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EMOTIONAL BURNOUT SYNDROME SYNDROME IN WOMEN RESEARCHERS. THE CASE OF THE JUÁREZ AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF TABASCO

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ABSTRACT

The objective was to determine through a qualitative approach the presence of Emotional burnout syndrome (EBS); the causes associated to the women researchers who belong to the National System of Researchers in México, at the Juarez Autonomous University of Tabasco and its relationship to the development of his career in research. Semi-structured interviews were applied to 13 women researchers and analysis of the categories was carried out with the selective axial open code method, with the support of the Atlas.ti 6.0 program. The results show evidence of Emotional burnout syndrome associated with multiple functions and workload, depersonalization toward students and reduced sense of personal accomplishment related to various causes including lack of recognition. It is concluded that the researchers do perceive the presence of the EBS generated by multiple functions, which affects their career in research; but is not perceived to be linked to a gender issue, but of a structural nature.

KEYWORDS

emotional burnout syndrome - women researchers - gender.

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ABSTRACT

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many organizations today, it is increasingly common for working days are ever increasing and the pace of life in big cities leave little time for rest and recreation, which has created the phenomenon of stress on workers.

The theory of resources and work demands postulate that an employee with excessive labor demand and limited resources show symptoms of stress. Numerous studies on the subject have been framed in the theory of the demands and labor resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2013) and this model has been used to predict the Syndrome in the Anglo-Saxon literature or "Emotional burnout syndrome" as it was operationalized by the authors (Magaña and Sanchez, 2008).

1.1. Origin of the concept

In 1974, a psychiatrist doctor named Herbert Freudenberger who worked as a volunteer assistant at a clinic for drug addicts in New York, noted that after a more or less long period, between one and three years, most suffered a progressive loss of energy, lack of motivation, lack of any interest in the work up to exhaustion, along with various symptoms of anxiety and depression (Mingote Adam, 1998; Moreno,

Gonzalez and Garrosa, 2001, cited in Carlin and Garcés of Fayos, 2010). The type of work that these people did was characterized by lack of a fixed schedule, have a very high number of hours and had a very low wage and a very demanding social context, usually tense and committed. Freudenberger described how these people become less sensitive, unsympathetic and even aggressive in relation to patients with a distanced treatment with tendency to blame the patient of the problems he suffered.

To describe this homogeneous behavioral pattern, Freudenberger chose the same word "Emotional burnout syndrome" which was also used to refer to the effects of chronic use of toxic substances of abuse (Freudenberger and Nort, 1985). This was a word commonly used in athletic, artistic and sports jargon, referring to those subjects who were not getting the expected results despite the efforts made (Carlin and Garcés of the Fayos, 2010).

Thus, the term "emotional burnout syndrome" was presented by Freudenberger and began to be studied with the works of Pines and Kafry (1978) and the Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1977), but its spread as a syndrome is mainly due to the work of Cristina Maslach and Susan Jackson (1981).

1.2. Associated Causes

There are several factors associated with the presence of the EBS, most of the authors classified the origin in organizational variables, those relating to the labor context (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004; Maslach and Leiter, 1997; Whitaker, 1996); personality variables, which are attributed to individual characteristics (Raya, Moriana and Herruzo, 2010), variables associated with the roles and the variables outside the organization such as the interaction of work - family (Gil Monte & Peiró , 2009), the latter being the most influential to them in gender studies associated with EBS.

Several studies have shown a greater propensity of women to show symptoms of EBS (Agut, Beas and Grau, 2003; Oplatka, 2002) as women need to do more than men, particularly in high-demand and competitiveness careers as it can be the investigation. Moreover women have tendencies to suppress negative emotions and accumulate tensions that they are not always able to effectively release (Rubino, Volpone and Avery, 2013).

However, Gil-Monte & Peiró (2009) argue that there is no conclusive evidence in this regard, as the results of the studies vary depending on the population, the instruments used and the country (Gil-Monte, 2002). It should be noted that for the Latino culture, women are socially conditioned to the education and childcare, housework and care of the couple.

1.3. The National System of Researchers in Mexico.

The National Researchers System (NRS) was created in Mexico in 1984 by the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT, 2012, p.1) as a mechanism to contribute to the formation and consolidation of researchers with scientific knowledge and high technological level, and as an element to increase the culture, productivity, competitiveness and social welfare.

