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The study of psychosocial risks at the group level and operational distress among employees in Salvadoran companies is scarcely addressed, despite the significant importance organizations place on this issue. This study aims to understand employees' perceptions of these psychosocial risks and distresses through an assessment of their prevalence using the Healthy Talent Model© and HTMetrics PCAS Tool©, with the goal of proposing interventions to mitigate negative impacts. A descriptive analysis using frequency tables was conducted. The findings confirm the prevalence of occupational stress, the presence of psychosocial risks at the group level, and operational distress. Finally, various levels of intervention are proposed to address these issues in Salvadoran companies.

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# Psychosocial Risk Factors at Group Level and Operational Distress among Employees in Salvadoran Companies

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## ABSTRACT

*The study of psychosocial risks at the group level and operational distress among employees in Salvadoran companies is scarcely addressed, despite the significant importance organizations place on this issue. This study aims to understand employees' perceptions of these psychosocial risks and distresses through an assessment of their prevalence using the Healthy Talent Model© and HTMetrics PCAS Tool©, with the goal of proposing interventions to mitigate negative impacts. A descriptive analysis using frequency tables was conducted. The findings confirm the prevalence of occupational stress, the presence of psychosocial risks at the group level, and operational distress. Finally, various levels of intervention are proposed to address these issues in Salvadoran companies.*

**Keywords:** psychosocial risks, operational distress, employees, public and private organisations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Organisational culture and psychosocial risks emerge as crucial areas of focus for fostering health and productivity in the contemporary workplace. Consequently, organisations recognise the interrelation between these elements, as psychosocial risks can significantly impact organisational culture and vice versa. Therefore, psychosocial risks, stemming from the lack of monitoring and evaluation of factors such as policies, organisational culture, and employee satisfaction, can affect job performance and health, increasing exposure to stress. These risks can erode team cohesion and company reputation, thus impacting talent retention. Hence, studying

and identifying these risks aims to ensure employee satisfaction, thereby enhancing productivity and performance (Ordoñez-García et al., 2023; Dollard et al., 2017).

This article conceptualises its framework based on the Healthy Talent Model© (2024), which comprises four pillars: (1) psychosocial factors, neutral elements of the work environment that can become risks if not properly managed; (2) psychosocial risk factors, conditions with negative potential if early intervention is not undertaken; (3) psychosocial risks, situations with a high probability of harming psychosocial health; and (4) psychosocial health damage, such as mental and behavioural disorders, which can arise from these factors in the workplace (Álvarez & Gamero-Burón, 2013).

Psychosocial factors, as classified by Roozeboom and Van den Bossche (2008), are divided into two main categories: those impacting the corporate level and those impacting the individual and/or group level. Within the latter category are factors such as working conditions, job design, and job quality, which, if not adequately managed, can become psychosocial risks.

Psychosocial risks constitute a crucial element that is closely intertwined with various types of occupational distress. These risks, such as job insecurity, excessive job demands, high workload, and lack of social support, are the primary work-related psychosocial factors generating stress, which can act as triggers or aggravators of workplace distress (Gómez et al., 2019).

Understanding workplace distress is structured into three categories: relational distress,

operational distress, and ecological/corporate distress, each related to different psychosocial risk factors. The inadequate management of these distresses can trigger negative consequences for psychosocial health, underscoring the importance of implementing preventive measures at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels to counteract their impact and foster a healthier and more productive work environment (Vaquerano et al., 2023).

Among these categories, operational distress stands out as a critical aspect influencing both individual and group levels in the workplace. This distress arises from perceived dissatisfaction regarding the content and methods of work employed, which can cause an imbalance between job demands and the resources available to meet them. Additionally, it may manifest as emotional exhaustion due to job demands, feelings of social isolation at work, or tensions associated with technology use. Addressing these psychosocial risk factors linked to operational distress is essential for improving employee well-being and productivity, thereby fostering a healthier and more effective work environment (Chávez, 2009).

Moreover, operational distress can be related to a negative psychological state associated with technology use at work. When these factors are not properly managed, they can contribute to the emergence of various psychosocial risks, such as job stress, boreout syndrome, emotional labour, burnout syndrome, Wilson's syndrome, and technostress. It is crucial to address these psychosocial risks to promote a healthier work environment and enhance employee well-being (González-Trijueque et al., 2015).

