

Main methodological issues in the study of job stress in college staff: A systematic review

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Abstract

Introduction: Research about of job stress at university contexts has not been exempt from conceptual and methodological difficulties. **Objective:** analyze the main methodological and instrumental aspects in studies published between 2010 and 2019, on job stress in professor, administrative and support staff working in Latin American universities. **Method:** following the suggested by the PRISMA model, it was consulted the databases: LA Reference, Dialnet, Scopus, EBSCO and Web of Science, obtaining 258 papers that, after a debugging process, derivated 6 studies for their final review. **Results:** the results show that all the studies were quantitative, with non-experimental and cross-sectional designs, and with descriptive scopes. In addition, the use of 15 instruments that mainly assess work stress and occupational risk factors was detected. Theoretical and methodological implications derived from the findings are discussed.

Key words: stress; job stress; college staff; systematic review.

Principales aspectos metodológicos en el estudio del estrés laboral en personal universitario: Una revisión sistemática

Resumen

Introducción: El estudio del estrés laboral en el ámbito universitario no ha estado exento de dificultades conceptuales y metodológicas. **Objetivo:** analizar los principales aspectos metodológicos e instrumentales en estudios publicados entre 2010 y 2019, sobre estrés laboral en docentes, administrativos y personal de apoyo que trabaja en universidades latinoamericanas. **Método:** siguiendo lo sugerido por el modelo PRISMA, se consultaron las bases de datos: La Referencia, Dialnet, Scopus, EBSCO y Web of Science, obteniendo inicialmente 258 trabajos que dieron lugar a 6 estudios para su revisión final. **Resultados:** señalan que los estudios fueron cuantitativos, no experimentales y transversales, y con alcances descriptivos. Además, se detectó el uso de 15 instrumentos que principalmente evalúan estrés laboral y factores de riesgo laborales. **Discusión:** se resaltan niveles significativos de estrés laboral en las muestras incluidas, así como la necesidad de prevenir las causas y factores asociados al fenómeno.

Palabras clave: Estrés; Estrés laboral; Personal universitario; Revisión sistemática.

Principais aspectos metodológicos no estudo do stress ocupacional no pessoal universitário: Uma revisão sistemática

Resumo

As pesquisas sobre estresse no trabalho em contextos universitários não ficaram isentas de dificuldades conceituais e metodológicas, portanto o objetivo desta revisão sistemática é analisar os principais aspectos metodológicos e instrumentais em estudos publicados entre 2010 e 2019, sobre estresse no trabalho em professores, administrativos e pessoal de apoio que trabalha em universidades públicas latino-americanas. Seguindo o sugerido pelo modelo PRISMA, foram consultadas as bases de dados: LA Reference, Dialnet, Scopus, EBSCO e Web of Science, obtendo 258 artigos que, após um processo de depuração, obtiveram 6 estudos para sua revisão final. Os resultados mostram que todos os estudos foram quantitativos, com delineamento não experimental e transversal, e com escopo descritivo. Além disso, foi detectada a utilização de 15 instrumentos que avaliam principalmente o estresse no trabalho e os fatores de risco ocupacionais. As implicações teóricas e metodológicas derivadas dos resultados são discutidas.

Palavras-chave: estresse; estresse no trabalho; equipe da faculdade; revisão sistemática.

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The current employment situation in colleges and universities poses numerous challenges to their personnel including faculty, administrative and support staff, leading to several research studies being conducted to try to identify and understand undesirable phenomena such as job stress. In this context, this exploratory systematic review is aimed at analyzing the main methodological and instrumental aspects of studies on stress in public universities personnel published between 2010 and 2019. For this purpose, five prestigious databases have been consulted with the ultimate goal of analyzing the accumulated scientific evidence and making the synthesis available for consultation and use to anyone interested in the subject.

Introduction

Considered as the disease of the 21st century, stress has been an object of interest in research due to the effects it has on people's health and on their work environment. Therefore, it is considered a condition that has repercussions

on the quality of life (Bairero, 2017) and affects people regardless of their personal characteristics (Karam, Parra, Urrego, & Castillo, 2019). The origin of this phenomenon can be traced to domestic or work-related problems (World Health Organization [WHO], 2004), job stress being a resulting category (Berrío & Mazo, 2011), which generates and represents significant cost for organizations due to the high number of employees suffering from it (García, Maldonado, Ramírez, & Lozano, 2013). Thus, due to this condition, occupational health tends to decline due to factors such as, e.g., the length of time spent at work (Collado, Soria, Canafoglia, & Collado, 2016). In that sense, people may experience job stress when the demands of the job exceed their mental and physical capabilities, which may or may not be considered harmful or detrimental, depending on the individual's capacity (Hessels, Rietvelt, & Zwan, 2017; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011).

