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WORK, HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF STREET VENDORS ON THE RAILWAY IN THE METROPOLITAN REGION OF RIO DE JANEIRO

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Abstract: This article's main objective is to analyze the perception of street vendors about their working conditions, health and social security. The research involved the participation of twelve workers and adopted a critical-descriptive methodological approach in the area of social research. Data collection was carried out through individual interviews. For data analysis, the "thematic analysis" technique was used, resulting in the construction and generation of six thematic categories: Insecurity and lack of guarantees, Regularization and authorization, Tranquility and safe environment, Respect and fair treatment, Government support for benefits and aid, Equity in access to health services. It was found that the demands and concerns of street vendors reflect the need for public policies that meet their specificities and needs. Government actions are necessary to guarantee safety, regularization of the profession, fair treatment, access to benefits and assistance, adequate working conditions, health and social security. These measures aim to improve the quality of life and guarantee the strengthening of workers' organizations in order to increase resistance and collective defense of health.

Keywords: Health conditions, Working conditions, Social Security, Occupational Health, Street vendors

INTRODUCTION

The political, economic and social changes that have occurred in the last century have produced significant changes in the working conditions, health and social security of workers. The wage society has faced problems such as unemployment, vulnerability and precariousness of work, driven by the search for flexibility and competition. Previously, it was believed that increasing income and escaping poverty would guarantee good health conditions. However, recent research shows

that socioeconomic conditions affect health more broadly, not just limited to adverse conditions associated with poverty.¹

Informal work is characterized by the precariousness of occupations and encompasses a set of productive activities carried out outside labor and legal regulations. In this context, we find self-employed workers, without a formal contract and without pay, with the majority not contributing to social security.²

Informal work is more common in developing countries, with higher rates in Africa and Asia. In the Americas, around 40% of jobs are informal, with emphasis on Latin America and the Caribbean. In Brazil, informality represents 46% of total employment, being higher among men³.

These people faced difficulties in re-entering the job market, often due to advanced age, low education or lack of opportunities. Continuous unemployment and the need to guarantee their livelihood motivated them to opt for street vending as a way of survival. In other words, the lack of prospects of returning to the job market leads workers to seek self-employment as an alternative income.⁴

In the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro (RMRJ), street vendors play a significant role in informal commerce. With the increase in consumption at the base of the social pyramid, more people have sought informal work opportunities, coming from the outskirts of the city, from cities in the interior of the state, from other states and, sometimes, from other countries⁵.

On SuperVia trains, the company responsible for rail transport, different flows of production, goods and financial transactions converge, ranging from small local producers to large national and international manufacturers. Street vendors play a fundamental role in the commercial distribution of these diverse products, coming

from different origins ⁵.

The intense movement of thousands of people in these spaces, combined with the wide variety of goods offered at affordable prices, characterizes a robust economic dynamic in RMRJ. Therefore, in this article our main objective is to investigate and analyze the perception of street vendors about working conditions, health and social security on the railway in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The study seeks to understand and value the knowledge derived from the workers' experiences, considering them as central actors in the analysis of issues related to health in the work context.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a descriptive and critical methodological approach in the field of social research. Regarding the field of study, we chose RMRJ, which covers 22 municipalities and is one of the most populous and economically important regions in Brazil. The informal economy in the region is significantly large, involving diverse types of occupations and a large population. SuperVia is the company responsible for managing the 102 railway stations distributed across eight branches, totaling around 270 kilometers of railway.

The study included twelve workers who have worked as street vendors on the RMRJ railway for at least six months, over the age of 18 and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The approach to selecting street vendors was based on accessibility criteria, considering the main researcher's prior knowledge of some workers, as well as through the "snowball" technique, in which some participants were nominated by street vendors who had already had responded to the survey.

For data collection, a semi-structured interview script was used that addressed

aspects related to socioeconomic profile, health conditions, working conditions and social security conditions. The interviews took place in a public office belonging to the SUS, located in Rio de Janeiro, between the months of October and December 2022, and were scheduled in advance.

Information from the interviews was collected through direct observation, written records and audio recording. In addition to the interviews, document analysis was used as another source of evidence. The collected data was analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA)⁶. TA is a method that involves identifying, coding, and organizing themes within data to understand participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings.

The study generated overarching themes from the initial codes, which encompass several issues related to street vendors on the railways. These themes cover aspects such as health, occupational risks, resistance faced, social and financial insecurity, working hours, personal fulfillment, dreams and life projects, among others. This approach reflects the complexity and multiple facets involved in street work in this context.