To receive the distinction of National Researcher, the applicant must have a doctoral degree and have done quality work of scientific or technological research. This system provides recognition at various levels, the first is the candidate to researcher for young researchers (under 40 years) that must meet minimum requirements and show their relevant participation in research activities. Subsequently, the next category is that of researcher, which is divided into three levels: in level I, he must show to have done original work of scientific or technological research and quality, which will be shown through the presentation of their products for research or technological development; having participated in the direction of theses or graduate teaching courses and other educational or training activities, participating in outreach of science or technology; for level II, in addition to meeting the requirements of level I he should have made, individually or in groups, recognized significant, consistent original, scientific or technological investigation, where it is shown to have established a line of research, and have directed graduate thesis and formed high-level human resources; for level III, in addition to meeting the requirements of level II, he should have completed research that represents an important scientific or technological contribution to the generation and application of knowledge, have made outstanding leadership activities in the national scientific and technological community, to have national and international recognition for their scientific or technological activity, and to have done an outstanding job in training high-level human resources for the country. The third category is emeritus researcher intended for those who has completed fifteen uninterrupted years with the distinction of national researcher in the level III and be over 65 years (CONACYT, 2012, pp. 10-11).

This program has been established as a cornerstone in quality assurance in higher educational institutions in Mexico, as apart from the appointment an economic stimulus is provided according to the level it holds, which has managed to reduce the brain drain and stimulated the development of research activities and the consolidation of research groups and networks of national and international collaboration.

Being so important the program for scientific development it is necessary to observe its female participation, which has historically been lower than the male (Didou and Gerard, 2010, 2011). The latest figure reported by CONACYT (2014, p. 58) notes that women accounted for only 35% of researchers in Mexico and this proportion decreases as the category increases, making it imperative to wonder whether gender is a factor of discrimination in developing a career as a researcher and the consequences on the emotional health of the female researchers.

Despite being a program with many benefits, the pressure of reconciling the demands of the National System of Researchers with the guidelines of the

organizational structure of each institution in the researchers, it is a phenomenon that has been studied previously and in which has reported evidence of EBS (Magaña and Sanchez, 2008; Magana, and Sanchez Aguilar, 2014).

2. OBJECTIVES

Despite the wide range of studies on emotional burnout syndrome in women (Agut, et al., 2003; Oplatka, 2002. Rubino, et al, 2013) or in researchers (Boardman and Bozeman, 2007; Magaña and Sanchez, 2008;. Magaña et al, 2014), no evidence of a study referring to the origin of BDS in female researchers of the National Research System was found.

The purpose of the case study presented was to determine the presence of EDS and the associated causes in the female researchers who belong to the National System of Researchers at the Juarez Autonomous University of Tabasco, as well as their relationship with the development of their career in research.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study design was a descriptive case study and the purpose was to determine the causes associated with the problem under study, from a holistic approach to each of the dimensions that comprise it. Stake (2010) points out that the selection of cases is done by unique characteristics or situations that are common, where it is often very useful to select cases that are representative of others. He notes that in a instrumental study as presented, some cases are illustrative of circumstances that go unnoticed in the typical cases and that is why attention must be paid to the context at the time of selection.

3.1. Population under study

The information was obtained through semi structured interviews, based on the dimensions of the construct of emotional distress syndrome, 13 of the 42 researchers belonging to the National System of Researchers at the Juarez Autonomous University of Tabasco (UJAT, 2015, p.255), being those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the case under review and acknowledged to show symptoms of EDS.

3.2. Instrument, Reliability and Validity

To establish the topics of the guide to use in the interviews, the construct dimensions were used. To establish the reliability the review of the guide was requested from three female researchers from different areas of knowledge, outside the institution

but that had the characteristics of the subjects who participated in the interview, as part of the pilot program.

Goetz and Le Compte (1988) define the validity of the qualitative approaches as the interpretation of the same meaning and understanding of the constructs and categories among participants and the observer. Attached to this view of validity, an introduction at the beginning of the interview where the operational definition of the construct and each of its dimensions was presented.

The reliability and validity in qualitative research is often questioned because the subjects under study may not always express their true opinion on the subject. In qualitative studies, this estimate is usually primarily based on judgments about the correspondence between the findings and reality.

