



CONCEPTIONS OF WORK: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF WORKERS UNDER THE “PEJOTIZAÇÃO” ARRANGEMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF WORK

CONCEPÇÕES DO TRABALHO: UM ESTUDO EMPÍRICO COM TRABALHADORES PEJOTIZADOS À LUZ DA PSICODINÂMICA DO TRABALHO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This article aimed to understand the relationship between the conceptions of work and workers' experiences of pleasure and suffering under the Brazilian pejotização (Brazilian legal contracting arrangement).

Method/approach: Using a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with workers under the pejotização arrangement from different occupational sectors. The Analysis of Core Meanings technique was used to analyze the data.

Main Results: The main results of the research found that the conceptions of work of the workers under the pejotização arrangement are mainly related to results and compensation. In their experiences of pleasure and suffering, the workers reported exhausting work routines and the lack of results as their main sources of suffering, finding pleasure in achieving goals and maintaining personal activities. Among the perceived advantages of the pejotização arrangement were financial gains and flexible working hours; however, the disadvantage was the insecurity resulting from the absence of statutory labor rights and benefits.

Theoretical/practical/social contributions: The research contributes by providing an overview of the contradictions that emerge from pejotização, offering a critical perspective on flexible work arrangements. As for future possibilities, it paves the way for the investigation of pejotização in specific branches of work.

Originality/relevance: This article is justified by the scarcity of studies on contemporary conceptions of work, in the context of new types of work arrangement, and by the need to delve deeper into the phenomenon of pejotização, in order to investigate the understanding of the workers engaged in this type of work arrangement and its impact on themselves and society.

Keywords: Pejotização. Work. Psychodynamics of Work.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este artigo teve como objetivo compreender a relação entre as concepções do trabalho e as vivências de prazer-sofrimento de trabalhadores pejotizados.

Método/abordagem: Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa, exploratório-descritiva, realizaram-se entrevistas semiestruturadas com trabalhadores pejotizados de diferentes ramos de atuação. Para análise dos dados utilizou-se a técnica da Análise dos Núcleos de Sentido (ANS).

Principais Resultados: Como principais resultados a pesquisa verificou que as concepções do trabalho dos pejotizados estão relacionadas principalmente a resultados e remuneração. Em suas vivências de prazer-sofrimento, os pejotizados enfrentam como sofrimento a rotina exaustiva e a falta de resultados, encontrando prazer no alcance de metas e na manutenção das atividades pessoais. Entre as vantagens do trabalho pejotizado foram apontados os ganhos financeiros e a jornada flexível, contudo, como desvantagem foi destacada a insegurança da ausência dos benefícios trabalhistas.

Contribuições teóricas/práticas/sociais: A pesquisa traz como contribuição um panorama das contradições que emergem do trabalho pejotizado, oferecendo a possibilidade de que sejam analisados criticamente os modelos flexíveis de trabalho. Como possibilidades futuras, abre caminho para investigação da pejotização em ramos específicos de trabalho.

Originalidade/relevância: O presente artigo justifica-se pela escassez de estudos sobre as concepções contemporâneas do trabalho, no contexto dos novos tipos de vínculo, e pela necessidade de aprofundamento no fenômeno da pejotização, para que se investigue a compreensão dos sujeitos imersos nesse tipo de vínculo e o impacto disso sobre si e a sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Pejotização. Trabalho. Psicodinâmica do Trabalho.

1 INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of social and economic changes associated with the advance of neoliberalism, a growing trend has emerged toward reducing labor costs and increasing labor market flexibility. With this process underway, there is greater freedom in the contractual relationship between employers and workers, impacting crucial issues such as remuneration (Souza & Borges, 2021).

In the meantime, some important questions arise as a reflection on the world of work: what models have stood out in this context of flexible labor relations? Have these models impacted on the health conditions of workers? These and other questions have been raised in literature to understand this phenomenon. For example, research has documented the growing adoption of work arrangements such as outsourcing (Droppa et al., 2021), uberization (Abílio et al., 2021), telework (Maio, 2019) and the *pejotização*, a Brazilian employment arrangement in which workers establish legal entities to provide services in lieu of standard employment contracts (Krein et al., 2018). In the international context, flexible work models have been highlighted in literature, such as *trabajo a honorarios* in Latin America (Muñoz, 2021), the adoption of independent contractors in the United States (Abraham et al., 2024), the dynamics of the zero-hour contract in the United Kingdom (Atkinson, 2022), and the growth of self-employment in Europe (Behling & Harvey, 2015).

Among the work models presented, the practice characterized by requiring workers to establish a legal entity (Pessoa Jurídica, abbreviated as PJ) through which they provide intellectual services has attracted growing attention because of the legal controversies surrounding it (Farias et al., 2023). The literature has explored how various professions have adopted this type of employment relationship, especially doctors (Neto et al., 2019), nurses (Farias et al., 2023), teachers (Gemelli et al., 2020), the beauty and aesthetics sector (Souza & Borges, 2021) and in the information technology field (Silva, 2016).

Studies have also highlighted its connection with the 2017 Brazilian Labor Reform (Porto & Vieira, 2019; Reis & Prado, 2019), pointed to a possible relationship with precariousness (Guimarães Junior & Silva, 2020) and raised convergent issues such as entrepreneurial discourse (Silva, 2016; Wissmann, 2021), the configuration of the Individual Microentrepreneur (MEI) as the main mechanism through which *pejotização* is implemented (Fernandes, 2024) and the loss of union strength related to this and other work models (Rodrigues et al., 2022).

