



Fatigue and health-related quality of life in nursing teachers in Argentina

Fatiga y calidad de vida relacionada con la salud en docentes de enfermería de Argentina

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The context of university higher education is particularly complex and exposes teachers to multiple structural stresses that predispose them to the development of work fatigue, thereby affecting their Health-Related Quality of Life.

Objective: To analyze the relationship between work fatigue and health-related quality of life in nursing teachers at eight higher education institutions in Argentina.

Methods: Descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative study. A total of 343 academics agreed to participate and completed the MFI-19 and MOS-12 instruments.

Results: Quality of life was positive in all dimensions; however, general health and vitality were found to be at risk. The prevalence of work fatigue was moderate and was related to nursing degree training, working in public universities, and performing caregiving roles. Work fatigue has a negative impact on teachers' quality of life, with a more pronounced impact on mental health.

Conclusions: Interventions are needed to reduce the prevalence of fatigue and prevent the deterioration of teachers' health, so that they can cope with the demands of the university context.

Keywords: Academic teaching personnel, Fatigue, Higher education, Public health, Quality of life.

JEL Classification: I11, I25, I31.

Submitted: 20-05-2026

Revised: 15-08-2026

Accepted: 01-09-2026

Published: 11-09-2026

Editor: Alfredo Javier Pérez Gamboa 

RESUMEN

Introducción: El contexto de la educación superior universitaria es particularmente complejo y expone al docente a múltiples tensiones estructurales que predisponen al desarrollo de fatiga laboral, y que, con ello, se afecte su calidad de vida relacionada con la salud.

Objetivo: Analizar la relación entre la fatiga laboral y la calidad de vida relacionada con la salud en docentes de la Licenciatura en Enfermería de ocho instituciones de educación superior de Argentina.

Metodología: Estudio descriptivo, transversal y cuantitativo. Participaron 343 docentes que accedieron a participar en el estudio y diligenciaron los instrumentos MFI-19 y MOS-12.

Resultados: La calidad de vida fue positiva en todas las dimensiones; sin embargo, la salud general y la vitalidad se detectaron en riesgo. La prevalencia de fatiga laboral fue moderada y se relacionó con la formación de grado en enfermería, desempeñarse en universidades públicas y cumplir roles asistenciales. La fatiga laboral incide de manera negativa sobre la calidad de vida de los docentes, con un impacto más pronunciado en la salud mental.

Conclusiones: Son necesarias intervenciones para disminuir la prevalencia de la fatiga y prevenir el deterioro de la salud de los docentes, de modo que puedan hacer frente a las demandas del contexto universitario.

Palabras clave: Calidad de Vida, Enseñanza Superior, Fatiga, Personal académico docente, Salud Pública.

Clasificación JEL: I11, I25, I31.

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INTRODUCTION

The context of university-level higher education is particularly complex, exposing faculty members to multiple structural tensions. On one hand, they are expected to train competent professionals; on the other, they must meet institutional demands regarding student retention and successful graduation, fulfill multiple roles (teaching, research, and community engagement), and participate actively in institutional life. These challenges are often compounded by various psychosocial risk factors—such as stress, competitive environments, a lack of administrative support, isolated work, and excessive workloads—within a landscape characterized by the massification of access to higher education (Loayza Torres et al., 2022; Flores-Meza et al., 2022). Consequently, occupational fatigue emerges as a direct result of these prolonged and sustained pressures.

Occupational fatigue is defined as a state of extreme physical and mental exhaustion that impairs the ability to work effectively. Caused by stress, excessive workloads, long hours, and a lack of rest, it manifests as poor performance, tiredness, reduced concentration, and general malaise (Gutierrez Ruivo et al., 2023a), potentially leading to health problems if left unaddressed. Levels of occupational fatigue are particularly high in professions involving significant social interaction, including higher education teaching (Wu et al., 2021). For educators in nursing and other health professions, professional demands are even greater; their role requires constant updating within their discipline, continuous development of specific teaching skills—encompassing disciplinary, pedagogical, and human dimensions—and the ongoing adoption and mastery of new technologies (Elizalde Ordoñez et al., 2024; Gutierrez-Ruivo et al., 2023b; Ortigoza, 2023; Steege et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021).