To minimize the risk of subjectivity and increase the reliability and validity of the data, the methodology was supported by the principles of analysis presented by Rodríguez, Gil and Garcia (1999), which highlighted the importance of data triangulation.

3.3. Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

Once the interviews, recordings of the sessions were transcribed and through content analysis answers (witness statements) were classified and grouped by size (level) of each variable. According to Rodríguez, et al., (1999), category systems give your name to all the observing systems are described and be characterized by models in which the explanation is given to a particular phenomenon. They are displayed as a conceptual construction in which behaviors to observe (witness statements) was operationalized and meet certain rules: 1) Completeness of the categories: any power unit must be located in one of the categories; that is, the system is able to cover all possible data in discrete units, 2) Mutual Exclusion: each unit is included in a single category. A distinct segment of text can not belong simultaneously to more than one category, and 3) only qualifier principle: the categories should be made from a single sort order and sorting.

The analysis of the categories was done with the method of open, axial and selective with the support of Atlas.ti program, version 6.0.15 encoding. Open coding by Strauss and Corbin (2002) is seen as an analytical process whereby concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions so discovered that using this process could associate the concepts that emerged from the analysis of the interviews relating to the issue under study. It is because during axial might be related to its sub categories and coding are performed around the dimensions of the construct linking the categories in relation to their properties. Finally it defined as selective as only those attached to the theoretical construct related were associated during the interviews to a theoretical saturation point where the construction of category and presented relative to the size of the construct.

4. Results

Through coding procedures used in the analysis of information with the support of the Atlas.ti program, the three categories corresponding to the dimensions of the construct emerged, and the subcategories based on the analysis of the interviews, which are presented through a conceptual network that graphically presents the established relationships (Figure 1).

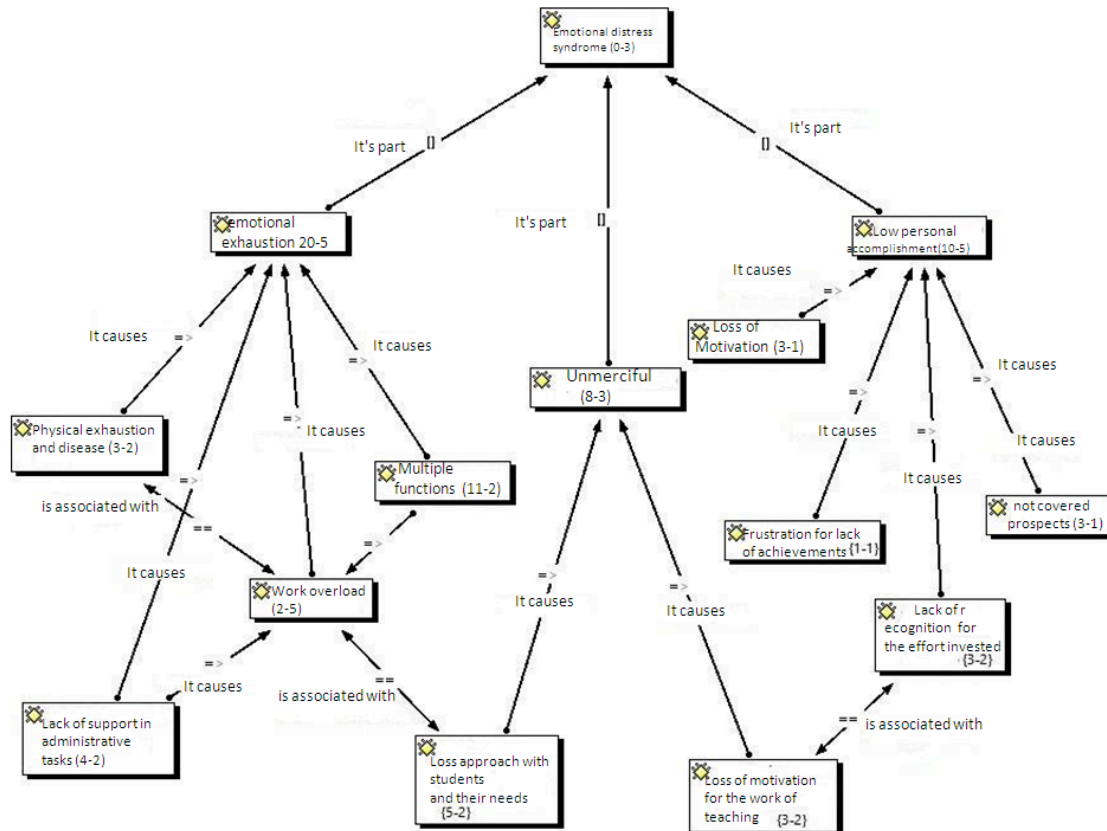


Figure 1. Conceptual Syndrome Network Emotional Wear
Source: Prepared by the Atlas.ti software, version 6.0.15