Research has identified that the adoption of *pejotização* arrangement results in negative impacts on workers' health, triggering work-related illnesses (Cabral et al., 2022; Farias et al., 2023). In this sense, the research follows this guiding principle and draws upon the theoretical framework of Psychodynamics of Work, developed by Christophe Dejours, which aims to understand and reflect on how workers manage to cope with situations that promote oppression, suffering, psychological imbalance, and emotional and physical exhaustion arising from the work context (Dejours, 2015). In his theory, Dejours (2012) discusses that the act of working is not considered neutral, as work directly influences the individual and constitutes experiences of pleasure and suffering at work depending on the context in which the individual is inserted.

Given the above, the research uses the following guiding question: how do conceptions of work relate to the experiences of pleasure and suffering of workers under the *pejotização* arrangement? In this sense, the general objective of the work was to understand the relationship between conceptions of work and the experiences of pleasure and suffering of workers under *pejotização* arrangement. From this, the following specific objectives were

outlined: (1) to identify the conceptions of work of workers under the pejotização arrangement and (2) to characterize the experiences of pleasure and suffering of these workers.

This study is justified because, although the literature already addresses topics such as outsourcing (Droppa et al., 2021), uberization (Abílio et al., 2021), and telework (Maio, 2019), the phenomenon of pejotização has its own controversies, which have been explored by studies that focus primarily on legal aspects (Reis & Prado, 2019; Farias et al., 2023), leaving a gap regarding the subjective experience and conceptions of work of individuals immersed in this model. The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The next section presents the literature review, followed by the research methodology. The subsequent section discusses the findings, and the article concludes with the final considerations.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on a literature review and a search for articles related to the research, the focus was on the themes of conceptions of work, pejotização, and Psychodynamics of Work, which underpin the analysis and results of the research.

2.1 WORK AND ITS CONCEPTIONS

Work has a significant influence on an individual's life and constitutes a determining and meaning-forming task. Whether in the subjective realm, where work acts as a link between the individual and society, shaping identity and mental health, or in the political realm, when it guarantees the subsistence of the evolutionary processes of society, the fact is that work occupies a central place in life and in the relationships that constitute the human being (Dejours et al., 2023). It is worthwhile to understand how work has been viewed throughout the history of society up to the present day and to point out its relationship with the individual.

Conceptions of work change throughout history in response to multiple transformations - economic, social, political, religious, technological, ecological, and cultural - inherent to human beings' fourfold relationship: i) with the transcendent; ii) with the material world; iii) with the other; and iv) with himself (Ramos, 2008). In summary, we agree with Ramos (2008) that, when dealing with the evolution of work in human history, four phases stand out: i) work in Pre-literate Societies; ii) work in Classical Antiquity; iii) work in the Medieval Era; and iv) work in Modernity.

In pre-literate societies, work was directly linked to survival, related to activities such as hunting and gathering, and was integrated into the totality of life, similar to other dimensions of life such as the relationship with deities. In Classical Antiquity, there are records of the pejorative or unfortunate meaning associated with work, since not depending on physical labor was a condition for the free life of the free citizen of the polis, in contrast to domestic slaves, in the context of Greco-Roman civilizations. In the Middle Ages, especially due to the feudal system of production, work was of a servile nature and tied to the land, to the fief. In the face of the religious influence of Roman Catholic Christianity, work assumed an ascetic value in the lives of devout serfs (Costa, 2024; Ramos, 2008; Rohm & Lopes, 2015).

In the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, at least two revolutions stand out – the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, and a religious reformation within Christianity, the Protestant Reformation, all influencing the way of thinking about and experiencing work and its role in the nascent modern society. Regarding the Protestant

Reformation, authors disagree on the influence of its ethos on human labor. Some, based on a reading of Weber (2001) present the Protestant Reformation as promoting the spirit of accumulation of capitalism, by linking vocation and the wealth accumulation to salvation of the soul. On the other hand, within Protestantism, some point to the core values of the Reformed *ethos* as being work, frugality, and thrift; the latter in a social sense, to be able to help those in need and not for personal accumulation (Biéler, 2012; Costa, 2024).

From Hegel's perspective, work is a dialectical process rather than merely an activity aimed at human survival. Through work, individuals transform nature, themselves, and consequently the society in which they live. However, from Marx's perspective, survival now depended on selling one's labor power in an unequal relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, where the worker's labor power was understood as the commodity itself (Semeraro, 2013).

In Arendt's view (2007), work is the activity linked to the human capacity to artificially create one's own existence, an existence that is not limited to the natural life cycle of the species and whose finitude is not compensated for by this cycle. Through work, a world of artificial objects is constructed, clearly distinct from nature. Each person lives within this constructed world, even though it is made to last beyond life.

Considering the analysis of how the vision of work has developed over time, there has been a growing tendency to understand work involving your totality and not only its physical characteristics, such as environment or tools, is perceived. However, in recent decades, the traditional definition of work, based on employment, remuneration, and a fixed place of execution, has proven inadequate in the face of the social transformations of the 21st century. Therefore, work needs to be understood beyond an instrumental logic, which has increasingly been emphasized in recent literature to broaden this conception, as subjective and relational dimensions are incorporated (Laan et al., 2023). Thus, a review of the main conceptions regarding work in recent years summarizes that:

Work is an innate human function which inherently informs the individual's life purpose and role; work is relational and is manifest through various socialisation processes comprising interactions with the contexts of work, deriving meaning from conscious thought and activity and/or efforts, and is driven by personal and societal codes of *ethos* and *praxis* which in turn is manifest in the expression of one's work and social service, while influencing one's well-being (Laan et al., 2023, p. 267).