The initial codes provided a broad view of street vendors' experiences, including aspects related to Insecurity and lack of guarantees, Regularization and authorization, Tranquility and safe environment, Respect and fair treatment, Government support for benefits and aid, Equity in access to health services health.

A procedure was adopted to preserve the identity of the interviewees, using order numbers for each interview. This way, the first interviewee was identified as V1, the second as V2, and so on. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Sergio Arouca National School of Public Health with CAEE, number: 56941722.6.0000.5240.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

INSECURITY AND LACK OF GUARANTEES

We don't have any security here. No certainty, today we are working, but tomorrow we don't know if we will get here and the inspection will take us out of work. We don't know what could happen. If I was sure I could always be here, I would invest all my time, all my mind in this (V1).

I think we must have support, you know. Some law that would protect us, to make us a little safer, right, because working here is complicated, because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. Today we have it, tomorrow we don't have it. So, we are not sure of anything. It's every man for himself (V5).

I think the government must treat street vendors with more care, because the majority of street vendors either lost their jobs due to their age, because unfortunately this happens a lot in Brazil, the elderly has no value (V6).

Most interviewees mention the lack of security, lack of guarantee and uncertainty in relation to working as street vendors. They express concern about the possibility of being removed from the workplace by inspections, the absence of specific laws and regulations for this activity, the lack of support and assistance from the government, in addition to the need for greater attention and respect from authorities and of society in general.

Lack of security can have a significant negative impact on the well-being and safety of street vendors working on trains ⁷. Some of the ways in which lack of security affects street vendors include public safety, financial security, mental health and general health. Street vendors may be at risk of violence or accidents due to a lack of effective public safety measures, such as a lack of protection against crime. The lack of security can also lead to financial insecurity for street vendors,

as they are vulnerable to life-threatening robberies and assaults. Overall, poor safety can have serious consequences for street vendors working on trains, and it is important to address these issues to ensure the safety and well-being of these workers. ⁸.

The vast majority of street vendors working in railway areas are unemployed and have not found jobs with stable contracts. This means that if these workers become ill or have an accident, they will be completely helpless, as they generally do not contribute to social security. ⁹.

Income from informal commerce on the RMRJ railway is highly unpredictable, which makes street vendors extremely vulnerable and insecure. The issue of the employment record was emphasized by the interviewees, representing an achievable objective for some and a distant one for others. This highlights the demand for rights, such as guarantees for future retirement, sick pay when necessary, unemployment insurance and paid annual leave. However, both as street vendors and in previous jobs, the majority of interviewees did not have access to basic labor rights due to the precarious nature of this type of work. ⁹.

It is essential that measures are adopted to guarantee the safety and well-being of street vendors. This includes the implementation of specific public policies, adequate regulation of the activity, access to labor and social security rights, in addition to strengthening dialogue between street vendors, government authorities and society as a whole.

It is necessary for the government and society to recognize the value of the work of street vendors and adopt actions to improve their working conditions. By doing so, we will be contributing to the promotion of a more just, inclusive and supportive society, in which all workers have their rights respected and their dignity preserved.

REGULARIZATION AND AUTHORIZATION

There had to be normalization like any other profession, right, like a domestic worker, like a taxi driver, you know. You have to regulate it, you have to do something for the street vendor (V3).

So, I think that if it were a legalized thing, if we had authorization, if we had some kind of assistance that would help us to replace it, because then, it's not wrong to sell, but they don't make laws for that, therefore, a better condition, or having the opportunity to have somewhere to stop, so we can do our work, because everything we are doing is with the intention of surviving, right (V8).

At least be legalized. It must be a legal thing! It's something that must be more structured, have better working conditions. Have better conditions (V11).

Some workers interviewed defend the need for regularization and professionalization of the activity of street vendors on the train. They mention the need for laws and regulations that recognize the profession of street vendors and provide better working conditions. This category reflects the desire to have a regulated and stimulating work environment. They argue that, if there were clear regulations and established laws, street vendors would have better working conditions and could occupy adequate spaces to carry out their commercial activities.

Street vendors face difficulties finding jobs that offer a minimum of social protection¹⁰. Despite developing survival strategies and working together to deal with adversity, there are few formal employment opportunities and little organization in this sector⁰.

Many people are unaware of this reality and have little interest in working outside the railway environment, due to the lack of expectation of improvements in working conditions.¹⁰ These workers live in constant

insecurity and struggle daily to meet their own needs and those of their families¹⁰.

The lack of specific laws and adequate structure for street vendors creates an environment of uncertainty and difficulties for vendors. The lack of authorization and government support limits their opportunities for professional growth and development. Furthermore, the lack of regulation contributes to informality and a lack of social protection, leaving workers in a vulnerable position.

