Work Engagement in Portugal’s National Continues Care Network Professionals

Diogo Almeida, Carminda Morais, and Alexandra R. Costa

ABSTRACT

The national network of integrated continuing care is one of the most recent responses of the Portuguese National Health System. It is therefore crucial to carry out studies that assess this response, but also focus on the professionals who ensure the provision of care on a daily basis. Knowledge about work engagement of professionals is essential to improve the quality of these organizations. Work Engagement is an indicator of the relationship between the professionals and the work environment and is an important factor in performance and productivity. The aim of this study was to evaluate levels of engagement among these professionals. The data collection instrument consisted of a sociodemographic and professional questionnaire, and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale short version (UWES-9) by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), translated and adapted for the Portuguese population by Sinval et al. (2018). In a universe of about 1000 professionals from different units, 240 individuals were studied. The results obtained show that professionals have high work engagement values. There were statistically significant differences in the means of work engagement, taking into account the sociodemographic variables, marital status (t=-4.28; p=0.006) and age group (F=3.476; p=0.009) and socio-professional classification in the remuneration (t=-5.015; p<0.001), professional experience (t=3.343; p=0.001) and professional category (F=6.385; p=0.002).

Regression analyses that showed a R square determination coefficient value, obtained, 12.4% of the variance in work engagement can be explained by the demographic and job features variables.

Keywords: continues care network, healthcare professionals, utrecht work engagement scale, work engagement.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Portuguese National Network of Integrated Continuous Care, created in 2006, is a response created to guarantee the continuity of care for citizens whose clinical condition does not justify acute hospitalization, but also does not allow full discharge to their home. This care is guaranteed by multidisciplinary teams, composed of professionals from clinical and social areas. (Almeida et al., 2021; Petronilho et al., 2017). It is therefore crucial to carry out studies that evaluate this response, but also focus on the professionals who daily ensure the provision of care. Due to the specificity and importance of the work developed by these professionals, it is essential that organizations pay attention to the employees’ workplace well-being, and specifically with work engagement as this directly correlates with productivity (Christian et al., 2011).

Organizations need engaged and committed employees in order to accomplish organizational objectives, and because having engaged employees provides competitive advantage, since this is directly related to performance, commitment, and health (Bakker et al., 2008; Halbesleben, 2010). Understanding the work engagement of these specific professionals is therefore fundamental.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Work Engagement has been characterized as a positive, persistent, work-related cognitive-affective state. It consists of a behavioral-energetic component (vigor), an emotional component (dedication) and a cognitive component (absorption). These components are for many authors the three dimensions of engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Sinval et al., 2018).

Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience during work, willingness to put effort into work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to the individual being heavily involved in their work and is characterized by a sense of relevance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge in the face of work. Absorption corresponds to a state in which the person is totally focused, losing track of time and happily getting carried away in his involvement with work, from which the person finds it difficult to let go (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Work engagement benefits at an individual and organizational level and is deeply linked to the development of the organization, stimulating individual and organizational results. Employees with high levels of engagement are committed, but also very emotionally attached to the institution, which does not mean that these individuals are
unable to disconnect from work or that they incur excessive work, but rather it means that in the time they are to work are able to enjoy and maximize their time, focusing on looking for opportunities that create benefits and add value to the organization (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The concept of work engagement has been studied extensively by different areas of knowledge to determine factors affecting employees’ positive attitudes towards their work (Derbis & Jasiński, 2018; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Jenaro et al., 2011; Kašpárková et al., 2018; Lepistö et al., 2018). According to Bakker (2011), elements like job demands and job resources are the main elements involved in work engagement dynamics and therefore the promotion of work engagement, its antecedents and its consequences can be explained through the Job Demands and Resources Model. This model indicates that the characteristics of the job can be defined by your requirements and/or your resources. Job demands are defined through the physical, psychological and social aspects of work, such as high pressure at work, emotionally demanding interactions with clients/users/colleagues, which therefore require effort, physical and psychological cost from individuals. On the other hand, job resources, which include, for example, social support from colleagues and superiors, appreciation, work feedback and autonomy, are the physical, psychological, social and organizational factors of work that allow the achievement of objectives, reducing the demands and consequently the physical and emotional costs, contributing to personal and professional development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job demands are major predictors of exhaustion, mental health problems and burnout, due to the requirement they create on the individual to expend energy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job resources are fundamental predictors of engagement, motivation and job satisfaction, as they are resources that meet the basic psychological needs of individuals, such as autonomy and relationships in the work context (Wingerden et al., 2016, 2018).