It is worth highlighting that transformations in the contemporary work context affect an individual's conception of work, which develops as a subjective process, becoming more prominent as individuals are integrated into and occupy a place in the world. Therefore, in each situation, given its contingency, human beings are led to attribute a conception to work, influenced by characteristics such as occupation, historical space, conditions, and work organization (Souza & Borges, 2021). Against this background, the present study seeks to understand how these conceptions are shaped within the specific characteristics of the pejetização arrangement.

2.2 PEJOTIZAÇÃO

In parallel to the well-known employment relationship, regulated by the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), Brazilian law has seen a growing number of atypical forms of work such as temporary work, cooperatives, outsourcing, and the Brazilian practice known as pejetização, whereby workers are required to establish a legal entity (Pessoa

Jurídica, or PJ) to provide services. What differentiates these forms of work are the fundamental principles of Brazilian Labor Law, since the employment relationship is characterized by personal service, continuity, remuneration, and subordination. In contrast, the employment relationship lacks legal recognition, resulting in the non-application of labor rights (Barbosa & Orbem, 2015).

From this perspective, the use of *pejotização* arrangement to avoid labor laws is part of a process of flexibilization that has taken hold in Brazil and around the world. In the United Kingdom, one can cite the zero-hour contract, a work arrangement where the employer does not establish a minimum amount of work that links the employer to the employee (Atkinson, 2022). Thus, the "employees" are at the company's disposal, without any prospect of regulation or rights.

In the United States, independent contractor (IC) work is a phenomenon in which workers offer their services to companies and individuals independently, unlike self-employment, where they own other types of businesses. In the IC model, there is no legislation regulating wages and hours, no possibility of unionization, and no employment-related compensation (Abraham et al., 2024).

As a phenomenon specific to Brazil, *pejotização* can be understood as a specific form of labor outsourcing, since in this modality, an individual employee begins to perform services for a specific company through the creation of a legal entity. A service provision contract, exempt from labor rights, begins to determine the functioning of the relationship between the contracted worker and the contracting company (Gemelli et al., 2020).

Among its main characteristics, this work model carries with it autonomy for the worker, who is faced with a flexible proposal regarding working hours and remuneration. However, the literature points out that, for companies, this model brings cost reduction and transfer of responsibility (Lima & Oliveira, 2021), while for the worker, job insecurity remains (Fernandes, 2024).

The exemption from paying tax and labor charges by companies, such as INSS¹ (Brazilian Social Security Institute) and the Guarantee Fund for Length of Service (FGTS), and the lack of obligation regarding the annual readjustment of remuneration are some of the advantages for companies; however, for service providers, there is no right to vacation or severance pay. Furthermore, since the worker becomes a service provider, they are no longer managed by the Human Resources (HR) Department, but by the purchasing department, a transition that causes the worker to cease being seen as an employee and instead be treated from the perspective of a mere service provider (Barbosa & Orbem, 2015).

2.3 PSYCHODINAMICS OF WORK

The Psychodynamics of Work is an interdisciplinary approach developed by Christophe Dejours in France during the early 1970s. This approach understands the organization of work as both a source of pleasure and suffering, as well as the origin of defensive strategies used by individuals to reconcile the demands of the work environment with their efforts to protect their mental health (Dejours, 2015; Adier & Gernet, 2023).

¹ INSS contributions are a mandatory social security contribution, classified as a tax and labor charge aimed at providing workers with legal guarantees, ensuring rights such as retirement, sick pay, and pensions.

According to Dejours' perspective, work cannot be considered neutral, as it influences and generates both pleasure and suffering in the individual. Thus, suffering is inevitable in the work context, as it stems from the way work is organized in our society. Furthermore, the notion that work can be solely a source of pleasure is utopian (Gonçalves & Junior, 2023). However, suffering can be transformed into pleasure, provided it is not pathological suffering (Dejours et al., 2023). In these cases, suffering can lead to the development of occupational health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and burnout, which are currently very prominent.

According to Dejours (2012), suffering is inherent to the human condition. In the context of work, it is present at some level and can emerge in different ways, whether through conflict between prescribed and actual work or through the effort applied to the work activity itself by the individual. In this sense, suffering occurs because work requires not only technical skills or the physical effort employed, but also a psychological and emotional mobilization of the individual when performing the work.

However, suffering should not be understood solely as harmful, as it can become a catalytic force that propels the individual to action, leading to re-signify suffering into pleasure (Areosa, 2021). Creative suffering, for example, occurs when an individual faces a conflict and manages to overcome it through solutions that mobilize their creativity, transforming that challenge into growth, strengthening their identity, and gaining recognition among their peers. Meanwhile, pathogenic suffering arises when the worker is unable to reinterpret their experience of suffering or when they face a lack of recognition from others and from themselves. Therefore, it is understood that the way in which the subject experiences, elaborates and resignifies or does not resignify suffering is determinant for their mental health (Oliveira, 2022).