The legalization and regularization of street vendors' activities would not only guarantee better working conditions, but would also bring benefits to the local economy. By providing a safe and regulated environment, sellers could more effectively contribute to the development of the communities in which they operate.

It is essential that public policies are implemented with the participation of the workers themselves, which promote the regularization and authorization of the activity of street vendors, aiming at the protection and recognition of these workers. By doing so, we will be promoting the social and economic inclusion of these professionals, in addition to contributing to the construction of a fairer and more equitable society, where everyone has access to decent and safe work opportunities.

TRANQUILITY AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

It's fine for me, I don't want the guard to disturb me, that's all. I feel good here, it's like it's my home. The environment is good, here I don't have to run around, or people steal, every now and then someone shows up saying there's been a robbery. It's very peaceful here (V4).

It is truly paradoxical that, after emphasizing the issue of insecurity faced by street vendors, the interviewee highlights the feeling of security and tranquility found in

their work. It is interesting to note that, even in a context where insecurity is prevalent, this street vendor has found an environment that he considers to be a “home”, where he does not need to worry about risky situations and robberies.

This perception by the interviewee highlights the importance of a safe and peaceful working environment for street vendors, and perhaps also points to the appreciation of small achievements and spaces of protection in the midst of an often-adverse scenario. The contrast between the reality of insecurity and the interviewee’s positive experience in his work reveals a duality that may exist in the daily lives of many street vendors.

This paradox reinforces the need for public policies that seek to provide better conditions and security for this group of workers, allowing them to carry out their activities in a calmer and more stable way, without feeling threatened. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of listening to the voices of workers themselves to understand their specific realities and needs, in order to implement effective protection and support measures.

According to Correia¹¹, the idea that the identification of street vendors with their profession is directly linked to dissatisfaction with the activities carried out is not entirely true. This is a paradox, as some street vendors find satisfaction in their work and feel that it contributes to their professional fulfillment.

Therefore, when asked about their identity as street vendors, they may be surprised, as it leads them to reflect on something practical and every day, revealing a lack of consideration about the personal meaning of being a street vendor.

Creating a safe and peaceful environment for street vendors not only ensures their protection and well-being, but also promotes better performance and quality of life at

work. These aspects are essential to promote the satisfaction and professional fulfillment of street vendors, who play a significant role in the economy and social dynamics of the communities in which they operate.

RESPECT AND FAIR TREATMENT

I think we must at least have respect, right, because we're there in the rush like everyone else, doing that honest work, you know. Better than being there on the track, right, running after things that are ours, wanting to steal and everything else. I would like it to be like this, much better for us (V9).

We are very decriminalized by the train agents, you know, especially by the security guards there, because they try to keep a firm rein, but we have to work, there is no other way, the service could be much better, but whatever (V10).

Some interviewees mention the importance of being treated with respect and dignity. They emphasize that they are honest workers, who are fighting to survive in a dignified way and deserve to be valued. They express the desire to be treated with more consideration by train officials and society in general. This category highlights the search for a change in the perception and social treatment of street vendors, aiming for fair and respectful treatment.

Vargas Falla and Urinbojev¹² found that many workers relied on the help of a friend or family member to find a good place to work, as having a friend or family member already established as a street vendor was an advantage for new vendors. According to the authors, these people acted as “facilitators” or “mentors”, helping them find places with a good clientele, where supervision was not rigorous and other sellers allowed them to set up, without conflicts.

Laurell and Noriega¹³, emphasize the importance of work experience as valuable

knowledge that provides protection to workers. In the context of street vendors, this experience is fundamental to their success. Street vendors face a variety of challenges, from competing with other vendors to the need to find strategic locations to attract customers. By relying on guidance from an experienced friend or family member, new salespeople can avoid common mistakes and difficulties, saving time and resources.

Furthermore, the experience also allows these mentors to provide tips and strategies for dealing with the demands of street work, such as price negotiation, inventory management and customer relations. This practical knowledge is valuable to ensure the success and sustainability of the business.

This way, the work of street vendors illustrates how experience gained over time can promote the protection of workers. Through guidance from friends or family members established in this activity, new salespeople can take advantage of their accumulated knowledge and overcome the challenges faced in street vendors, increasing their chances of success and ensuring a better quality of life.

Faced with these daily challenges, street vendors and passengers interact with each other, creating bonds and social phenomena, such as eventual recognition between passengers who use the same carriage daily, with the same street vendors and rules of coexistence and logistics. This adds an additional level of complexity to the relationship between people who use the interior space of the carriages, whether as a means of transport or as a place to work¹⁴.