A decline in health can extend beyond the educator's personal life to negatively impact their work performance, resulting in lower-quality instruction, increased dissatisfaction, and reduced work commitment (Garcia & Juliani, 2024). Based on these observations, a link is identified between psychosocial risk factors—including occupational fatigue—and the educator's psychophysical health (Canova Barrios et al., 2025; Casimiro et al., 2025).

Health, viewed holistically, is assessed through the construct of Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL). This is defined as “the subjective influence of health status, healthcare, and health prevention and promotion activities on an individual's capacity to achieve and maintain a level of functioning that allows for the attainment of life goals and is reflected in general well-being,” encompassing physical, psychological-cognitive, and social dimensions (Tudela, 2009).

Regarding prior research, a study conducted in Peru with a sample of 326 university educators found a moderate positive correlation between workload and HRQoL. Another study conducted in Argentina, involving 159 health sciences faculty members, identified moderate negative correlations between fatigue and health-related quality of life (HRQoL), with a greater impact on aspects related to mental health (Canova Barrios et al., 2025). Both studies conclude that higher levels of occupational fatigue negatively affect faculty members' perceived well-being and performance. This finding is supported by various other studies on the subject (Alves et al., 2019; Cobos-Sanchiz et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2025).

Given the scarcity of research on the impact of occupational fatigue on HRQoL among university faculty in the Argentine context, it is essential to generate evidence that highlights issues often treated as normal, identifies psychosocial risk factors, and provides a basis for designing institutional policies aimed at promoting health, preventing occupational burnout, and improving educational quality. Furthermore, these studies contribute to strengthening the sustainability of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by recognizing that faculty well-being is a key component in ensuring high-quality, socially responsible educational processes.

Based on the elements described, the objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between occupational fatigue and health-related quality of life among faculty members in Nursing degree programs at eight HEIs in Argentina.

METHODS

This is a descriptive, correlational, multicenter, cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach. The study population consisted of all faculty members in the Bachelor of Nursing program across eight higher education institutions (HEIs) in Argentina. The sample consisted of 364 teachers who agreed to participate voluntarily, accepting the Informed Consent and completing the data collection instrument. Twenty-one observations were excluded due to incomplete completion of the instrument, resulting in a final sample of 343 observations. Non-probability sampling was employed. Data collection took place during the second academic term of 2025.

Inclusion criteria were defined as follows: being a faculty member in the Bachelor of Nursing program, being affiliated with one of the eight institutions where the study was conducted, having at least six months of employment tenure at the time of data collection, and agreeing to participate voluntarily. Members of the research team and program administrators

were excluded. Incomplete and/or improperly completed instruments were discarded.

Two instruments were used for data collection: the MFI-19 and the MOS-12. The MFI-19 (Multidimensional Fatigue Inventory in Work Environment) is a questionnaire designed to measure work-related fatigue; it consists of 19 items grouped into three factors: General Fatigue (eight items), Physical Fatigue (six items), and Concentration/Motivation (five items) (Boada-Grau et al., 2014). Responses to the instrument's items are recorded on a scale ranging from 1 ("Yes, that is true") to 7 ("No, that is not true"). The final scale values are interpreted such that a higher score indicates greater work-related fatigue. To maintain the instrument's directionality, the values of nine items were reversed. The MFI-19 demonstrated good reliability in the sample ($\alpha=0.90$).