Job satisfaction stems from overcoming the obstacles imposed by prescribed work through diligence. Thus, actual work is full of unforeseen events, making it impossible to strictly follow the rules to complete a given task. Furthermore, according to Dejours (2007), another crucial aspect that is a source of job satisfaction is recognition. This symbolic recognition strengthens the worker's identity and well-being and gives new meaning to suffering at work. For the author, this recognition is divided into two: the judgment of utility, which reflects the validation of the impact and usefulness of the work performed for the institution; and the judgment of beauty, which reflects the approval of others, such as superiors and colleagues, who recognize the skill and quality of the work done, appreciating the creativity, quality, and skill involved.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is understood to be an investigation that starts with a question or a problem that requires action and reflection in the pursuit of understanding reality. To achieve its objective, the discussions presented are the result of research work with a qualitative approach, since it focuses on understanding the phenomena linked to the social reality experienced by the participants who are immersed in the phenomenon itself within a given context (Minayo et al., 2015).

Regarding its focus, the study is considered field research, as it aims to analyze the conceptions and experiences of individuals who are experiencing "pejotização". Furthermore, field research allows the researcher to collect information directly linked to

the source that participates in the phenomenon to be investigated (Minayo et al., 2015). For this purpose, as a data collection technique, the semi-structured interview was used, which proved opportune to first analyze their understandings, and then undertake an analytical effort of the narratives treated as an integrated narrative (Minayo, 2007).

Regarding the sampling method used, the homogeneous purposive sampling was employed, combined with the maximum variation within a homogeneous sample; that is, the study adopts as the single inclusion criterion the fact that the interviewees are self-employed workers. However, within this sample, the aim is to diversify factors such as gender, age, profession, and education level. To determine the number of respondents, the research used the principle of empirical saturation, in which interviews were concluded when no new themes emerged (Pires, 2008), that is, throughout the data collection process, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed simultaneously, which allowed the identification of recurring themes.

As a criterion for participation in the research, respondents had to have opted for the PJ (legal entity) model at some point in their professional career, having at least 6 months of work as a worker under the PJ arrangement. It was also necessary that respondents work in different sectors and, for convenience sampling, as the interviews took place, new respondents were indicated and invited to participate in the research, which preserved the identity of the workers through the use of fictitious names and the signing of informed consent forms as stipulated in the project registered and approved by the research ethics committee of Instituto Unichristus LTDA, under opinion number 7.277.195/24. As shown in Table 1, five workers from various business sectors were interviewed, and the interviews totaled 3 hours, 21 minutes, and 29 seconds.

Table 1

Characterization of the research subjects

NAME	AGE	GENDER	EDUCATION	YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	BRANCH
Maurício	47	Male	Bachelor's degree	24 years	Logistics
Marcos	39	Male	Postgraduate studies	21 years	Logistics
Joana	45	Female	Postgraduate studies	23 years	Journalism
Pedro	24	Male	Bachelor's degree	7 years	Gastronomy
Isaac	56	Male	Postgraduate studies	30 years	Civil Engineering

The interviews were conducted both in person and online, using a semi-structured script organized into three sections to address the objectives. The first section contained questions aimed at characterizing the interviewees through information such as age, marital status, education, and length of employment. The second section sought to trace their professional trajectory, identify the point of transition from formal employment to pejetização, and characterize their experiences of pleasure and suffering. This section also included a stimulus question aimed at understanding the participants' conceptions of work from the interviewees, asking them to name three words that came to mind when thinking about work. The use of this stimulus question allows the researcher to identify a wide variety of necessary information without turning the interview into a mere interrogation (Batista-dos-Santos & Oliveira, 2015). The third section contained questions related to the closing of the interview.

For data analysis, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed using the Turbo Scribe program. In addition, the transcription underwent a meticulous cross-review process among the authors who had not participated in the interview. This process aimed to correct errors and ensure the reliability of the accounts. From the interview transcripts, the content was coded and categorized using the ATLAS.ti software, which allowed codes to be created and grouped into thematic categories (Mello, 2006).

In this sense, the categorization and coding were validated among the authors and through peer review, seeking to ensure greater accuracy and reliability. Regarding the analysis of the collected data, an adaptation of the Core Meaning Analysis technique, coined by Mendes (2007), based on Bardin's (1977) content analysis technique, was chosen. The technique consists of selecting context units to identify, within them, the core meanings with similar semantic load and then coding them. Through systematic procedures, the codes are grouped into categories based on the same semantic convergence (Mendes, 2007).

4 FINDINGS

Given that each participant had a unique professional trajectory and specific work context, the individual accounts were analyzed in a first stage of analysis. Then, the narratives of the five interviewees were considered holistically, in a second analytical step, to identify the core meanings.

4.1 MAURÍCIO, 47

Having worked in the logistics industry for at least 21 years, Maurício viewed the pejetização arrangement as an opportunity to increase his salary, since, as a CLT employee (employee under the CLT labor law), he could not receive the raise he desired due to labor and social security charges. Thus, the lower tax burden and the possibility of managing the full amount received constitute the main advantage that led him to adopt this work model.

As a PJ my salary increased [...] With a formal employment contract, I would earn less. You know what I mean? What's left at the end of the month, what's left in my account, is much more than what I'm earning. [...] Financially, it's much better. Because I pay less tax. If I were earning what I'm earning today, I would be paying 27.5% income tax (Maurício).