It is necessary to highlight the positive influence that respect and fair treatment can have on the lives of street vendors. By being recognized and valued, these workers can feel encouraged and motivated to continue with their work, seeking improvement and

professional growth.

It is necessary to promote a change in the social perception of street vendors, overcoming stigmas and prejudices associated with this activity. Valuing the contribution of these workers to the local economy and recognizing their importance as active members of the community is fundamental to building a more inclusive and fair society.

Therefore, it is essential that spaces for dialogue and partnership are created between street vendors, train agents and other social actors, in order to promote respect, equality and fair treatment for all.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR BENEFITS AND AID

For example, I need it and I don't get any help from the government, you know. It's me alone every day (V6).

We would need to have a benefit that we don't have. We have to buy things, try to resell these things, this work is not easy and we can't afford anything. I think that we, that the government must give us a benefit, so that we can survive better, because it is very difficult. We buy expensive merchandise, we are going to resell it and it has to be at a higher price, it is very difficult that way (V7).

They could give us assistance, right, because we work, you know, we are not people who are there committing crimes (V10).

Some interviewees mention the need to receive benefits and aid from the government to help street vendors have better survival conditions. They highlight the difficulty in purchasing goods and reselling them at competitive prices, emphasizing the importance of government support to facilitate their activities. Furthermore, they express the desire for laws that support and protect this category of informal workers, as well as the importance of a more attentive and sensitive approach on the part of the

government towards the elderly and people with little education.

Despite their essential role in urban economies, street vendors often face difficult working conditions and a lack of access to crucial social security benefits. The lack of legal protections for street vendors working on trains is a significant issue that needs to be addressed. Of course, street vendors are an important part of the economy and contribute significantly to the livelihood of communities.

They generally face significant economic difficulties due to the nature of their work. They may have difficulty supporting themselves due to low income, unstable work schedules and the high cost of living in cities¹⁵. One of the main problems faced by street vendors is the low income associated with their work. Many street vendors sell low-cost items such as food, drinks and small objects and may only make a small income. Additionally, sellers often have to compete with each other for customers, which can further reduce prices and income.

According to Lund¹⁶, street vendors are excluded from social protection programs aimed at groups considered “vulnerable”, as they are adults of working age. Furthermore, they are also not covered by social security programs that cover work-related illnesses or injuries. The author highlights the lack of specific social protection related to work for street vendors, who are considered “workers” and do not receive the same rights and access to social protection programs as citizens in general.¹⁶

To ensure a more equitable environment, it is crucial that government policies recognize the economic importance of street vendors and seek to promote their well-being, especially through the implementation of social protection and financial support programs. The inclusion of these informal workers in social security systems and the creation of specific support measures will contribute to

their stability and dignity at work.

EQUITY IN ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

V12: Same for everyone. I don't want it to be better than anyone else's, now I want to be seen, when I need to go somewhere, get there and have a doctor there to be able to help, because that's not happening. I would like there to be a health standard for everyone (V12).

Laurell e Noriega¹³ emphasize that the production process and the work environment have a direct impact on workers' health. In the case of street vendors, the work is characterized by a high level of physical effort, exposure to unfavorable weather conditions and emotional stress resulting from the uncertainties and instabilities of informal work.

Some interviewees point to the need for improvements in health conditions and access to healthcare. They express frustration with the lack of adequate care and advocate the implementation of an equal standard of healthcare for all. This category emphasizes the importance of access to adequate healthcare for street vendors.

Giovanella¹⁷ highlights that access to healthcare is a crucial aspect that influences the relationship between the demand for services and the ability to use them. It refers to the way in which health services are provided, which can facilitate or hinder their use by potential users, in addition to demonstrating the health system's capacity to provide services and meet the population's health needs. In this sense, the access difficulties faced in the daily routine of health services must direct attention to the conditions of health care networks, aiming to improve the provision of services and meet the needs of users more efficiently.

According to Souza¹⁸, the Unified Health System (SUS) faces challenges related to

its complexity, specific difficulties in each location, fragmentation of health policies and programs, in addition to the need for improvement in management and social control. The organization of a regionalized and hierarchical health network is also a pending issue. One of the main challenges of the S.U.S. is to guarantee quality access, as there are still disparities between the different cities and regions of Brazil. It is essential that health professionals, the population and managers at all levels are committed to minimizing these inequalities.

According to Souza¹⁸, the health category does not have a pre-determined value in the field of worker health, but rather something to be achieved through struggle and praxis (combination of theory and action). Health is in constant historical tension due to the contradictions between the economic interests of capital and the possibilities for transforming reality. There is consensus in the field that health is strongly determined by social conditions and the organizational capacity of workers¹⁸.