The MOS-12 (Medical Outcomes Study) is a 12-item questionnaire used to assess HRQoL across eight dimensions (Physical Functioning, Role-Physical, Bodily Pain, General Health, Vitality, Social Functioning, Role-Emotional, and Mental Health) and two components (Physical and Mental Summary Components) (Canova-Barrios & Oviedo-Santamaría, 2021; Canova Barrios et al., 2025; Ware et al., 1996). Items are rated on Likert-type scales with two to six response options. Final scores for both the dimensions and the summary components range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating better physical and/or mental health. The cutoff score distinguishing between good and poor quality of life is 50 ± 10 . The MOS-12 demonstrated good reliability in the sample ($\alpha=0.86$).

Data collection was supplemented by the inclusion of thirteen questions to characterize the teachers sociodemographically and in terms of their education and employment; these inquiries covered variables such as age, work experience, sex, marital status, type of employing institution, subjects taught, and workload (hours/week), among others.

Data collection was carried out using Google Forms. Invitations to participate, informed consent forms, and the link to complete the instrument were distributed via email and instant messaging applications (WhatsApp). Once the responses were obtained, they were exported to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using the free version of Infostat (April 2020).

Parametric tests were used for data analysis, taking into account the normal distribution of the data. Quantitative variables were described using means, standard deviation (SD), and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI), while qualitative variables were described using absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies. Inferential analysis involved independent-samples Student's t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation tests. A statistical significance level of $p=0.05$ was established.

Regarding ethical considerations, this study is observational, anonymous, and voluntary. It was approved by the Research Department's Ethics Committee under Resolution I24-25 of 2025. The study was classified as "no-risk."

RESULTS

Participants included 343 faculty members from Nursing degree programs at eight higher education institutions in Argentina. Their mean age was 48.92 years ($SD=10.59$); the majority were women (73.47%), married or in a domestic partnership (53.35%), and had children (70.26%). They held nursing qualifications (88.92%) and postgraduate degrees (58.89%), were affiliated with public institutions (72.89%) and a single institution (65.01%), and had a teaching workload of 10 to 20 hours per week (46.06%). They taught courses involving hospital- or community-based clinical practice (65.60%) and worked in healthcare institutions performing clinical care roles (55.39%) (Table 1). Professional work experience averaged 22.18 years ($SD=11.37$), and teaching experience averaged 13.15 years ($SD=9.33$).

Table 1.
Characterization of the institution and year the test was taken

Variable	Categoriess	n	%
Sex	Male	91	26.53
	Female	252	73.47
Marital status	Single	114	33.24
	Married or Common-law partner	183	53.35
	Widowed or Divorced	46	13.41
Children	Yes	241	70.26
	No	102	29.74
Nursing qualification	Yes	305	88.92
	No	33	9.62
	Don't know/No response	5	1.46