Despite seeing the salary as the main advantage of being a self-employed professional (PJ), Maurício acknowledges the risk of not having access to employment benefits such as vacation or the 13th-month salary. To overcome this difficulty, the interviewee suggests that it is necessary to manage the amounts received well, even when it comes to taking a trip.

So, that's why it's bad. If a person doesn't manage their finances properly, it complicates things, because I don't get a Christmas bonus at the end of the year. I don't have vacation time. If I take time off, I don't receive paid vacation. [...] For example, if I'm going on a trip, I must plan, save money, so that on the day I have the money, because I won't receive the Christmas bonus. I won't get vacation pay. So, if I'm going on a trip, I need to have the money saved in advance (Maurício).

When questioned about the possible differences between working as a CLT employee and being a PJ, Maurício stated that there is no difference whatsoever; that is, both PJ and CLT employees can perform the same tasks, same functions, same level of decision-making,

but receiving different salaries. However, when the need arises to take specific measures that require the formality of their management position, they point to a disguised way of carrying out certain tasks. The statements show a common contradiction in this work model, where the contractor assumes the role of a manager, but is prevented from performing some duties as such.

None at all. To make it perfectly clear, the *pejotização*, the person performs the same activities, the same decision-making levels, nothing changes! The only thing that changes is the money in their pocket (Maurício).

There are certain things you must be careful about, you know? I remain the immediate superior, he recognizes me. But when it comes to issuing a warning, a suspension, something of that nature, I don't sign it (Maurício).

Regarding conceptions of work, Maurício points to compensation, decision-making, and results as words that summarize work. In his experiences of pleasure and suffering, Maurício finds pleasure in a day when his decisions are correct and efficiency in the execution of his activities is demonstrated. The interviewee even mentions that "normally all workdays are good" (Maurício).

4.2 MARCOS, 39

As a partner in a labor services company with 21 years of professional experience, Marcos found in his own business and in the flexibility of working hours some of the advantages present in the *pejotização* arrangement. However, having worked both as a CLT employee and as a PJ in previous companies made him realize disadvantages such as the great responsibility and concern for the company's financial results, which can impact his personal finances. He states that "today I am a PJ, I set my own hours, and before I was a prisoner" (Marcos).

Since many individuals are registered as Individual Microentrepreneurs (MEI), Marcos can employ people so that the tasks stipulated in their contracts are performed efficiently. Therefore, the high tax burden and the risk of unemployment for family breadwinners constitute disadvantages for this type of work.

In his statements, Marcos explains that he sees no difference whatsoever between a CLT worker and a PJ worker, pointing out, as an example, that the working hours and job responsibilities, sufficient to differentiate the two modalities, are the same in practice and constitute a contradiction in relation to the principles of the employment relationship. Unlike the CLT model, the PJ model does not incorporate these principles, which are personal service, subordination, continuity, and remuneration (Carvalho & Dias, 2022). Thus, some PJ workers do not need to be subject to a fixed schedule and can provide services on an occasional basis.

I confess that I didn't feel any difference. [...] normally you work as a PJ in companies, in managerial positions, in supervisory positions, management positions, director positions, normally it is, depending on the company. [...] personally, I didn't feel any difference. Why? Because, well, you're an employee in the same way that you'll receive your payment at the end of the month. And you have time to arrive and time to leave. If you don't come in one day, you're held accountable (Marcos).

Sometimes they even work as a PJ, but as a PJ within the company, right? It's just a way for people not to... not have a formal employment contract, but it ends up... it ends up being, right? They provide exclusive services within the company, as a manager, as a director, and more as a PJ, right, as contract. But in practice, he's essentially a CLT employee. He has a start time, an end time, he must work, he has the responsibilities of a CLT employee (Marcos).

Regarding his conceptions of work, Marcos mentions the words responsibility, livelihood, and happiness directly expressing his conception of work. As for experiences of pleasure and suffering, Marcos finds pleasure in working with people and in the logistics field, but suffering comes from the responsibility and worry of keeping his businesses running and keeping the accounts up to date, including the amounts owed to his contractors.

4.3 JOANA, 45

Joana, a journalist at a communications agency with over 20 years of experience, saw the possibility of a better payment as an advantage of working as a PJ. On the other hand, she cites as disadvantages the absence of benefits such as severance pay and termination penalties, and false flexibility, since she mentions being held accountable regarding working hours, something very similar to the reality of a CLT employee.

Why do I need a formal employment contract? To get a 13th-month salary, to get vacation time, which I still don't know how it's going to work out. I don't know if they'll be supportive, if they'll give me a month of vacation, if they'll give me a 13th-month salary, because I think it's very unlikely (Joana).

When questioned about continuing her work as a PJ, Joana considers that she would return to working under a CLT contract if the remuneration were reasonable, as the lack of stability in this type of work generates concern about her financial future and the possibility of losing her contract without guarantees. Joana also highlights the contradictions of the *pejotização* arrangement, stating that she is often treated like an employee, contradicting the idea of autonomy inherent in this model. Furthermore, she says that no have difference between being a CLT employee or a PJ in terms of occupation but acknowledges that there is a different level of concern for her regarding overtime.

Because they're worried about overtime, they're not worried about me. I don't work at weekends. If they need to work extra on the weekend, they ask me. They don't ask themselves (Joana).