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting the growing interest in research on job stress in developing countries (Ramírez, 2019), without forgetting the existence of theoretical, conceptual, and methodological dilemmas in its study. For that reason, this paper conducts a systematic review of the literature in order to

obtain an overview of the subject, focusing on methodological and instrumental aspects.

Job Stress and the University Setting

The changes experienced by humanity have modified the way of producing life, culture, and society, thus marking an era of transformations for people (Mejía, 2015). In this order of ideas, it is convenient to remember that work is the means by which economic sustenance is obtained and psychological needs, such as personal and professional self-realization, the construction of social identity, or the sense of community life are covered (Alves, Cirera, & Guiliani, 2013). However, paradoxically, people might prefer to work in poor conditions than to be unemployed (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2016). It is in this current context that the demands on the worker's performance have grown, expecting from him or her an increased capacity for flexibility, group work, decision-making, and mastery of new information and communication technologies (Ramos & Jordão, 2015). So, there is an interaction between the perceived demands of the situation, the resources that the worker has to buffer the stressor, and his or her individual characteristics (Hermosa & Perilla, 2015). In this sense, stress manifests itself in different settings, being two of the most frequent ones daily life and work; however, despite its situational nature, its effects do not seem to appear immediately when individuals change context (Nava, Orihuela, & Vega, 2016). As for job stress, it arises as a response to work requirements and demands (Patlán, 2019), which, together with the lack of control to make decisions at work, can cause tension in the staff (Birolim et al., 2019; Karasek, 1979), thus originating a potentially pathogenic emotional, physiological, and behavioral response that influences the worker's activities and their outcome (Zuniga-Jara & Pizarro-Leon, 2018). However, it is convenient to point out that this process may be different in each individual due to the adoption of a coping posture related to positive emotions, cognition, and learning derived from stressful experiences (Ganster & Rosen, 2013; McCarthy, 2019; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011).

In today's globalized world, the university is an entity that contributes to the promotion of the

economic and social development of a country (Huanco, 2019). It is an organized space that provides a sense of representation, significance, and structuring of behaviors, rituals, and roles for groups related to it. Therefore, universities represent values, beliefs, and expectations of various strata, groups, and social classes (Acosta, 2019), being its challenge to contribute to society by forming professionals with subject matter knowledge, but most importantly, with competencies and values (Figueroa, Encinas, Félix, & Vega, 2019).

Therefore, its members share purpose to achieve common objectives based on collaborative work towards a work culture (Aparicio & Sepúlveda, 2019). However, since the 1960s, globalization marked changes in organizations, such as universities in Latin America and the Caribbean, relegating the humanities and giving priority to technology (Soto & Forero, 2016). For its part, the globalizing context has favored educational reforms and policies aiming to increase education quality. As a result of these changes, public universities have been forced to adopt a quality control system that allows them to achieve their longed-for goals (Zúñiga, Pérez, & García, 2016). However, in the face of the global changes emerging from the transition between the 20th and 21st centuries, some educational systems have become obsolete, translating the minimal educational opportunities and low quality in education into a lack of job opportunities, crime, and deterioration of the quality of life (Orozco-Alvarado, Núñez-Martínez, & Orozco-Bravo, 2019). Thus, in the face of global transitions, the key actors that face and have kept pace with the constant changes are the people immersed in the university context. In this sense, it is important to note that professors and administrative and support staff are some of the sectors that make up the university and, therefore, that have been affected by the constant changes.