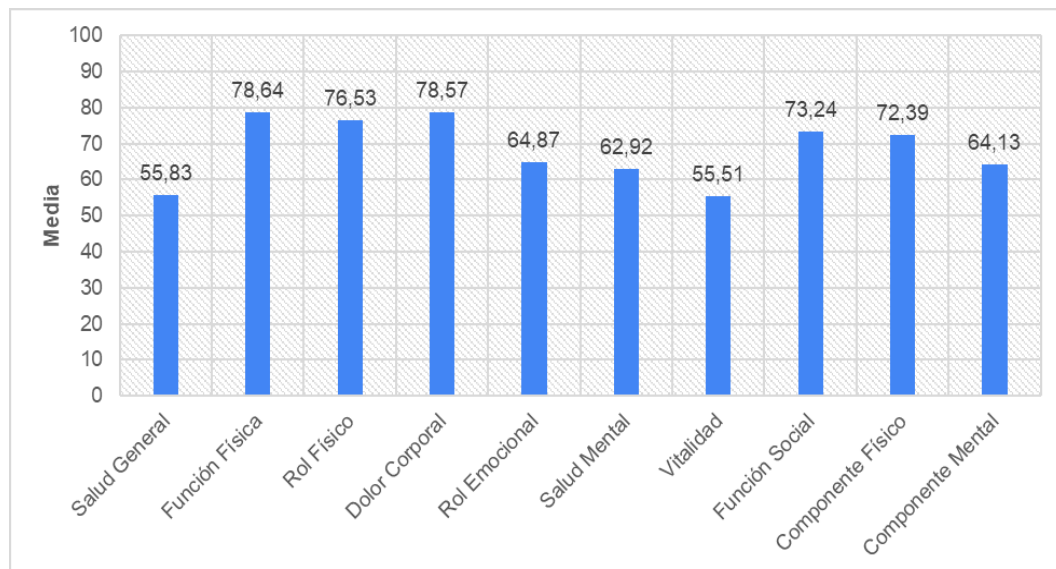
Institution type	Public	250	72.89
	Private	83	24.20
	Don't know/No response	10	2.92
Educational level	Bachelor's degree	91	26.53
	Bachelor's degree + Postgraduate certificate	50	14.58
	Specialization	129	37.61
	Master's degree	65	18.95
	Doctorate	8	2.33
Working hours per week	Less than 10 hours	78	22.74
	10 to 20 hours	158	46.06
	21 to 30 hours	55	16.03
	31 to 40 hours	36	10.50
	41 hours or more	16	4.66
Multiple teaching jobs	Yes	120	34.99
	No	223	65.01
Course with hospital/community clinical placements	Yes	225	65.60
	No	118	34.40
Clinical practice	Yes	190	55.39
	No	153	44.61
Total		343	100.00

Source: own elaboration.

When analyzing the health-related quality of life of the respondents, higher mean scores were found in the dimensions comprising the physical component. Physical Functioning and Bodily Pain showed the highest average values, with means of 78.64 (SD=26.86) and 78.57 (SD=24.33), respectively. In contrast, Vitality had the lowest mean score, at 55.51 (SD=24.80). The Physical Component Summary scored higher (Mean=72.39; SD=21.37; 95% CI=70.12–74.66) compared to the Mental Component Summary (Mean=64.13; SD=23.16; 95% CI=61.67–66.59) (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Mean scores for health dimensions among faculty members in Bachelor of Nursing programs in Argentina (n=343)



Source: own elaboration.

Note: the figure appears in its original language.

A very weak positive correlation was found between age, work experience, and HRQoL dimensions ($r < 0.2$; $p < 0.05$). Men showed better Physical Functioning ($p = 0.035$); respondents with children had a lower prevalence of Bodily Pain ($p = 0.017$); single individuals reported better mental health ($p = 0.014$); those with a background in Nursing had lower mean scores in the dimensions of Physical Functioning ($p = 0.001$), Bodily Pain ($p = 0.030$), and Physical Component Summary ($p = 0.024$); those working in public universities had lower mean scores across all dimensions ($p < 0.05$), except for General

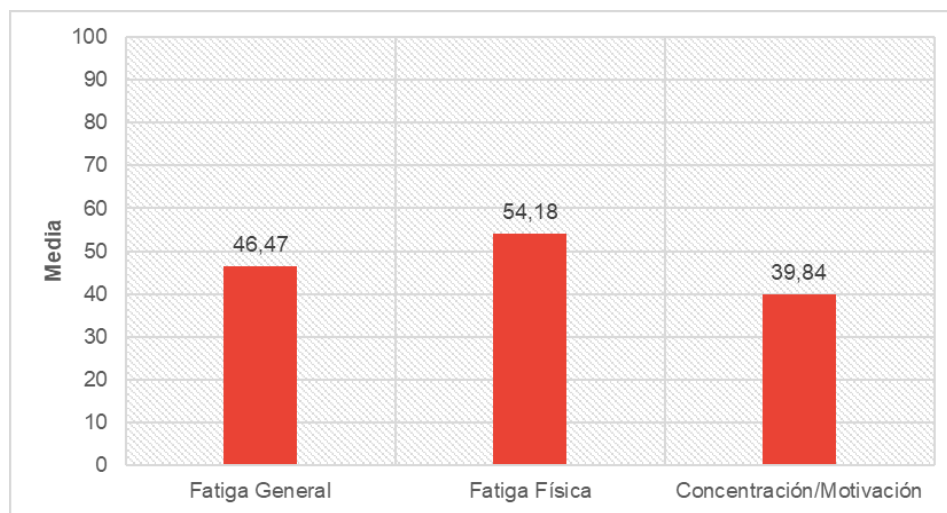
Health, Physical Functioning, and Role-Emotional. Those not performing clinical care roles had higher mean scores in Role-Emotional ($p=0.031$). Finally, it was found that a higher weekly workload was associated with greater impairment in the dimensions of General Health ($p=0.019$), Social Functioning ($p=0.048$), and Physical Component Summary ($p=0.041$).