The Portuguese reality was studied in 2017. The Sixth European Working Conditions Survey reported that Portugal, among the 28 countries analyzed, was the country with the lowest levels of work engagement (Parent-Thirion et al., 2017).

The aim of this study was to describe work engagement of Portugal’s National Network of Integrated Continuous Care professionals. The study results increase knowledge about the work engagement of all the professionals involved in this network, as well as possible differences between professional groups and their sociodemographic and professional characteristics. This research has two objectives:

1. To describe this professionals’ levels of work engagement.
2. To describe the associations between sociodemographic and professional characteristics and work engagement.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Design

Based on the objectives of the research a quantitative methodology and correlational nature were used.

B. Participants

The study was carried out in Portugal over a 2-month period, from May 2022 to the end of June 2022. A convenience sample of Portugal National Network of Integrated Continuous Care was utilized. Information was gathered from 8 different Units of one of the main players of the Portugal National Network for Integrated Continuing Care. Inclusion criterion was work length of a year or more. According to the information provided by the company about the employees who received the questionnaire, the rate of response was 24%. A total of 240 subjects (Registered nurses, Nurse managers and Certified Nursing Assistant) participated in the study after informed consent. Confidentiality was guaranteed during the assessment.

C. Data collection

Data were collected using an electronic questionnaire that comprised a Survey on demographic data and job features (14 items), Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – short version (9 items) and Quality of Work Life Scale (16 items). This study presents only the analyzed results of the UWES scale.

D. Survey on Demographic Data and Job Features

Sociodemographic and job position characteristics of the professionals were collected with an ad hoc survey collecting sociodemographic information about, age, sex, nationality, dependents, marital status, academic qualifications, and professional information about, management functions, salary level classification, professional experience, seniority in the institution, professional category, and type of employment relationship.

E. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Short Version (UWES-9)

The UWES-9 was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). The measure is a self-report scale scored on a 7-point rating scale (0 = never; 6 = always) with three questions each about the three dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, willingness to invest in work, and persistence in difficult situations. Dedication refers to the individual being heavily involved in their work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being completely focused and involved in one’s work, time passes quickly, and the individual has difficulty letting go of his work. Higher values on the total scale and dimensions reveal a higher level of work engagement. According to the authors of the instrument, 5 categories of classification of the work engagement level can be created, namely, “Very high”, “High”, “Medium”, “Low” and “Very Low”, whose limits are defined through the 5th, 25th, 75th and 95th percentiles of the total score obtained (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). The UWES-9 is one of the most-used constructs to measure engagement (Ferreira et al., 2020). We used the Portuguese version of UWES-9 developed and validated by Sinval et al. (2018).

UWES-9 had a Cronbach’s α of 0.92 in the original version (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The Portuguese version had 0.96 (Sinval et al., 2018). In this research, the Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.92.
F. Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Authorization to carry out the study was requested from the Company's administration, which was authorized. The study project was sent to the ethics committee of the Health Sciences Research Unit: Nursing at the Coimbra Nursing School for authorization. In order to use the UWES-9, a formal request was made via email to the authors of the Portuguese version, who authorized the use of the instrument.

G. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data. The categorical variables were then examined using cross-tabulation, and differences were tested by independent t-test and a one-way analysis of variance, ANOVA, with post hoc comparisons, Tukey and Games-Howell for equal or unequal variances respectively were employed. The level of statistical significance was set at p<0.05. Associations among different variables were examined using Pearson’s r. Finally, work engagement as a continuous variable was analyzed with a linear regression model with stepwise method, with categorical variables being transformed into dummy variables (Marôco, 2018). Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25.0.

IV. RESULTS

A. Participants

The sample (Table I) consisted of 240 individuals, aged between 18 and 66 years, with a mean age of 39.39±11.76 years, most of whom were female (n=194; 80.8%). In terms of nationality, 87.1% were of Portuguese nationality. Regarding marital status, 44.6% were “married or in a de facto union”. In terms of academic qualifications, 38.8% have a Bachelor’s degree. The household is composed on average of 2.71±1.38 elements, the number of children of the individuals in the sample is 0.87±1.01 children, and 69.6% of the individuals in the sample do not have dependents. office.

In terms of job position characteristics, 36.7% of the participants belong to the professional category “operational assistant”, which includes direct action assistants and cleaning assistants, 32.9% belong to the professional category “health professional” that includes doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, nutritionists, psychologists, nutritionists and the remaining 30.4% belong to the “others” category, which includes directors, supervisors, social workers, sociocultural animators and other technical administrative staff, with 18.3% of participants perform coordination functions. Regarding the type of employment relationship, 56.3% of the participants belong to the company's staff. 69.6% of the participants classify their remuneration level as “insufficient”. In terms of professional experience, the participants have, on average, a professional experience of 12.99±10.25 years. The length of service in the institution has an average of 5.14±4.41 years.

B. Levels of Work Engagement

The global Work Engagement mean score was 4.37±1.12, which indicates a high level of engagement. Vigor averages a total score of 4.03±1.35, indicating a medium level. Respondents mean score in terms of dedication was 4.58±1.22, representing a high level and last Absorption had a mean score of 4.51±1.12, which is also a high level.

C. Associations between Sociodemographic and Job Position Characteristics and Work Engagement

Several differences were observed among participants demographic and job features variables (Table III). Participants that were separated had significantly higher work engagement mean scores (4.81±0.92; F=4.28; p=0.006). A tukey post hoc test showed that individuals who were single score significantly lower, then the remaining groups. Regarding academic qualifications, individuals with undergrad's degree recorded the highest score with a mean of 5.05±1.12 (F=3.747; p=0.016).

The tukey post hoc test indicated that the individuals with bachelor degree had a significantly lower score of work engagement. In terms of age, the individuals the 50 to 60 age group, had the highest work engagement mean score, with 4.59±1.12 (F=3.476; p=0.009). A post hoc tukey test indicated that individuals with less than 30 years of age, scored significantly less than the older ones. More experienced professional (more than 11 years) had highest work engagement mean scores (4.61±1.03; t=-3.343; p=0.001) such as, the ones that classified their salary level as insufficient. 

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TABLE I: SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROFESSIONAL DATA OF THE STUDY SAMPLE

TABLE II: WORK ENGAGEMENT DESCRIPTIVES
Finally, we tested which factors predict work engagement. Regression analyses were conducted with the variables that showed correlations and significant differences as predictors. Be obtained a 2-step regression model with an R square adjusted determination coefficient value of 0.124. Age and salary level classification has “insufficient” where statistically significant and therefore explained 12.4% of the variance in work engagement. The regression model, explaining the impact of this characteristic on work engagement, is valid (with F=17,925; p<0.001). A beta value of -0.299 with p<0.001 was found for participants that classified their salary level has insufficient, so it is possible to affirm that those who earn a salary considered insufficient have a level of engagement 0.299 points lower than those who classified their salary level has insufficient. Age presented a beta value of 0.220 with p<0.001, so according to the model with the increase of age, work engagement also increases.