University Professors

They are considered agents of change committed to face, through education, the challenges posed by implementing pedagogical strategies so that students acquire environmental knowledge and

develop critical, systemic, and complex thinking about reality (Sánchez-Contreras & Murga-Menoyo, 2019). However, their work demands are increasing because better results are expected in the shortest possible time, generating low self-esteem and a sense of failure in them (González & Orta, 2016). Added to this, the type of university could be a factor that influences the difference in workload levels and functions in this population (Yousefi & Kanesan, 2019). Therefore, professors, who are immersed in a world of constant transformations, such as the current one, must carry out their activities with urgency and pressure. This can certainly generate stress in the end (Alvites-Huamani, 2019), resulting in job stress, a type that originates from the imbalance of demands and pressures caused by coercion at work and non-optimal working conditions. These exceed the workers' resistance and ability to cope and resolve them (Sánchez, 2017), thus affecting their personal and professional competence, as well as their productivity (Watts & Robertson, 2011). In this regard, it should be remembered that teaching is one of the noblest activities of human endeavor, characterized by a love for wisdom and learners (Barrientos, 2016), but it has also been one of the professions frequently affected by job stress (Botero, 2012).

Administrative Staff

Administrative personnel are considered the human resources in charge of the university's administrative, academic, and budgetary processes, and act as contacts for internal and external users; therefore, their work is marked by demands and constant pressure because they must keep pace with the active and productive development of today's world (García et al., 2014; Gonzáles, 2014). Thus, this population is considered vulnerable as they are under constant stress and at risk of suffering from job stress, since the scenarios with which they usually have to deal include deadlines, documents to be completed, and workload, among others (Rivera-Encinas, 2016).

Support Personnel

Another sector that makes up the university is the support staff, made up of non-academic and permanent bodies (González & Codagnone,

2010). This is a group that could enjoy stable positions and economic benefits in times of labor crisis and, unlike the previous sectors, would not be exposed to the competitiveness of the professional world (Marsollier & Aparicio, 2014). Added to this, it could be subclassified by the nature of their different tasks (administrative, technical, professional, maintenance, and service) as different contributions and demands can be found in these subgroups (Durán, Atlante, & Giordano, 2010), as well as, of course, job stress.

On the other hand, it is pertinent to mention some studies in the Ibero-American region that share some direct characteristics with the present systematic review in the university context, including some theses (García, 2016; Ramírez, 2018) or empirical papers (Carpio et al., 2017; Londoño, 2019). In terms of previous reviews, we can mention the contribution of Avargues & Borda (2010), a review of the main lines of research on job stress and burnout in the university, taking faculty and research, administration, and service staff as a sample. Therefore, it is evident that there is a lack of recent systematic reviews on job stress, especially with a focus on the Latin American region. Thus, the following research questions were elaborated in this study: What are the main methodological aspects in the study of job stress in university personnel? And what instruments have been used for this purpose? In this sense, the objective is to analyze the main methodological aspects in studies published between 2010 and 2019 on job stress in professors and administrative and support staff in public universities; as well as to identify the instruments used to measure and/or evaluate job stress in university personnel.

Methodology

This is an observational and retrospective research design aiming to synthesize the results of primary research (Beltrán, 2005). To carry out this exploratory systematic review, we followed the PRISMA model (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & PRISMA Group, 2009) to the largest extent possible, due to the great heterogeneity in nature and design of the studies evaluated.

Thus, combinations of the selected key words were made with the use of the Boolean operator

"AND," from which two search strings were obtained, resulting in Spanish: "Estrés laboral AND Personal AND Universitario" and in English: "Job stress AND Personal AND University." The search for papers was carried out in the LA Referencia, Dialnet, Scopus, EBSCO, and Web of Science databases, in the period from May to August 2019, and were obtained from the following:

Inclusion criteria: 1) publications from January 2010 to July 2019; 2) English and Spanish language; 3) open access and full text; 4) job stress as the main topic; 5) sample of professors, administrators, and support staff working in Latin American universities; 6) at least one validated instrument that assesses or measures job stress for the Latin American population.

Exclusion criteria: 1) papers written not in the years 2010 to 2019; 2) languages other than English and Spanish; 3) closed access and/or pay-per-view; 4) topic focused on burnout; 5) a sample of university students; 6) non-Latin American countries.

The papers obtained were included in spreadsheets and analyzed in four phases, which were used to select potentially relevant papers for this review. The description of these phases is given below:

Phase 1: The selection strategy consisted of typing the search string in each database using the advanced search option, and the following filters were applied to select the documents:

1) the period between January 2010 and July 2019 and 2) a search in all the fields. The record of this phase contains the identification data of the documents found: title, author(s), year, country of publication, DOI, type of resource and access, and database from which it was retrieved.