No, I don't see any difference because I think that's how I'm treated as... now, as an employee, right? I think that's why I don't feel any difference because I think I'm held to the same standards. I don't have... even though I work from home, I'm constantly being asked for things. I always must deliver something. I don't have the freedom to just say, "Today, I'm a PJ, today I'm not going to work". That doesn't exist because whoever serves clients, the client can ask. I can even make that agreement with myself, but it won't work. It might work if there's no demand, but it probably won't work, you know? (Joana).

Regarding conceptions of work, Joana believes that fulfillment, compensation, and occupation are directly related to work. In relation to experiences of pleasure and suffering, Joana points out that working with something she enjoys and obtaining results from her

work provides pleasure and satisfaction. Suffering stems from a busy day, lack of flexibility, and pressure for results. This becomes common in her work as a press officer, as her clients sometimes do not understand the organization of her work routine.

A bad day is when you already have an interview at 7 am, you have to rush out of the house, you have to deal with something outside your routine that you didn't foresee, something that... came up at the last minute, urgent demands that you can't eat, have lunch, that you can't leave on time, that there's tension about the deadline, I think that's a bad workday when there are pressures related to that (Joana).

4.4 PEDRO, 24

Working as an administrative manager in the industrial gastronomy sector, Pedro has 7 years of experience, which is little compared to the other participants. However, his entrepreneurial vision and advocacy for the PJ model, which is exempt from social security contributions and allows flexibility, led him to insist on this employment relationship as a condition of his hiring.

For Pedro, one of the advantages of working as a PJ is the lack of exclusivity, which allows him to prospect service contracts with other companies, even competitors. The flexible hours and the possibility of investing money more profitably are also mentioned as attractive aspects. As disadvantages, Pedro cited the absence of employee benefits such as health insurance and transportation allowance. Even pointing this out as a disadvantage, he explains that good income management and drafting a contract can make it possible to maintain these benefits independently.

When you're a CLT employee, you have a set number of hours to work, you have fixed days, let's put it this way, you have a set of rules to follow, something I don't have to worry about with my PJ format (Pedro).

Another situation is that there are positive and negative points to being a PJ. For example, a negative point is that I give up benefits, so there are no benefits like a regular employee would have, such as health insurance, dental insurance, transportation vouchers, and even tax benefits like vacation pay, 13th-month salary, social security contributions, and severance pay (Pedro).

Pedro mentions the need for a structure to manage his own business and the risk of working more than a traditional employee without oversight as negative aspects. Furthermore, according to Pedro, autonomy seems more related to professional growth and flexibility than to the security of a fixed job. Pedro values the autonomy that allows him to explore other business opportunities and invest in his own projects; therefore, being autonomous, in this case, means the ability to build an independent professional future and have control over his career. For this reason, Pedro is not afraid of losing his current contract, as he trusts in his ability to generate results and transform the reality of the companies where he works.

His concept of work is related to productivity, results, and effort. Regarding experiences of pleasure and suffering, Pedro points out that suffering is related to being trapped in routine; in other words, the more time spent only solving problems, the worse the workday becomes. Pedro finds pleasure in moments when the company's structure functions properly, and he can have a little more flexibility.

4.5 ISAAC, 56

Isaac, a construction coordinator with 30 years of experience in civil engineering, considers the practice of *pejotização* arrangement advantageous because it increases his ability to support his family and to have a financial reserve for the future. He recognizes the lack of security from employment benefits as a determining factor in adopting good financial management.

I prefer it, I really prefer it. I found it interesting because the company can pay you more and you have less dealings with the government (Isaac).

A PJ contractor needs to have a good head on their shoulders because if the company comes along and wants to fire them, there's nothing they can do. They fire them, they give them their last invoice, the balance they're owed, and that's it. There's no severance pay, no termination penalty, nothing else. That's why they earn 40% more, it's so they can build up that reserve (Isaac).

Although he prefers to be a PJ, Isaac doesn't rule out the possibility of returning to a CLT employment if the opportunity proves financially advantageous. This demonstrates that financial security is a determining factor in his decision-making. He also says that his concern about maintaining his employment contract has decreased over time, as he has gained more experience and confidence in his abilities.

The advantage is that you have more capital, the money comes to you, you're the one who manages it, but if you're not a good manager of that money, you can get lost and spend all the money and have no reserves left (Isaac).

When questioned about the differences between a CLT worker and a PJ worker, Isaac points out that he sees no difference in his field regarding working hours, subordination, and activities. An apparent contradiction to be highlighted in Isaac's statement concerns the "fit" of the PJ worker into the organizational culture, which could serve as a possible reason for "dismissal". However, representing his own company, the PJ worker has his own organizational culture and, since he is not considered an employee, he should be more attentive to the activities proposed in his contract than to adapting to the culture of another organization.

If a person doesn't respect the rules, if a person isn't good, isn't a good engineer, or whatever he is, whether he has a formal employment contract or not, he's going to end up being replaced by someone who follows the company's rules and organizational culture; whoever doesn't fit in doesn't stay on the team (Isaac).

Isaac's conception of work is linked to discipline, competence, and results. Regarding experiences of pleasure and suffering, Isaac states that his pleasure comes from seeing things succeed and receiving recognition from others. Suffering arises from problems on the projects, such as work stoppages and unmet goals. He mentions that at some points in his professional career, he faced depression and needed psychological help due to work pressure.