The influence of Latin American social medicine and Italian workers' studies is still significant in the theoretical-methodological configuration of workers' health. This approach originates from historical materialism and emphasizes the consolidation of a militant field of knowledge, with the shared production of knowledge between researchers and workers.

From this perspective, health is closely linked to the promotion of struggle processes and health defense movements in collaboration with workers' organizations¹⁸.

From a historical point of view, Marxist categories, especially that of "work process", are considered explanatory for the analysis of work. It also highlights the organization's crucial need for workplaces as a fundamental strategy for transforming working conditions and environments. However, the profound

transformations resulting from the productive logic and changes in current work relations, such as outsourcing and other forms of precarious work, imply the continuous challenge of updating the references in the field of knowledge, in order to produce knowledge in close correlation with the transformation of reality¹⁸.

Workers' health is still a field of knowledge and practices in development in Brazil that demands reflection on its theoretical foundations, to understand and analyze workers' health as a social process. The relationship between the work process and the worker's physical and psychological well-being is evident. Work is an activity that involves the transformation of man and nature and its configuration directly influences the health of workers¹⁸.

Within the scope of the Unified Health System (SUS), there is the National Network for Comprehensive Occupational Health Care (RENAST), which consists of a network of health assistance and surveillance services aimed at workers. Its objectives are to expand access and carry out health promotion, protection, prevention and surveillance actions, in addition to offering specialized assistance in worker health¹⁹. However, it is possible that many workers are not aware of this right.

Awareness of the existence and benefits of RENAST may vary among workers. Some may be aware of the issue, especially those involved in occupational risk activities or who have greater access to information. However, others may not be familiar with the services and resources available to protect and promote their health in the workplace.

These thematic categories reflect the opinions and demands of street vendors on the RMRJ railway. They seek security, stability, regularization of the profession, benefits, institutional support, fair treatment

and access to health services. These demands aim to improve the quality of life and well-being of these workers and reflect the need for public policies that meet their specificities and needs, aiming to guarantee their safety, social inclusion, provide benefits, assistance and adequate working conditions, health and social Security. Furthermore, the need for government support to facilitate the work of these sellers and guarantee their livelihood is highlighted.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the interviews carried out with street vendors on the railways, it was possible to identify several demands and concerns related to their work and living conditions.

One of the main issues raised by interviewees is insecurity and lack of guarantees in relation to their work. They express concern about the possibility of being removed from the workplace by inspections and the absence of specific laws and regulations for their activity. Furthermore, they highlight the lack of support and assistance from the government, as well as the need to be treated with more respect and appreciation.

Another important aspect mentioned by interviewees is the need to regularize and authorize the activity of street vendors. They argue that, like other professions, this activity must also be legalized and regulated, providing better working conditions and opportunities to occupy suitable spaces.

The search for a safe and peaceful work environment is also highlighted by street vendors. They value the feeling of security found in their work and highlight the importance of avoiding risky situations and robberies.

The demand for respect and fair treatment is another concern raised by interviewees. They emphasize that they are honest workers who deserve to be valued and treated with

consideration, both by train agents and by society in general.

Street vendors also express the need to receive government support, such as benefits and aid, to facilitate their activity and improve their survival conditions. They mention the difficulty in purchasing goods and reselling them at competitive prices, highlighting the importance of government support for this issue.

Furthermore, equity in access to health services is also a concern raised by interviewees. They express frustration with the lack of adequate care and advocate the implementation of an equal standard of healthcare for all street vendors.

Without a doubt, the need to strengthen the organization of street vendors is crucial to improve their working conditions and face the challenges they face daily. By uniting their voices and interests, street vendors can achieve greater representation and negotiating power with authorities and institutions responsible for regulating and protecting informal workers.

The collective organization allows street vendors to share information, experiences and strategies to face common issues, such as the search for safer and calmer environments, defending their labor rights and obtaining better working conditions, such as suitable places to sell. of your products.

Furthermore, a solid organization can promote the training of street vendors, providing them with information about their rights and duties, guidance on safe and sustainable work practices, and offering mutual support in adversity situations.

Another relevant point is that, by organizing themselves, street vendors can become a more active voice in formulating public policies that directly affect them. They can participate in discussions with municipal and state authorities, contributing to the creation of

solutions best suited to their specific needs.

A strong organization can help combat the exploitation and abuse that some street vendors may face, as they will have a support network to report such situations and seek legal assistance if necessary. Strengthening

the organization of street vendors is essential to ensure that their voices are heard and to promote a significant improvement in their working conditions, ensuring them a safer and more dignified environment to carry out their economic activities.

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