Overall, the Figure 1 shows clear evidence of dominance in the emotional exhaustion where the multiplicity of functions is the most often referred subcategory. Followed by exhaustion, there is the decline of the sense of personal fulfillment by a progressive loss of motivation, essentially in the educational field, perspectives not covered and no appreciation for the effort invested. Finally the dimension about the depersonalization, is also associated repeatedly with the teaching function as a loss of the rapprochement with the students associated with the workload.

In a specific analysis of each dimension of the construct, Figure 2 shows the subcategories associated with emotional exhaustion, where the multiplicity of functions is the subcategory that most often was referred to emotional exhaustion related to the lack of administrative support of the functions academic.

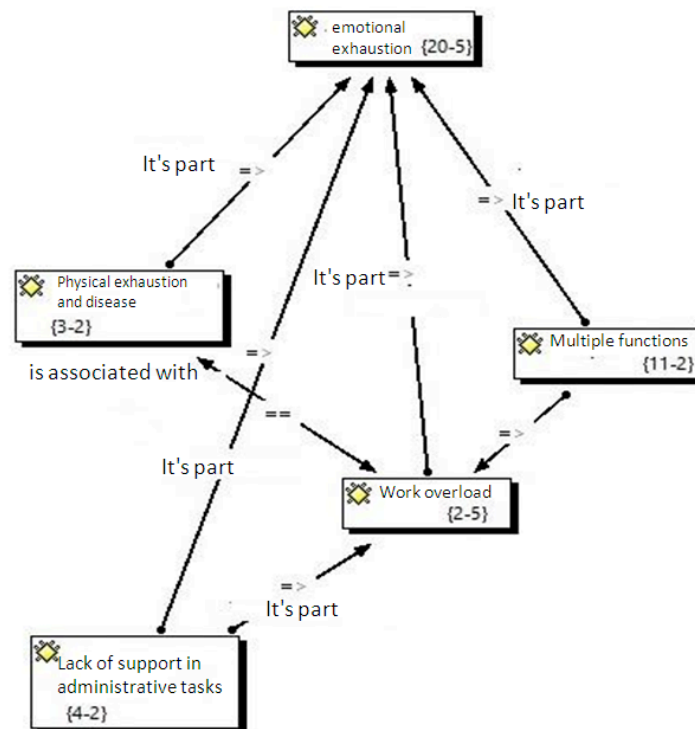


Figure 2. Conceptual Red Dimension Emotional Exhaustion
 Source: Prepared by the Atlas.ti software, version 6.0.15

This multiplicity is referred to a lack of planning and adherence to the times set by the academic assignments at the beginning of the semester, the above is clearly reflected in the following quote: "... sometimes we have commissions to work that are not defined in the academic workload, but are important and I asked the coordinator hey, but I am also in this, what I do first? are the two important? and the answer was see how you make them but you have to fulfill with, me, you have to fulfill with the other, and then such situations cause a lot of emotional and physical exhaustion" (Interview 4: 2 [102: 102]). The obligations of teachers are referred to clearly in chapter four of the collective work contract, which requires the submission of a plan of academic activities to the authority of their dependence (Juarez Autonomous University of Tabasco, 2013, p. 145) and in which is not clearly specified the allocation of commissions, nor notes that they should not be scheduled simultaneously.

In addition to features not referred to in the collective work contract, the female researchers also show a complete lack of support for the administrative tasks that are not found in the profile of the research professor, but if they develop research with funding that is a task that they must perform, for which they refer that they do not receive any support from the appropriate authorities, "... what causes me emotional exhaustion is the administrative issue, it is the first time I have a funded project, then before when I did not have a funded project I saw it easier, but when I have to make a funded project, it mortifies you, that is, it is a tiny thing, is extremely tiring because there is no administrative support" (Interview 3: 6 [75:75]).