In this context, the objective of this study focused on understanding the perceptions of employees in Salvadoran companies regarding group-level psychosocial risk and operational distress. This was done through an assessment of their prevalence using the Healthy Talent Model© and HTMetrics PCAS Tool©, with the aim of proposing interventions to mitigate negative impacts.

## II. METHODOLOGY

In El Salvador, approaches related to diagnosing psychosocial risks and, specifically, operational distress in the context of the new normal are scarce. Therefore, this study addressed this issue using a descriptive-exploratory approach under a quantitative paradigm (Hernández et al., 2014). The objective of this research focused on studying operational distress through the methodology proposed by the Healthy Talent Model© to describe this distress faced by employees in Salvadoran companies. This analysis facilitated a descriptive narrative of psychosocial risk factors and psychosocial risks, with evaluations based on the 16 questions that determine operational distress. The information was collected via a Likert scale questionnaire, including questions about working in person, remotely, or in a hybrid format. This questionnaire was sent via email to 69 public sector employees and 155 private sector employees.

On one hand, the sampling design used a weighting of the population's representativeness through data from the 2021 Statistical Yearbook of the Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS), with a confidence level of 95% and a 3% margin of error. On the other hand, data processing was conducted using SPSS v.22 software (Echeverría et al., 2023), which calculated the necessary frequencies for data analysis.

## III. RESULTS

According to the United Nations (2018), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals outlines measures aimed at ensuring decent work. Among the various targets is the goal of protecting labour rights and ensuring safe and risk-free work environments for all workers, especially migrant women and men, as well as those in precarious jobs. Consequently, it is the responsibility of subscribing nations to develop efforts aimed at regulating labour activities and thus fostering safer productive conditions that help identify occupational risks and implement measures for their eradication or mitigation.

Indeed, each productive activity has its own risks for those who perform it. In this context,

evaluating psychosocial risks related to the workplace has identified job demands, work-induced emotions, social relationships or support, and technology as psychosocial risk factors.

Therefore, the research efforts in this field focus on identifying and analysing the effects to which employees are exposed, as illustrated in Table 1. Specifically, work stress and Boreout syndrome are related to job demands; emotional labour and

Burnout syndrome are related to emotions; technostress is related to technology; and Wilson's syndrome is related to relationships/ social support.

Understanding how these risks affect employees allows for the design and implementation of programmes that promote effective occupational health and safety management, thereby enhancing dignified workspaces and aligning towards decent employment.

*Table 1:* Questions, Factor, and Psychosocial Risk of Operational Distress

| #  | Question                                                                                                      | Factor                       | Risk              |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1  | My professional competencies match the demands of my job                                                      | Job Demands                  | Work Stress       |
| 2  | I have experienced work overload                                                                              |                              |                   |
| 3  | I have felt physical and/or psychological fatigue at times                                                    |                              |                   |
| 4  | I have experienced episodes of anxiety at work                                                                |                              |                   |
| 5  | I have suffered from frequent headaches, insomnia, muscle tension, and/or a stiff neck/jaw                    |                              |                   |
| 6  | I have too much free time in my job, leading to episodes of boredom                                           |                              | Boreout Syndrome  |
| 7  | I have felt compelled to display emotions I did not genuinely feel                                            | Emotions                     | Emotional Labour  |
| 8  | I have felt like I "can't take it anymore" with my job                                                        |                              | Burnout Syndrome  |
| 9  | I maintain the necessary emotional closeness in my professional relationships; I am involved in the workplace |                              |                   |
| 10 | I have made an impertinent comment about the low value of my work                                             |                              |                   |
| 11 | I have had an excess of virtual relationships in my job                                                       | Technology                   | Technostress      |
| 12 | I have worked with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for less than 80% of my workday          |                              |                   |
| 3  | I feel competent in working with ICT                                                                          |                              |                   |
| 14 | I have felt mentally exhausted from constant use of ICT                                                       |                              |                   |
| 15 | I have been satisfied with the social relationships I have maintained at work                                 | Social Relationships/Support | Wilson's Syndrome |
| 16 | I have felt lonely or isolated, whether teleworking or working in person                                      |                              |                   |

*Note: This table illustrates the relationship between the 16 questions in the instrument, showing the factors and psychosocial risks, as taken from Vaquerano et al. 2023.*

Workers who experience the conditions outlined in Table 1 perceive impacts on their mental health, such as anxiety, stress, irritability, and depression, among the most significant. Guzmán (2020) argues that prolonged exposure to these conditions can lead to physical ailments, including digestive complications, muscle pain, and poor job performance.