Phase 2: The documents from the previous phase were kept and narrowed down through a qualitative evaluation (yes/no), eliminating duplicate works. These criteria were added to the record in the spreadsheet, leaving fewer documents than in the first phase.

Phase 3: The selected papers were subjected to a filter of six questions for their evaluation in terms of methodological quality, theoretical contribution, and instrumental contribution, so that they could be subjected to a complete critical reading. Each question had a 2-point value; if

the paper fully answered the question, it was assigned the number two; if it partially answered it, a one; and if it did not answer or had no relation to the question, zero. For the paper to advance to the next phase, it needed a minimum score of nine and a maximum of twelve.

Phase 4: The potentially relevant documents are in this part, organized in a spreadsheet using an analysis table, which maintains the main data section of the paper (Phase 1). Columns were added to know the journal to which it belongs, and the methodological part, the sample, the instrument used, the results, the discussion, and the contributions were also reviewed in depth.

Ethical aspects

This systematic review considers the guidelines from the Code of Ethics of the American Psychological Association (2017), so credit was given to the research works consulted, taking into account the copyright of the papers when writing the corresponding quotes and references.

Data coding

The following information was extracted from each study: year of publication, country of publication, language, key words, approach, design, and scope. As for the sample, the country of origin, size, gender, age range, and job were analyzed.

In addition, names, authorship, years of publication, and the object of evaluation were collected from the instruments.

Data analysis

The Microsoft © Excel 2016 program was used to prepare the database that includes the analysis phases, separated by sheets, where all the selected studies are contained.

Results

Initially, 258 papers were retrieved; however, once the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, and after a filtering process, only six of them met the characteristics required for the final analysis (see Figure 1).

General Characteristics of the Research Works

After the analysis was performed, the identification data and keywords of the papers included in this review are presented. The years of publication of the studies range from 2014 to 2018 and Colombia appears as the main promoter within these publications. On the other hand, a great diversity of keywords considered in each paper is observed, although, listed by frequency of occurrence, they are: Job Stress, Stress, Health and Psychosocial Risk Factors (see Table 1).

Approach, Design, and Scope of Studies

Regarding the methodological part of the papers included in this review, the main characteristic of these studies is that they are quantitative, with non-experimental and cross-sectional designs, and mostly descriptive in scope. Also, there was a study with a non-experimental and cross-sectional design, with a descriptive scope and also with instrumental contributions, since it is the validation of a scale (Unda et al., 2016), which can be visualized in Table 2.

Participants

Regarding the samples, it can be observed that they come mainly from Colombia. Likewise, their description is presented, with variations with respect to the size of the samples, where the smallest is 196 people, compared to 957 professors, which is the largest. As for the distribution of participants, by sex, men participated more, whereas the minimum age presented in the studies was 21 years and the maximum age recorded was 76 years. With respect to the job variable, there was more participation by professors, followed by administrative personnel (see Table 3).

Characteristics of the Instruments

With respect to the instruments used in each paper analyzed, a total of 15 were detected, of which 6 are questionnaires, 5 are scales, 1 is an inventory, 1 is a survey, 1 is a test and 1 is a battery. With regard to the age of the instruments, it should be noted that most of them were published more than 10 years ago. On the other hand, it was found that those that evaluate stress and occupational risk factors