V. DISCUSSION

Results obtained, showed that the levels of work engagement in this convenient samples of workers of Portugal National Continues Care Network were seemingly high, compared with previous studies in Portuguese settings (Marques-Pinto et al., 2015) and studies made in the same time setting, the Covid-19 pandemic period (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2021), but it has also lower, then other studies made in different countries (Cuartero-Castañer et al., 2021; Lepistö et al., 2018). These findings suggested that even after a period of great demand and stress, these professionals presented a high level of work engagement, but it also showed that the specifically health professionals had significantly less score of work engagement then the order professional categories, and if we look at the specific value of work engagement of this professionals the values is more in line with findings of previous studies made with Portuguese healthcare professionals.

Regarding the values of the work engagement subscales, the vigor domain presented a mean score that indicated an average level, being the domain that presented the lowest evaluation. This fact reinforces the results of other researchers (Cao & Chen, 2019; Cuartero-Castañer et al., 2021; Gómez-Salgado et al., 2021; Lepistö et al., 2018; Sinval et al., 2018). Like other researchers, we considered that this level of vigor can be attributed to the type of work these professionals do, and because of the extra demands they had during the covid-19 pandemic period. The dedication dimension presented the highest value which is consistent with the results of other studies (Cuartero-Castañer et al., 2021; Gómez-Salgado et al., 2021; Lepistö et al., 2018; Sinval et al., 2018). Dedication domain therefore presents a level high, in professionals of the National Network of Continuing Care integrated. Finally, the absorption domain presented also a high level. This value is in line with results of other researchers (A. G. da Silva et al., 2020; M. Silva et al., 2020; Sinval et al., 2018) Other studies showed considerably lower levels, with only an average absorption level (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2021).

There were some sociodemographic and job characteristics associated with different results of work engagement. For
example, marital status, individuals that were divorced, and married were the ones that scored the highest, with the difference being statistically significant. This finding contradicts the results obtained by other researchers (Borges et al., 2021; Faria et al., 2019; Garbin et al., 2019). Cuartero-Castaher et al. (2021) also found high levels of engagement in divorced and married participants, but there were no statistical differences.

Academic degree was another differentiating factor, with individuals with a non-university education being those with the highest level, and the differences between individuals with High school degree and bachelor’s degree were statistically significant. This result contradicts the results obtained by other researchers (Garbin et al., 2019; Neiva et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2004).

Individuals with greater professional experience were those who had higher levels, and this finding in our opinion is in line with the higher level of engagement of older individuals. Older individuals have greater professional experience.

Operational assistants were the professionals who showed higher levels of engagement, compared to health professionals who showed the lowest levels. If, on the one hand, the levels presented by the operational assistants are very positive, because they are often those who mostly deal with users of the National Network of Continuous Integrated Care, organizations should reflect on the lower levels presented by health professionals, which, due to the central importance that these professionals represent in the provision of clinical care, can have a negative impact on the organization’s outcome and consequently on the quality of care provided to users.

The individuals that classified their remuneration level as sufficient are those who present higher values, with this difference having a high statistical significance. This result is in line with the theoretical job demands-resources model defined by Bakker and Demerouti (2007), which advocates that the salary can act as a work resource, promoting the achievement of work goals and reducing the demands of the same and, thus, at least on a theoretical level, they may be positively related to a higher level of engagement. However, other researchers have not reached the same results (Kulikowski & Sedlak, 2020).

The variables age, marital status, salary level classification and professional experience, despite showing statistically significant correlation, the values of the correlation coefficients are between 0.163 and 0.289, therefore presenting correlation values classified as low and very low (Pestana & Gageiro, 2020).

Last of all, our regression model predicted that 12.4% of the variance in work engagement can be explained by salary level classification and age. We didn’t find any research with this kind of settings, but there were some similarities with the regression models of Cao and Chen (2019) with their model explaining 6.8% of the variance of work engagement with some Sociodemographic characteristics.

VI. CONCLUSION

The professional of Portugal National Continues Care Network presented high levels of work engagement showing that they are enthusiastic and proud of their work, have good levels of energy and disposition, concentration and capacity of effort, and persistence in the face of adversity.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

REFERENCES