5 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

During the analysis of the overall narrative of the interviews, six themes were observed that grouped the identified codes, as shown in Figure 1. In general, the interviews showed that the experience of being a PJ worker is complex and depends on the profile and expectations of each person. While some value autonomy and the possibility of higher financial gains, others miss the security of the CLT worker regime.

Figure 1
Grouping of identified codes

THEME	MAIN CODES IDENTIFIED
Conceptions of work	Responsibility; results; livelihood; decision-making; success; discipline; productivity; effort; compensation; work goals.
Advantages of working as a PJ	Payment increase; I set my own hours; tax burden; flexibility; freedom; paying taxes; time for family; proportional earnings; cost reduction; financial improvement.
Disadvantages of working as a PJ	Formal employment contract; vacation; no 13th-month salary; no FGTS; termination penalty; saving money; health insurance; severance pay; high costs; giving up employee benefits.
Contradictions	No difference between CLT and PJ; fixed hours; worries; vacation time as a PJ; company culture; loophole in the law; treated as an employee; legal problems; false coordination; sham process.
Pleasure	Personal and professional separation; job satisfaction; service quality; everything going well; progress in execution; disconnecting from work; daily schedule; company results; having money left over in the account; duty fulfilled.
Suffering	Rushing; tiredness; busy day; need to change; drop in productivity; pressure to deliver; not delivering satisfactory service; customer dissatisfaction; out of the ordinary; urgent demand.

5.1 CONCEPTIONS OF WORK

According to the word cloud presented in Figure 2, the summary of the most common words cited at the time of using the stimulus element were results and remuneration, showing that these dimensions predominated in the respondent's conceptions of work.

Relating conceptions of work to experiences of pleasure and suffering at work, it is possible to highlight the points of connection and point out that the way a worker perceives work is related to how suffering and pleasure manifest themselves. Thus, given that there is a greater emphasis on financial gain and the achievement of goals, pleasure is found in the success of activities, the efficiency of execution, and financial return. On the other hand, suffering emerges directly from the lack of results or days when things go "wrong", from the pressure on delivery and productivity.

The conception of work as a means of livelihood and the strong link to compensation also intensify the suffering generated by job insecurity, the concern with "managing well", and the absence of benefits, given the threat of contract termination without labor guarantees. Thus, the way in which the PJ workers conceptualize their work, focused on performance and financial return, directly shapes the situations that will be perceived as sources of fulfillment and suffering in their daily lives.

The conceptions of work primarily linked to results and compensation, although seen as financial advantages of the pejetização arrangement, intensify the pressure and suffering resulting from insecurity due to the absence of benefits and labor rights.

Figure 2*Word cloud – conceptions of work*

Without the traditional safety net of the CLT model, the concern with managing resources well and the dependence on the outcome to guarantee survival make pathogenic suffering more likely, limiting the ability to convert suffering into pleasure (Farias et al., 2023; Gemelli et al., 2020).

5.2 EXPERIENCIES OF PLEASURE AND SUFFERING AT WORK

Regarding the suffering of the PJ workers interviewed, words such as hectic schedules, different routines, decreased productivity, and failure to deliver satisfactory service are associated. The participants pointed out that the work demands a certain flexible dynamic that becomes detrimental as it requires a high number of interventions; that is, when it deviates from the expected, from the routine, and the worker needs to reinvent themselves, the situation constitutes suffering.

Since suffering is related to an unbalanced routine, those who are under the pejetização arrangement interviewees seek fulfillment through balancing a typical, routine, and productive day, which translates into job satisfaction, except for Pedro, who finds pleasure in not being tied to a routine. Furthermore, we can cite the separation of personal and professional contexts as a source of pleasure, since, as work demands a lot of time from the pejetização arrangement, when they manage to organize themselves and have "extra" time for their personal activities, this also constitutes pleasure.

Viewed as a kind of drama, suffering at work arises as the worker confronts the demands of the work organization, which do not correspond to the subject's desires in relation to the activity performed. Thus, to overcome suffering, the subject intervenes in the prescribed work through defense strategies and finds meaning, transforming suffering into pleasure (Mendes, 2007).

5.3 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PEJOTIZAÇÃO

The most frequently mentioned advantage was compensation, as the move from CLT model to PJ model is commonly justified by the need for an increase or payment of higher remuneration compared to market rates. To avoid labor charges and taxes, companies sign a service agreement with the worker, who is then registered as a legal entity.

Furthermore, other advantages are mentioned, such as flexibility regarding working hours, autonomy in relation to activities, and the freedom of not being tied to a work structure, as per the employment relationship governed by the CLT. Unlike the CLT model, the *pejotização* does not constitute the principles that characterize an employment relationship, which are personal service, subordination, continuity, and remuneration (Carvalho & (Dias, 2022). Thus, workers under the *pejotização* arrangement do not need to adhere to a fixed schedule and can provide services on an occasional basis.

The reduced relationship with the government and the lack of exclusivity were specific advantages mentioned by two of the participants. Regarding this, we can assert that this is not standard in relation to service provision contracts, since it is possible for the company to demand an exclusive relationship. Thus, the literature points out that this possibility can create the appearance of autonomous work, in which the characteristics of direct employment, such as exclusivity, are masked (Behling & Harvey, 2015).

As a disadvantage mentioned by those interviewed, there is practically a consensus on the absence of employment benefits such as the thirteenth salary, vacation pay, FGTS, health insurance, and dental insurance. Those working under the PJ arrangement see this as a source of insecurity, especially regarding contract termination, as they feel compelled to manage their earnings more carefully and maintain a reserve.