Furthermore, the results obtained from Salvadoran employees participating in this study have been analysed from the perspective of the benchmark developed by the Talent Fullness Institute of Spain in 2020, known as the Healthy Talent Model. This model is designed to detect and address psychosocial risks related to operational distress. It offers organisations strategies and effective actions based on the prevalence level of each psychosocial risk factor and psychosocial risk, specifying the type of intervention required.

3.1 Results of the Psychosocial Risk Factor of Job Demands and the Psychosocial Risk of Work Stress and Boreout Syndrome

This risk factor is clearly evident based on employees' perceptions regarding workload

overload or the pressures of not being adequately trained to carry out their productive activities. According to Uribe-Prado (2020), job demands typically lead to physical or mental fatigue in workers due to the nature of the workday and exposure to traumatic or violent workplace events.

The findings indicate that workers in El Salvador are exposed to operational distress risk factors, with the most significant psychosocial risk being Work Stress. This situation suggests a potential overload of work, leading to physical and/or psychological fatigue, frequent headaches, insomnia, muscle tension, and/or a stiff neck/jaw.

Specifically, the average impact rate is 56.18%, necessitating a secondary level intervention due to the moderate intensity of the psychosocial risk factor and/or the psychosocial risk. This suggests the need for a reactive intervention at the first signs among the exposed worker population.

Table 2: Job Demands Psychosocial Risk Factor and Work Stress and Boreout Syndrome Psychosocial Risks in Salvadoran Workers

| Factor      | Risk             | Question                                                                                   | Response | Count | Percentage |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Job Demands | Work Stress      | My professional competencies match the demands of my job                                   | Yes      | 207   | 92.4%      |
|             |                  |                                                                                            | No       | 17    | 7.6%       |
|             |                  | I have experienced work overload                                                           | Yes      | 163   | 72.8%      |
|             |                  |                                                                                            | No       | 61    | 27.2%      |
|             |                  | I have felt physical and/or psychological fatigue at times                                 | Yes      | 181   | 80.8%      |
|             |                  |                                                                                            | No       | 43    | 19.2%      |
|             |                  | I have experienced episodes of anxiety at work                                             | Yes      | 103   | 46.0%      |
|             |                  |                                                                                            | No       | 121   | 54.0%      |
|             | Boreout Syndrome | I have suffered from frequent headaches, insomnia, muscle tension, and/or a stiff neck/jaw | Yes      | 165   | 73.7%      |
|             |                  |                                                                                            | No       | 59    | 26.3%      |
|             |                  | I have too much free time in my job, leading to episodes of boredom                        | Yes      | 22    | 9.8%       |
|             |                  |                                                                                            | No       | 202   | 90.2%      |

\*Note: Adapted from Vaquerano et al. 2023.

The results obtained indicate that on average the five questions related to work stress reach 56.18%, a situation which implies the need for a secondary intervention with reactive actions. Table 2 presents both high and low results for the set of questions related to the demand factor. For example, only 7.6% perceive that their professional competencies are not in line with the demands of their job, which undoubtedly translates into work stress. On the other hand, 72.8% report experiencing work overload, a symptom that calls for a secondary intervention. Regarding the question: "I have felt physical and/or psychological fatigue at times," given its result of 80.8%, it warrants a tertiary intervention; as it represents a high intensity presence of the psychosocial risk factor and/or psychosocial risk, thus requiring a curative intervention to address the negative impact on the psychosocial health of the affected workforce population.

Regarding exposure to Boreout Syndrome, only 10% of the workers declared feeling exposed, which implies an absence or low intensity presence of the psychosocial risk factor and/or psychosocial risk, necessitating a proactive intervention across the entire workforce population, i.e., primary intervention.

### 3.2 Results of the Psychosocial Risk Factor of Emotions and the Psychosocial Risk of Emotional Labour and Burnout Syndrome

To identify the emotional labour experienced by workers in the research instrument, the question

"I have felt compelled to display emotions I did not genuinely feel" was included, recognizing that assessing emotions requires evaluating various factors that affect workers' emotions.

Indeed, these are aspects that must be considered and are related to incidents in the development of risks associated with emotional labour, such as the incorporation of new technologies, workplace settings, social or organizational changes, as well as known impacts that have worsened the health status of workers (Gil-Monte, 2012).

Moreover, according to Freudenberger (1986), among the aspects associated with the emotions factor is the exposure experienced by workers to Burnout Syndrome. This syndrome manifests through exhaustion and feeling overwhelmed by problems, as a response to a worker's sense of dedication and commitment to an activity, as well as the need to prove oneself.