This situation has generated a work overload that in addition to their contracted obligations performs research, "... the dynamics of the teacher has changed completely and that has totally transformed his life, his health, his whole outlook has changed because there is a lot of work to be done that is not rewarded by a salary, then the teacher is subjected to a working pressure that is also part of a bad planning of the things, and coupled with poor planning, there is also a lack of communication "(interview 3:11 [313: 313]).

This extra workload generated by the multiplicity of functions has been associated repeatedly in the literature (The Sahili, 2011; Gil-Monte, 2005; Marrau, 2004, Pedrero, Door, Lagares, Saez and Farcia, 2004) to physical exhaustion and various diseases such as EBS, "... there has been problems of heart attacks, problems of facial paralysis, problems of gastritis, problems of migraine, headache, bones, so much stress" (Interview 6: 1 [30: 30]).

The studies of Friedman (2003) noted the importance of organizational self-efficacy in teachers' work schemes, where the relevance of the degree of involvement, planning and implementation of major activities in the management of resources for support and assistance is highlighted.

The results indicate that even though the teacher can plan his work schedule, administrative bodies are the ones which are not being efficient in organizing activities involving the presence of the researcher, because there is a duplication of commissions, and increased demand of the same in them, for considering them fundamental part in decision-making in the case under study.

In Figure 3 the dimension of depersonalization is presented, which comes as a result of the loss of rapprochement with the students and their needs, as well as the loss of motivation for the work of teaching.

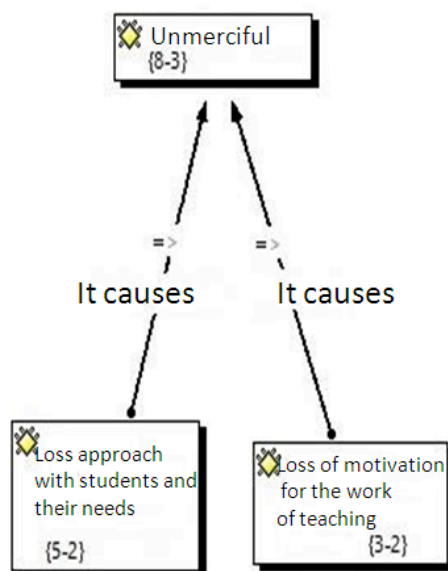


Figure 3 Conceptual Network of the depersonalization dimension
Source: Prepared by the Atlas.ti software, version 6.0.15

The depersonalization in teaching is a phenomenon whose causes have been widely documented in the literature (Guerrero, 2003; Ray, Moriana and Herruzo, 2010). The results of the interviews have shown a progressive loss of rapprochement with the students and their needs, combined with the large number of associated roles and saturated groups of students "... *It happens to me about students, suddenly I would want to get involved with them or have a rapprochement, but due to excessive activity, and sometimes the number of groups and the number of students per group, sometimes prevents me from getting to have this kind of more personal approach with the students*" (Interview 3: 1 [29:29]).

Another phenomenon reported is a progressive loss of motivation towards the teaching function, also associated with multiple functions, "... *to me it hurts me as a teacher is the total estrangement with the student, because the reason for our university are the students, who are so important to the institution and so important for the teacher, but we're moving further because you have meetings all the time and say I'll be with you so many minutes but right now I will return and I go to a meeting, but right now I return*" (3:13 interview [313: 313])