In this way, the PJ workers lose the labor protections that provide even a healthy work environment and legal guarantees that have been hard-won. These rights, which can provide quality of life, planning and better conditions, give way to job insecurity and illness (Barbosa & Orbem, 2015; Farias et al., 2023).

5.4 CONTRADICTIONS OF PEJOTIZAÇÃO

When questioned about the differences between working under a CLT contract and working as a PJ, the interviewees emphasized that there is no difference regarding labor relations, autonomy in decision-making, and the entire structure of the role they perform in the company. However, some statements demonstrate contradictions regarding the dynamics of service provision, which should not include the principles that characterize an employment relationship: personal service, subordination, continuity, and remuneration (Carvalho & Dias, 2022).

Furthermore, the flexibility regarding working hours that a PJ worker could enjoy is not always respected by companies which impose fixed working hours, justifications for absences, and demands for maintaining a work routine. Even so, there are times when the PJ worker needs to relinquish the prerogatives of their position to protect themselves from legal issues.

It is worth noting that recent research on the use of the Individual Microentrepreneur (MEI) status, a legal framework commonly adopted by workers under the *pejotização* arrangement to provide services, indicates that the primary motivation for registering as an MEI is the pursuit of independence and autonomy (Fernandes, 2024). However, the participants' accounts suggest that this autonomy is often only apparent, as the work arrangement frequently retains the characteristics of an employment relationship, thereby constituting a fraudulent circumvention of Brazilian labor legislation.

Based on the Psychodynamics of Work, which understands work not as neutral, but as something that directly influences the individual (Dejours, 2012), the psychological impact of the contradictions experienced by PJ workers emerges from the very dynamics of work organization, given that suffering at work can arise from discrepancy between prescribed

work and actual work, that is, the contradiction between autonomy and subordination.

Although the PJ model prescribes autonomy, flexibility, and a relationship between legal entities, reality often imposes itself through subordination, fixed hours, and demands typical of a CLT contract. This contradiction produces effects on the worker's social and psychological behavior, such as anxiety in the face of contractual insecurity; self-exploitation, as the worker sees themselves as solely responsible for goals, failures, or overload; and the weakening of collective bonds with a reduction in class identification. These effects are similar to those observed in other labor modalities or relationships, such as telework and uberization (Maio, 2019; Abílio et al., 2021).

Therefore, when autonomy proves incompatible with the control exercised by companies, loopholes arise for legal disputes regarding the recognition of an employment relationship. This can pressure legislators to establish objective criteria for differentiating between service provision and employment relationships, mirroring the jurisprudence in the courts. At the organizational level, illness and turnover among self-employed workers, in addition to legal conflicts, can lead companies to review contractual models, either through formal employment relationships or the creation of social protection mechanisms for PJ workers.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research aimed to understand the relationship between conceptions of work and the experiences of pleasure and suffering among workers under the *pejotização* arrangement. The findings revealed a close relationship between participants' conceptions of work and their experiences of pleasure and suffering under the *pejotização* arrangement.

The findings indicate that the practice of *pejotização*, which presents many contradictions, represents, along with outsourcing, the uberization of the workforce, labor reform, and new work arrangements, an increasingly pervasive process of flexibilization and erosion of labor and social rights, framed by the discourse of entrepreneurship (Antunes, 2012).

Furthermore, the way workers under the *pejotização* arrangement view work emphasizes compensation and performance outcomes reinforcing the individualistic and competitive trend that has guided the organization of work in modernity. These new dynamics have generated increasing mental health problems, given the centrality that work occupies in the individual's life and its strong relationship with mental health (Dejours et al., 2023).

6.1 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

In its contributions, the research offers an empirical account of the contradictions of the PJ work model, particularly the contrast between autonomy and flexibility, as well as the everyday reality of subordination and fixed routines experienced by workers. By relating conceptions of work to experiences of pleasure and suffering, the study deepens the understanding of how the organization of work impacts the mental health of these individuals.

Academically, the study offers an account of the contradictions between autonomy and subordination, broadening the debate on flexibility, psychological distress, and transformations in the world of work. From a public policy perspective, the results provide a

basis for discussions on clearer criteria regarding the characterization of employment relationships, social protection mechanisms, and strategies for promoting the mental health of workers subject to flexible employment arrangements. At the organizational level, the research offers a foundation for managers to rethink management practices regarding worker autonomy, strengthening contractual transparency, and professional recognition.

6.2 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations. It offers a snapshot, with interviews conducted at a specific point in time, providing a snapshot of experiences and conceptions within the context of pejetização. Although it captures the complexity of the phenomenon during the investigated period, this approach prevents the analysis of the evolution of conceptions of work and the dynamics of pleasure-suffering over time while working under the pejetização arrangement.

Future research could investigate the phenomenon in a specific economic sector, such as the construction industry. Given that the five interviewees work in diverse sectors, focusing on a single sector would allow for exploring the particularities of work organization, the pressures, and the contradictions inherent in the area. Another promising avenue for future research is investigating the phenomenon in the context of managers working under the pejetização arrangement. The manager's perspective is crucial to understanding the organizational dynamics that lead to the adoption of the PJ model, such as the pursuit of cost reduction or the shifting organizational responsibilities, and how they perceive or deal with contradictions such as practical subordination and false autonomy.

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