Analysis of the prevalence of occupational fatigue among teachers revealed a moderate level, affecting 46.83% of the sample. Fatigue was highest in the Physical Fatigue factor, with a mean score of 54.18% (SD=18.52) out of a possible 100 points. In contrast, the Reduced Concentration/Motivation factor was the least affected, with a mean score of 39.84% (SD=18.72) (Figure 2). Regarding the MFI-19 instrument, the item with the highest score (indicating the highest level of occupational fatigue) was "I feel rested," with a mean of 4.38 (SD=1.88) out of 7 points.

Inferential analysis revealed higher occupational fatigue levels among faculty members with a background in nursing ($p<0.05$) and those working in public universities ($p<0.001$). Faculty members who also held clinical roles showed higher scores in the factors of General Fatigue ($p=0.043$) and Reduced Concentration/Motivation ($p=0.038$). Age showed a low correlation with occupational fatigue ($r=-0.12$, $p=0.027$).

Figure 2.

Average scores for occupational fatigue factors among faculty in Bachelor of Nursing programs in Argentina (n=343)



Source: own elaboration.

Note: the figure appears in its original language.

Finally, the correlation between occupational fatigue and health-related quality of life indices was analyzed; negative correlations ranging from low ($r=0.2-0.4$) to moderate ($r=0.4-0.6$) were found, indicating that higher fatigue levels were associated with lower quality of life. General fatigue and reduced concentration/motivation had the greatest influence on the Mental Component Summary of HRQoL (Table 2).

Table 2.

Correlation between occupational fatigue and health-related quality of life among Nursing faculty in Argentina (n=343)

Dimensions	General Fatigue	Physical Fatigue	Concentration / Motivation
General Health	-0.46	-0.53	-0.32
Physical Functioning	-0.37	-0.42	-0.27
Role-Physical	-0.37	-0.32	-0.31
Bodily Pain	-0.35	-0.32	-0.29
Role-Emotional	-0.43	-0.37	-0.37
Mental Health	-0.52	-0.47	-0.41
Vitality	-0.52	-0.49	-0.42
Social Functioning	-0.45	-0.34	-0.37
Physical Component Summary	-0.49	-0.52	-0.37
Mental Component Summary	-0.58	-0.50	-0.47

Note: All values were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Source: own elaboration.

DISCUSION

The drive for greater efficiency within higher education institutions (HEIs) has led to an increasing workload for teaching staff. This burden stems not only from performance demands in contexts of mass student enrollment but also from the need to fulfill multiple roles—many of them unpaid—such as outreach, research, student advising and mentoring, and continuous disciplinary and pedagogical training (Cao et al., 2025). Compounding this are the tasks inherent to the faculty members' original disciplines—such as clinical practice for those in health-related fields—alongside family and social demands. Against this backdrop, teaching is recognized as one of the professions with the highest levels of work-related stress.