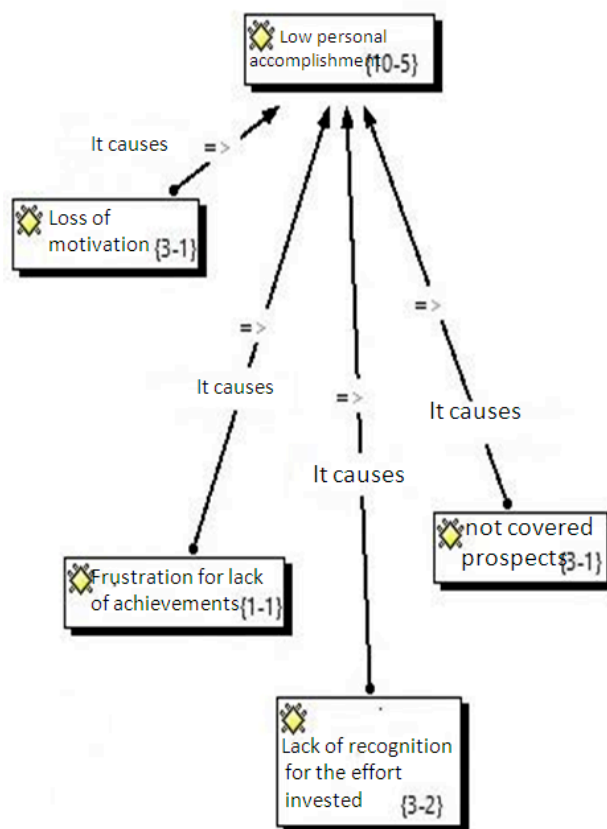


Figure 3 Conceptual Network Dimension Low Personal Accomplishment
 Source: Prepared by the Atlas.ti software, version 6.0.15

As causes associated with low personal accomplishment are the loss of general motivation for the difficulties associated with this multiplicity of functions and

poorly planned work schemes in existing structures "... to be a female investigator in this country it is like wearing boots filled with mud that make walking difficult" (Interview 4: 3 [133: 133]).

Overall, the loss of motivation has the same origin, lack of recognition of the effort involved, since the prospect of compensation differs from the stimulus received and this creates frustration. "... If the university gave us recognition of what we are doing here despite our indicators are not seen only by themselves, given the diversity that we do, luckily I would not feel so bad" (Interview 7: 7 [87:87]).

An aspect to be noted, not covered in the outlook is that it is also attributed as causes the conflict of interpersonal role (Gil-Monte & Peiró, 2009), as referred to by the female researchers to be generating two or more expectations of one or more members of the institution or the family, which cannot be met simultaneously as they are contradictory, but are ranked on the same level. A clear example is the combination of family demands with work, "... sometimes I wonder if it's worth that I do not attend the festival of Mother's day with my daughter to attend a conference abroad, for my family is the most important to me, but so is my career, and there is when I go into conflict, because in the end I do not want to leave either of them but I cannot be in both places at the same time and frankly there are times that I do not know how to handle it and that depresses me" (interview 13:10 [35:35]).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate the presence of emotional distress syndrome in the study population, which goes beyond a gender issue, it refers to problems of organizational structure, widely studied in the literature and that relate the multiplicity of tasks that generates an overload of functions, such as the main factors that trigger emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and a progressive decline of the sense of personal fulfillment.

Arquero studies and Donoso (2013) coincide with the general analysis done, where the research activities are not those that are positively associated with EBS, but the decrease of recognition of teaching by society, and by student's promotion systems and merit assessment, which has deteriorated the links in the effort-reward chain where depersonalization toward students has been revealed.

Regarding the causal factors of EBS referred, the multiplicity of functions is highlighted as the main cause of exhaustion, because the teaching, mentoring and management functions are not present with the same level and number of activities in research centers. Another aspect associated with the multiplicity of functions is the salary incentive system which encourages duplication of functions, the difference in outlook between the effort invested and the recognition received (Magaña et al., 2014).

Bakker and Demerouti (2013) referring to the theory of demand and labor resources, have indicated in several studies that properly designed work stations with good conditions facilitate employee motivation and reduce their stress level.

Moreover, although there are references to the role conflict with women's traditional roles, these are not presented as the most important in the development of research, because the frequency of expressions on the issue was minimal.

Rubino et al., (2013) highlights studies that refer to the importance of the role of gender in the work-family conflict, where it emphasizes the distinction between individuals who adopt traditional gender roles and those egalitarian. This situation, they say, moves to the organizational aspect, since women with a traditional conception of gender, are more likely to feel that they do not have enough time and energy to concentrate on both roles and are liable to suffer role conflicts and thereby trigger EBS.

It is concluded that the female researchers perceive the presence of EBS associated essentially to a multiplicity of functions, which affects his career in research, but that is not perceived to be linked to a gender issue, but to a structural and administrative issue.

The study, as it is qualitative, restricts the possibilities of generalizing the findings, but trace important lines for future research, as the phenomenon of EBS in women with professional careers with high demands and male competition, such as the research and technological development, could have important elements in the development of gender studies.

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