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Mental Health and agricultural work on the process of the productive restructuring of a sugarcane/alcohol industry in Minas Gerais - Brazil

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BRAZIL

Population: 190,732,694 inhabitants **

Urban Area: 160.8 million inhabitants **

Rural Zone: 29.8 million Brazilians live. **

Climate: hot and humid climates, with average temperatures around 20 °C **

Life expectancy: 73.5 years **

HDI: 70^o - 0.800 (ranking 2007)

**Source: Censo IBGE 2010

Sugarcane/alcohol industry- Brazil



- World's largest producer of sugarcane;
- Sugarcane occupies about 7 million hectares or about 2% of all arable land in Brazil;

(UNICA, 2011).

Sugarcane/alcohol industry - Minas Gerais




43 PLANTS IN OPERATION

INDUSTRY

- 2nd largest producer of sugarcane in the country.

(SIAMIG/SINDAÇUCAR, 2011).

The productive restructuring



Sustainable development

- Economic**
 - Reducing the time of harvest
 - Increased productivity
 - Reducing the cost of hiring
- Environmental**
 - Exemption from straw burning
 - Biofuels "clean energy"
- Social**
 - Mechanization of the crop
 - "Manual cane cutters" reduction

(ABREU et al., 2009; NUNES e OLIVEIRA, 2006; RAMOS, 2007)

The productive restructuring




- Unemployment
- Precarious work
- Intensification of work
- Social vulnerabilities

(SCOPINHO, 1999; RAMOS, 2007; MORAIS, 2007; ABREU, 2009)

Mental Health x Rural Work

- Centrality of work

The lack of work / employment undermines the subjective value that the individual attributes to himself, producing feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, insecurity, hopelessness and despair that characterize depressive and anxiety states.

The work devoid of meaning, unrecognized, or source of threats to the physical and / or mental integrity determines suffering .

(ANTUNES, 2002; JARDIM, RAMOS e GLINA, 2010; SILVA, 1996)

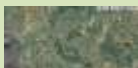
Questions/Objectives

To analyze the perception of cane cutters on the consequences of restructuring, with an emphasis on mental health;

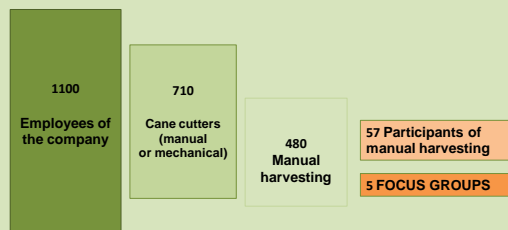
To analyze the strategies developed by these workers to deal with changes resulting from the restructuring process in cutting cane.

Methods

- **Study design:**
Qualitative study of conducting five focus groups.
- Study population:**
Cane cutter workers of a sugarcane/alcohol industry in the municipality of Pompéu, estate of Minas Gerais, Brazil.
- Study period:** May to September 2011.



Methods



Results - Hand cutting



The sugarcane field



Transport of sugarcane



Transport of sugarcane



Results / Discussion

**Productive restructuring :**

Production payment → fast pace of work
 (Decrease revenue cutter / rods of lower quality);
 Relations with superiors / hierarchy → rapid pace of exploitation;
 Physical wear → physical and mental exhaustion;
 Harvest Mechanization → impotence, professional devaluation and fear;
 Organization of work → Competitiveness / competition between workers.

Mental suffering

Results / Discussion

**Productive Restructuring x Mental Health**

- Fear of unemployment
 - Wearing
 - Fatigue and exhaustion
 - Work's dissatisfaction
 - Mental tiredness
 - Stress
 - Preoccupation
- Nervous
 - Discouragement
 - Distress
 - Insecurity
 - Despair
 - Anxiety
 - Mood swings

Mental suffering

Results / Discussion



"With mechanization you has no chance of development in the company. You will remain as cane cutter, once the sugarcane cut is over, you're waste, you will be thrown on the street, like garbage, worth for nothing else, you're all destroyed. You have no spine, you have nothing else. You have no arm."

(Cane cutter, GF1)

Results / Discussion



"We learned to work but the company also learned. She will get the profit. We learned to work much more too. Formerly it was so, had no practice of cutting cane for an ethanol plant, but not today. We have experience but the company has evolved much more than us. She will go far out there to get things over here, things we have no way to get, ain't? So the loss is ours alone. She went on a search and we didn't, ain't? Therefore we will only sink and it will only rise."

(Cane cutter, GF1)

Results / Discussion

Social consequences of mechanization:

- Reduction in the number of job post;
- Crime, violence, poverty, theft, burglary, social exclusion, delinquency;
- Increased use of alcohol and ilegal drugs.

(SCOPINHO, 1999; PINHEIRO, 2007 ;RAMOS,2007; MORAES, 2009).

Results / Discussion

Possible unemployment coping strategies

- Training rehabilitation ;
- Migration to neighboring counties in search of work;
- Search for other rural activities;
- Building, gardening, mining;
- Own business;
- "No future expectations."
- Installation of new industries and businesses in the city;
- Rural workers' union - representing greater strength;
- Government measures.

Conclusion

The professional desqualification of cane cutters and the change of the "of the job's profile" after the harvest mechanization are recognized by sugarcane workers, are as a source of worry, fear and insecurity among workers;

Despite huge differences in the ways each subject experiences the process of change brought by the productive restructuring process, these changes have been sources of mental distress and a threat to physical integrity and / or mental of sugarcane worker.

Thus, it is relevant to further discussion on the mental health of these workers, towards the construction of public health surveillance of rural sugarcane workers .

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Questions?

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Thank you for your attention!