It is important to note that the term "Burnout Syndrome" was first proposed in the mid-1970s. However, it has only been in recent years that the issue has become more pronounced. According to Martínez (2019), one of the symptoms of this syndrome is emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, which acts as a shield to protect against feelings of helplessness, indefiniteness, and frustration, as well as the abandonment of personal achievement, meaning that work loses its value for the worker.

**Table 3:** Psychosocial Risk Factor of Emotions and Psychosocial Risks of Emotional Labour and Burnout Syndrome in Salvadoran Workers

| Factor   | Risks            | Questions                                                                                                     | Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Emotions | Emotional Labour | I have felt compelled to display emotions I did not genuinely feel                                            | Yes      | 68    | 30.4%      |
|          |                  |                                                                                                               | No       | 156   | 69.6%      |
|          | Burnout Syndrome | I have felt like I "can't take it anymore" with my job                                                        | Yes      | 71    | 31.7%      |
|          |                  |                                                                                                               | No       | 153   | 68.3%      |
|          |                  | I maintain the necessary emotional closeness in my professional relationships; I am involved in the workplace | Yes      | 175   | 78.1%      |
|          |                  |                                                                                                               | No       | 49    | 21.9%      |

|  |  |                                                                   |     |     |       |
|--|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
|  |  | I have made an impertinent comment about the low value of my work | Yes | 51  | 22.8% |
|  |  |                                                                   | No  | 173 | 77.2% |

*\*Note: Adapted from Vaquerano et al. 2023*

In regard to emotions as a psychosocial risk factor, the findings indicate that emotional labour and the experience of Burnout Syndrome are indeed present in Salvadoran work environments. For instance, when querying workers about whether they have felt compelled to display emotions they have not genuinely experienced, 30.4% express that they have. This situation suggests the need for a secondary-level intervention.

Regarding Burnout Syndrome, upon analysing each of its three components, it becomes evident that all warrant a primary-level intervention. Specifically, the question "I have felt like 'I can't take it anymore' with my job" obtained the highest percentage of affirmative responses at 31.7%, as presented in Table 3.

3.3 Results of the Psychosocial Risk Factor of Social Relationships or Support and Wilson Syndrome

The daily work life of a worker sometimes entails carrying out their productive activities alone, as is

the case with night shifts or tasks performed separately from the team.

An immediate consequence of this dynamic is that workers are exposed to limitations in creativity and performance, unlike those who manage to establish strong connections with colleagues. Evidence suggests an increase in commitment, higher quality work, and a decrease in absenteeism among individuals who establish such connections.

Indeed, a consequence of social isolation in the execution of work activities is the absence of social support, understood as the presence of psychological support provided by other workers through the expression and reception of affection, availability of support, sense of belonging to a network, and mutual obligations and responsibilities, etc. (Pérez and Martín, 1997).

Table 4: Psychosocial Risk Factor of Social Relationships or Support and Psychosocial Risk of Wilson Syndrome in Salvadoran Workers

| Factors              | Risks           | Questions                                                                     | Response | Count | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Social Relationships | Wilson Syndrome | I have felt satisfied with the social relationships I have maintained at work | Yes      | 186   | 83.0%      |
|                      |                 |                                                                               | No       | 38    | 17.0%      |
|                      |                 | I have felt lonely or isolated; whether teleworking or working in person      | Yes      | 34    | 15.2%      |
|                      |                 |                                                                               | No       | 190   | 84.8%      |

*\*Note: Adapted from Vaquerano et al. 2023*

To identify the level of intervention in the Social Relationships/Support factor, the behavior of workers according to Wilson Syndrome has been analyzed. This syndrome aims to understand the satisfaction of the social relationships that workers maintain in the workplace. Regarding the results presented in Table 4, only 16% responded negatively. Concerning whether workers have felt

lonely or isolated, whether teleworking or working in person, only 15.2% responded affirmatively. Consequently, according to these findings, Social Relationships/Support at work require a primary level intervention, meaning proactive actions should be taken for the entire population of workers.

### 3.4 Results of the Psychosocial Risk Factor of Technology and Technostress

Undoubtedly, given today's business reality, the use of technology has become a valuable strategy that allows for the design and development of goods and services that improve people's quality of life. These benefits range from holiday planning to reuniting families or friends by facilitating communication with those living in other nations.