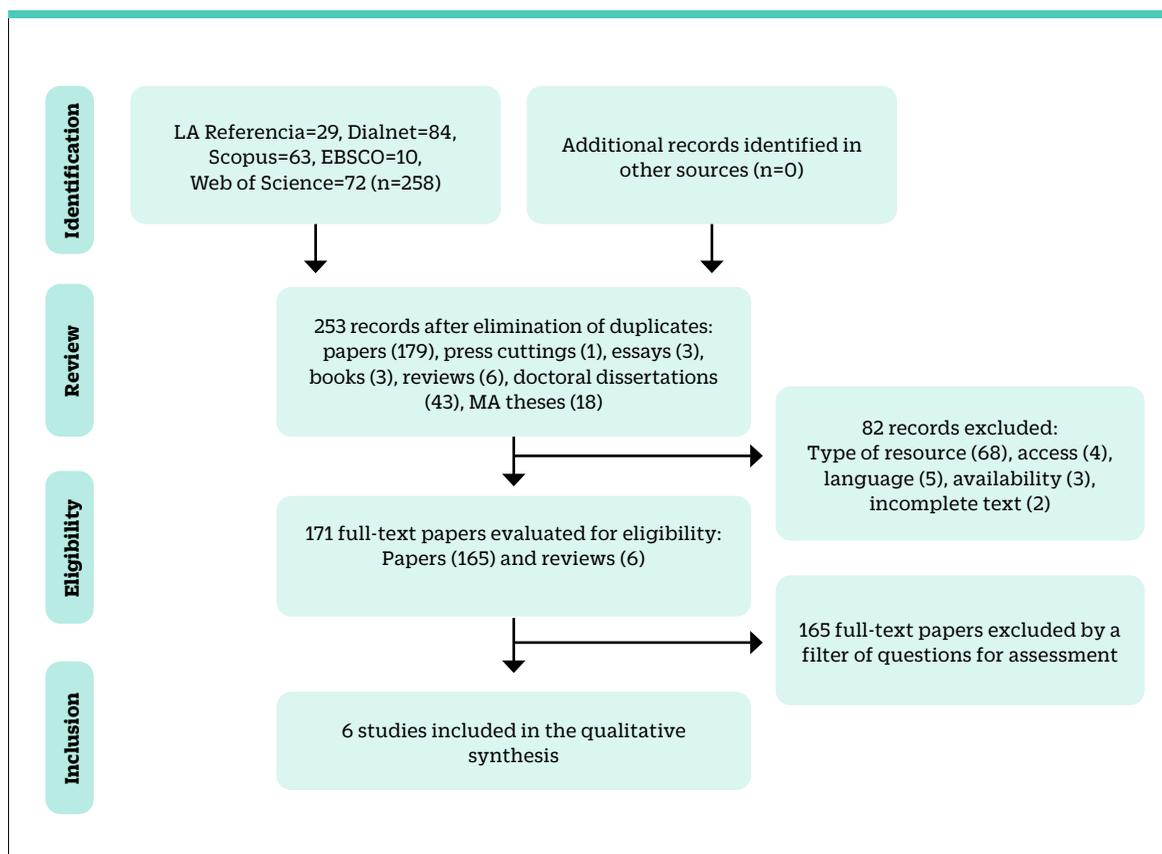


Figure 1. Algorithm based on the PRISMA model

Table 1*Main Characteristics of the Research Works Reviewed*

Author	Country of publication	Language	Key words
Martínez et al. (2018)	Venezuela	Spanish	Scholars, incentives, health, demands, occupational health.
Matabanchoy, Lasso y Pantoja (2017)	Colombia	Spanish	Stress, public education institutions, health, work environment.
Romero, Beleño, Ucros, Echeverría y Lasprilla (2016)	Costa Rica	Spanish	Stress, psychosocial factors, administrative personnel.
Unda et al. (2016)	Spain	Spanish	Psychosocial risk factors, work, university professors, psychometric validation, measurement.
Gómez, Perilla y Hermosa (2015)	Colombia	Spanish	Work and family, job stress, psychological distress, burnout, health psychology.
Millán, García-Álvarez y D'Aubeterre (2014)	Colombia	Spanish	Emotional intelligence, workflow, stress at work, well-being.

are the most widely used and are validated for the population of Latin American countries. The data and description of each are shown in Table 4.

Discussion

The aim of this systematic review was to analyze the main methodological aspects of studies published between 2010 and 2019 on job stress in professors and administrative and support staff in public universities, as well as to identify the instruments used to measure and/or evaluate job stress in university staff.

The countries promoting the publications analyzed were Spain, Costa Rica, Peru, Venezuela, and mainly Colombia, a country that seems to encourage scientific production and studies on different problems at the national and regional level since the end of the last century (Pérez, 2013).

An important finding was the diversity of keywords considered in each paper, where scholars and administrative and teaching staff are mentioned, while support staff is omitted, although they are also part of the university. However, it would be included in the so-called "non-teaching staff" group, who have long been overlooked and even excluded from fundamental decisions (Astorga, 2018).