Work-related fatigue emerges as a direct consequence of these working conditions and constitutes a significant psychosocial risk factor with a potentially negative impact on teachers' health. This study identified a significant relationship between levels of work-related fatigue and health-related quality of life (HRQoL); specifically, higher fatigue was associated with lower HRQoL, with a particularly pronounced impact on the mental health component. This finding aligns with reports by Alves et al. (2019), Canova Barrios et al. (2025), Cobos-Sanchiz et al. (2022), and Silva et al. (2025), all of whom described health deterioration associated with the development of work-related fatigue. Furthermore, mental health issues among university faculty have been widely documented, with evidence showing high levels of burnout, anxiety, stress, depression, irritability, and sleep disturbances (Moreno Castillo, 2025).

The level of work-related fatigue observed in this study was lower than that reported in other studies, such as the one by Wu et al. (2021), in which 60.49% of teachers experienced moderate stress levels and 38.05% experienced low levels. The finding of higher levels of occupational fatigue among nursing faculty members who work in public universities and also perform clinical care duties can be explained by the convergence of multiple work-related and contextual demands. For nursing educators, professional identity is historically rooted in the concept of care, which entails a heavy physical and emotional burden in both clinical and academic settings (Pi et al., 2025; Poole & Spies, 2022). This situation is intensified in public universities, where higher institutional demands, resource constraints, large student populations, and significant pressure to maintain core functions with limited structural support often coexist (Cao et al., 2025; Pujol-Cols, 2018; Tito-Huamani et al., 2022). Furthermore, the simultaneous performance of teaching and clinical roles leads to extended working hours, fragmented rest periods, and continuous exposure to stressful situations, thereby increasing the risk of occupational fatigue. Collectively, these factors create a scenario of heightened psychosocial vulnerability that helps explain the fatigue levels observed in this group of educators.

Age emerged as a slightly protective factor for teachers' health. This aligns with findings reported by Machado Sánchez et al. (2019) and Yao et al. (2022), who noted that older teachers perceive greater professional recognition, income, stability, and access to resources for meeting role demands—factors that mitigate the impact of adverse working conditions on health.

Limitations of this study include the sampling method used (non-probabilistic), the cross-sectional design, the use of self-administered instruments, and the low representation of private institutions. These factors may affect the representativeness and reliability of the findings and preclude the establishment of cause-and-effect relationships between the variables analyzed.

Strengths include the large sample size, the use of validated instruments, and the participation of multiple institutions. The large sample size represents a significant methodological strength, as it increases the study's statistical power, improves the precision of estimates, reduces random error, allows for the identification of associations with greater reliability, and enhances the representativeness of the study population. The use of validated instruments ensures that the variables of interest are measured reliably and consistently, guaranteeing construct validity and the comparability of results with previous studies. Furthermore, the multicenter nature of the study—encompassing both public and private institutions—is a substantial strength, as it captures the heterogeneity of academic and work environments, thereby reducing bias associated with single-institution studies. This institutional diversity enriches the analysis, improves the generalizability of the findings, and provides a more comprehensive view of the issue under study.

CONCLUSIONS

The health-related quality of life of nursing faculty members was generally positive; however, significant deterioration was identified in the General Health and Vitality dimensions.

The prevalence of occupational fatigue was moderate, affecting approximately half of the surveyed faculty. Furthermore, professional nursing practice (holding a nursing degree), employment at public universities, and the combination of teaching and clinical care roles were associated with higher levels of occupational fatigue.

Levels of occupational fatigue—as well as health-related quality of life—were similar across the eight participating institutions.

The results demonstrated that occupational fatigue negatively affects faculty health-related quality of life, with a more pronounced impact on mental health (Mental Component Summary).

Based on these findings, it is essential for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to design and implement policies to support and care for faculty, aimed at preventing occupational fatigue and preserving psychophysical health. Doing so will help ensure better health outcomes and effective performance in the core functions of HEIs: teaching, research, and community outreach.

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FINANCING

The authors received no funding for the development of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

No AI was used in the development of the article.

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