Indeed, among the advantages of technology in the workplace are increased productivity, the emergence of new professions, and the improvement or reinvention of existing ones; this presents new challenges and fosters innovation. However, not everything is positive; there are also disadvantages. These range from the difficulty

some people experience in handling new technologies, i.e., the digital divide, to dependence, which exposes workers to not respecting rest hours because they are always connected. Inefficiency is another issue resulting from various distractions, and isolation is a concern in both in-person, virtual, and hybrid work modalities. These disadvantages undoubtedly hinder teamwork and interpersonal relationships (Randstad, 2023). Technostress is definitively a negative psychological process linked to technology exposure or a future use threat sensation, resulting from a disruption between technological demands and labor and personal resources related to ICT; that is, Information and Communication Technologies (Salanova and Nadal, 2002).

**Table 5:** Psychosocial Risk Factor of Technology and Technostress in Salvadoran Working Individuals

| Factors    | Risks        | Questions                                                                                          | Response | Count | Percentage |
|------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------|------------|
| Technology | Technostress | I have had an excess of virtual relationships in my workplace                                      | Yes      | 55    | 24.6%      |
|            |              |                                                                                                    | No       | 169   | 75.4%      |
|            |              | I have worked with information and communication technology (ICTs) less than 80% of my working day | Yes      | 88    | 39.3%      |
|            |              |                                                                                                    | No       | 136   | 60.7%      |
|            |              | I feel capable of working with ICTs                                                                | Yes      | 195   | 87.1%      |
|            |              |                                                                                                    | No       | 29    | 12.9%      |
|            |              | I have felt mentally tired due to the constant use of ICTs                                         | Yes      | 95    | 42.4%      |
|            |              |                                                                                                    | No       | 129   | 57.6%      |

*Note: Adapted from Vaquerano et al. 2023.*

When analysing the results obtained and presented in Table 5, it emerges that on average, 35% of the workforce perceives a negative impact stemming from technostress. This situation necessitates a secondary-level intervention; that is, reactive measures. As depicted in Table 5, there are four questions associated with the risk of technostress, with particular emphasis on the one stating: 'I have felt mentally fatigued due to constant use of ICTs,' garnering a 42.4% affirmative response from employees. Hence, this percentage does not call for a remedial intervention; however, Salvadoran corporate decision-makers should give it considerable attention.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The perceptions of Salvadoran employees regarding psychosocial risks at the group level and operational discomfort have demonstrated the prevalence of such risks based on the percentages provided in their responses. Firstly, the results concerning the psychosocial risk factor of job demands and the psychosocial risk of job stress and Boreout Syndrome showed that job stress is the predominant psychosocial risk, indicating a heavier workload for employees and necessitating a secondary level intervention. These findings align with those of Ospina et al. (2023), who also observed high levels of job stress among employees, highlighting the need to address this

issue through palliative actions aimed at reducing the physical and mental effects generated by this problem. Thus, it is pertinent to examine the palliative actions being undertaken by Salvadoran companies and assess their effectiveness in addressing this issue within the context of the new normal.

Secondly, the results regarding the psychosocial risk factor of emotions and the psychosocial risk of emotional labor and Burnout Syndrome revealed the presence of these factors and risks, necessitating both secondary and primary level interventions respectively. These findings are consistent with those of Barral-Coral and Albán-Pérez (2021), who demonstrated the presence of these factors in job satisfaction, health, and extralaboral life. In Salvadoran work environments, immediate interventions within organizations are necessary to tackle the presence of these problems stemming from employees' emotions and frustration.

Thirdly, the results concerning the psychosocial risk factor of social relations or support and Wilson Syndrome demonstrated its presence at low levels, requiring primary interventions. Employees perceive a minimal need for psychological support, possibly reflecting Salvadoran societal attitudes where psychosocial health is often neglected. These results also align with those of Patlán-Pérez (2019), emphasizing the importance of organizations prioritizing psychological health, as it fosters mutually beneficial outcomes such as higher employee satisfaction and commitment towards objectives.

Lastly, the results concerning the psychosocial risk factor of Technology and Technostress underscored the necessity of secondary interventions. Perceptions indicate a lack of digital disconnection among Salvadoran workers, leading to an invasion of employees' personal lives by work-related demands. These findings mirror those of Rodríguez (2020), highlighting the urgent need for interventions aimed at curbing this trend. Consequently, further research and interventions are imperative to address this issue in Salvadoran workplace environments, focusing on its root causes.

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