energy for studying and engaging in healthy habits, including leisure<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, academic responsibilities and paid work both contribute to emotional exhaustion. When these responsibilities accumulate excessively, they hinder the fulfillment of expectations tied to key social roles—such as those of student and employee—and reduce overall life satisfaction<sup>34</sup>. These findings align with this study.

Such factors may lead students to make extreme decisions, such as dropping out. University dropout occurs when a student discontinues their studies due to reasons such as poor academic performance or limited job prospects<sup>35</sup>. Studies show that states in southern and southeastern Brazil—Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and São Paulo—have the highest rates of university dropout<sup>36</sup>.

A study with coordinators of health programs—including Pharmacy and Physiotherapy—highlighted strategies to reduce dropout related to financial and motivational difficulties. These include motivational approaches, open dialogue with students, financial guidance, academic development opportunities, and institutional support<sup>36</sup>.

Some studies show that working and studying are not mutually exclusive, although tension can arise when work hinders study or when lack of employment prevents educational advancement<sup>22,37</sup>.

This study was motivated partly by the research group's contact with productive environments related to Worker Health, where undergraduate students frequently appeared in different job positions, prompting interest in mapping this reality within these two programs. Limitations include sample size and the low number of morning-period students.

Studies exploring lifestyle and time use among future health professionals can help develop intersectoral health-promoting strategies involving universities, governments, employers, and worker organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The predominant profiles identified were female students working under formal employment arrangements (CLT), with weekly workloads of 40 hours or more, particularly in health, administrative, and commerce sectors. Students with very high workloads may be more susceptible to overload when such responsibilities combine with academically demanding programs. Evening education has been shown to help students who depend on work reconcile academic and professional obligations, though this remains a challenge for full engagement in university life. Conversely, working or interning in one's intended professional field tends to increase satisfaction, making the academic path less challenging personally and emotionally.

Therefore, work and education are interdependent, and achieving a healthy balance between them is crucial for the academic and professional success of university students in the programs analyzed.

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