Table 2*Approach, Design, and Scope of the Reviewed Studies*

Author	Approach	Design	Scope
Martínez et al., 2018	Quantitative	No Exp/Cross-sectional	Correlational/ Descriptive
Matabanchoy et al., 2017	Quantitative	No Exp/Cross-sectional	Descriptive
Romero et al., 2016	Quantitative	No Exp/Cross-sectional	Descriptive
Unda et al., 2016	Quantitative	No Exp/Cross-sectional	Descriptive
Gómez et al., 2014	Quantitative	No Exp/Cross-sectional	Correlational
Millán et al., 2014	Quantitative	No Exp/Cross-sectional	Explanatory

Table 3
Main Characteristics of the Reviewed Research Samples

Author	Sample				
	Source	Size	Sex	Age range	Job
Martínez et al., 2018	Mexico	957 professors	61% men and 39% women (587 men and 370 women)	26 to 76 years old	Professors
Matabanchoy et al., 2017	Colombia	196 people	65% women and 35% men	21 to 65 years old	Managers; administrative, teaching, and support personnel
Romero et al., 2016	Colombia	227 employees	157 women and 70 men	N/E	Administrative personnel
Unda et al., 2016	Mexico	500 professors	331 men and 168 women	21 to 76 years old	Faculty
Gómez et al., 2014	Colombia	302 scholars	57.3% men and 42.7% women	Average age 42.3 years	Scholars
Millán et al., 2014	Venezuela	199 professors	67.34% women and 32.66% men	Between 22 and 73 years old	Undergraduate and postgraduate professors

Note. N/E=Not specified.

All the papers analyzed were written from a quantitative approach with non-experimental and cross-sectional designs, mostly descriptive in scope, which implies valid contributions from an exploratory, descriptive, diagnostic, and localized point of view, but, at the same time, the limitations inherent to this type of design that prevent, for example, causal inference between variables or follow-up of the phenomenon over time.

As for the study samples, variations were observed in the size and distribution of the participants. Although it was found that both sexes participated, a greater presence of men was noted. This could be due to the fact that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the rate of female labor participation has increased. However, there is still a 25% difference with respect to men, causing the rates of unemployed women to be higher than those of men (Poltorak, 2018). Regarding the age of the participants, the minimum age found in the studies was 21 years and the maximum was 76 years. It should be noted that this age range covers different stages of the life cycle, and caution should be exercised in its interpretation, especially if it is considered that stressful events over the course of

a life have different meanings and impacts (Pearlin, 2010), without forgetting that at each stage there is a different idea of the social representations of the elements that quality of life and work should contain (Razo, Díaz, & López, 2018), the latter usually determining self-esteem, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and social opportunities (Siegrist, 1996).

It was evident that the studies focus more on teaching staff, followed by administrative staff, so there is little (or almost no) information about research on people who work as support staff in universities, a sector that seems to have been relegated. This is a trend that has already been noted by other authors, since it seems that research linked to universities continues to focus, generally, on professors (Luy-Montejo et al., 2019) and, in some cases, on students (Marsollier et al., 2014).

However, only four of the instruments used in the publications meet the objective of this systematic review, i.e., the specific assessment of job stress: 1) the DASS 21 inventory, which assesses anxiety, depression, and stress; 2) the third version of the Psychosocial Risk Battery, which identifies physiological, social and behavioral, and intellectual and psycho-emotional symptoms

of stress; 3) the Stress Questionnaire, where the phenomenon is estimated in three categories: high, medium, and low; and 4) the Inventory of Perceived Stressors in University Professors (IPED-U), which evaluates the degree of incidence of different sources of stress. In addition, a great

variety of instruments for the evaluation of the phenomenon could be observed, the most outstanding of which were the Questionnaire for the Evaluation of Stress and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). In the second case, it is important to mention that the MBI is not intended to assess

Table 4
Characteristics of the Instruments Implemented in the Reviewed Studies

Autoría	Instrument		
	Name	Author	What it evaluates
Martínez et al., 2018	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Survey adapted from the Program for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Workers' Health (PROESSAT) 2.DASS 21 Inventory 3.Yoshitake Test 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Noriega, Franco, Martínez, Villegas, Alvear y López, 2001 2.Daza, Novy, Stanley y Averill, 2002 3.Barrientos, Martínez y Méndez, 2004 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.N/E 2.Assesses anxiety, depression, and stress (validated for Latino population) 3.Measures fatigue (validated for Mexican population)
Matabanchoy et al., 2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Questionnaire for stress assessment, third version, from the Psychosocial Risks Battery 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Villalobos, 2010 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Symptoms of stress (physiological, behavioral, social, occupational, intellectual, and psycho-emotional)
Romero et al., 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Questionnaire for stress assessment 2.Battery of Instruments for PSRF Assessment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Castillo y Villalobos, 1996 2.Ministerio de la Protección Social (MPS), 2010 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Stress in three categories: high, medium, and low 2.PSRF in the institutions
Unda et al., 2016	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Scale for PSRF assessment in the work of university professors 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Unda, Uribe, Jurado, García, Tovalín y Juárez, 2016 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PSRF to which university faculty are exposed
Gómez et al., 2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) 2.The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) 3. Grzywacz and Marks work-family spillover scale 4.Maslach Burnout Inventory Survey (MBI-G) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Gómez, 2011 2.N/E 3.Pérez, 2004 4.Gil-Monte, 2002 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Occupational PSRF 2.Psychosomatic Symptoms, Anxiety and Sleep Problems, Depression and Social Dysfunction 3.Family-work conflict and facilitation through four dimensions 4.Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Professional Effectiveness
Millán et al., 2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Psychological Well-Being Scale (PBS) 2.Willingness to Flow at Work Scale (EDFT-3), third version 3.Trait Meta-Mood Scale 24 (TMMS-24) 4.Inventory of Perceived Stressors in University Professors (IPED-U) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Millán y D'Aubeterre, 2011 2.Millán y D'Aubeterre, 2012, 2013 3.Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera y Ramos, 2004 4.Álvarez, D'Aubeterre y Ramírez, 2011 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Degree of happiness and satisfaction with life as perceived by the person 2.Extent to which a worker is in optimal psychological condition (in terms of motivation, personal enjoyment of the task, and the performance of their role) 3.Attention, clarity, and repair 4.The degree of incidence of stress in Venezuelan university professors

Note. N/E=Not specified, PSRF=Psychosocial risk factors.

job stress, but burnout, which is a prolonged and evolved response to job stress (Olivares, 2017; Rodríguez & Rivas, 2011). Therefore, the tools used to analyze such syndrome are difficult to extrapolate to general or day-to-day stress levels (García-Unanue, León, Colino, & Gallardo, 2017).

In this regard, it should be noted that stress is currently considered a complex term and there is still no consensus on its definition (Silva-Ramos, López-Cocotle, & Meza-Zamora, 2020). This difficulty in defining stress lies not so much in the diversity of meanings as it does in the uses that have been given to it, the popular and the scientific, because, although everyone thinks they know what it is, few people seem able to accurately define its meaning (Rivera, 2010). In the same sense, it should be noted that job stress and burnout maintain inseparable ties (Barraca, 2010) that derive in theoretical problems that still exist about the construct, generating many times an indistinct use of the concepts in empirical research (Cajachagua, Salinas, & Carranza, 2015). Therefore, it is considered important to take into account the theoretical and methodological implications, the diagnosis of the phenomenon, the interpretation of the results obtained, and the establishment of more precise lines of research.

The limitations of this study include the strictness of the inclusion criteria; the specification of the sample for Latin America, which may have influenced the small number of studies obtained for this review; the interest only in professors and administrative and support staff, important sectors of the public university; and the specific interest in job stress. In addition, the studies analyzed were only those that were freely available.

Finally, with regard to future lines of research, it is considered pertinent to delimit the concept of job stress from that of burnout, so as not to continue contributing to conceptual and terminological confusion. It is also suggested to study different sectors of the university, for example, support staff and administrative personnel, so the phenomenon in question is detected early and, if necessary, stress reduction is attempted or, better yet, this disease is prevented in workers. Although it is true that stress often cannot be eliminated,

it is possible to develop skills and strategies to manage and control it (Durán, 2010). In addition, it is necessary to consider in a theoretical and methodological way the current conditions of university staff, especially the confinement due to the pandemic, as well as telework (Rodríguez, 2017; Vicente, Torres, Torres, Ramirez, & Capdevila, 2018), emerging with increasing frequency and importance (Muñoz, Amórtegui, & Esguerra, 2018). It is a work modality that has presented benefits (Valle, 2018), but also undesirable consequences, such as techno-stress (Cuervo, Orvitz, Arce, & Fernández, 2018), a phenomenon that could be the subject of research in future works. Finally, we emphasize the relevance of implementing programs that promote the health, as well as the physical and psychological well-being of people working at the university.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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