

## PRESENTATION

# Sociological interpretations of decent work in the social and solidarity economy

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## Abstract

This text presents the thematic issue that approaches the sociological interpretations of decent work in the social and solidarity economy (SSE). The first part presents different interpretative theoretical currents about work in modernity and contextualizes the concept of decent work launched by the International Labor Organization. Subsequently, the interface between the SSE and decent work as a field of study is developed based on bibliometric research. The last part presents the articles that make up this issue of the journal.

**Keywords:** Social and solidarity economy. Decent work. Social justice. Social management.

## *Interpretações sociológicas do trabalho decente na economia social e solidária*

### Resumo

Este texto apresenta a edição temática sobre interpretações sociológicas acerca do trabalho decente na Economia Social e Solidária (ESS). Na primeira parte, são expostas diferentes correntes teóricas interpretativas sobre o trabalho na modernidade para contextualizar o conceito de trabalho decente ou digno, lançado pela Organização Internacional do Trabalho (OIT). Em sequência, a análise da interface entre a ESS e o trabalho decente, como campo de estudo, é desenvolvida com base em pesquisa bibliométrica elementar. Na última parte, os artigos que compõem este volume da revista são apresentados.

**Palavras-chave:** Economia Social e Solidária. Trabalho decente. Justiça social. Gestão social.

## *Interpretaciones sociológicas del trabajo decente en la economía social y solidaria*

### Resumen

Este texto presenta la edición temática sobre interpretaciones sociológicas del trabajo decente en la economía social y solidaria. En la primera parte se exponen diferentes corrientes teóricas interpretativas sobre el trabajo en la modernidad para contextualizar el concepto de trabajo decente lanzado por la Organización Internacional del Trabajo. Posteriormente, el análisis de la interfaz entre la economía social y solidaria y el trabajo decente como campo de estudio se desarrolla a partir de una investigación bibliométrica. En la última parte, se presentan los artículos que componen este volumen de la revista.

**Palabras clave:** Economía Social e Solidária. Trabalho decente. Justiça social. Gestão social.

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## WORK IN MODERN SOCIETY

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In so-called industrial societies, work gained centrality in different theoretical approaches within sociology and economics. The reasons for this election, according to Offe (1989), were: (i) the possibility of distinguishing between the domestic and work spheres, as well as between property and paid work; (ii) the existence of a socially diffuse work ethic, which would have overcome the old hierarchy between the exercise of inferior and superior activities or between functional tasks and the significant manifestations of life; (iii) the prominent establishment of an instrumental type of rationality as a consequence of the vast industrial use of the workforce. Arendt (2009) also highlights some work aspects that (i) to achieve a higher ideal, (ii) as an act of transforming a structure into a superior one, (iii) as a form of control over oneself and nature; furthermore, (iv) as a way of achieving satisfaction like that obtained in leisure activities.

However, these social representations and functionalities began to be questioned by theorists such as Sabel (1982) and Touraine (1971) when they highlighted the loss of the ability to normalize work on the content of individuals' actions, interests, and lifestyles in post-industrial societies. As for Habermas (1983), for whom the category of work is no longer central in explaining social changes. For Bell (1976) and Castel (2005), when questioning elements of technology's participation in creating economic wealth, the role of work in this dynamic, and the metamorphoses of social transformation.

Supiot (2019), when analyzing the transformations of work and the future of labor law in the European Union, argued the need for the State to establish regulations beyond employment and implement the conditions of the "professional status of the person" to ensure the continuity of social status for all workers, regardless of the activities and relationships carried out throughout their professional lives.

These debates added the specificities of countries in the Global South, with their unstructured labor markets and high levels of informality, as is characteristic in Brazil (Oliveira, 2003; Pochmann, 2008).

It was in this scenario that the International Labor Organization (ILO) launched the Declaration on Social Justice for Equitable Globalization and established full productive employment and decent work as a central element of economic and social policies, stimulating the adoption of the four strategic objectives<sup>1</sup> of the Decent Work Agenda as priority goals for national and international policies.

This ILO strategy spread the concept to the four corners of the globe; however, it could not innovate the economic regulation of work. Its statute remained oriented towards the employment model as a way of organizing the production and distribution of social wealth, excluding several other activities not carried out under employment conditions and forgetting the countless precarious relationships that advanced in the world of work and created less than decent jobs. In fact, the concept of decent work became the target of different interpretations based on its value linked to dignity.

More recently, the United Nations intertwined decent work with economic growth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, expanding the previous conceptual scope by introducing new elements, such as the promotion of policies aimed at the development of entrepreneurship, formalization and growth of micro, small and medium-sized companies and improving the efficiency of global resources in consumption and production correlated to environmental aspects. However, its essence remained restricted to productive economic activities aimed at profit. In addition, it continued to adopt the employment relationship as the "dignified" form of social inclusion, even though reality increasingly challenges this inclusion.

In 2019, there was a change of direction. The ILO approved the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, recognizing the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as an alternative people-centered economic model capable of combining social, economic, and environmental objectives in the 108th International Labor Conference (ILC). After the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO adopted a global call for people-centered economic recovery and reinforced the directions in the 109<sup>th</sup> CIT. In the

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<sup>1</sup> The objectives of the agenda are: respect for rights at work, especially those defined as fundamental (trade union freedom, right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of discrimination in employment, and occupation, and eradication of all forms of forced labor and Child labor); the promotion of productive, and quality employment; the expansion of social protection; and strengthening social dialogue.

same way, the United Nations General Assembly followed in report A/76/209 of 2021 in identifying, at the interface between cooperatives and information and communication technologies (ICT), the opportunity to establish a new social contract that recognizes the interrelationships between the economy, social protection, health, and the environment.

## THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND DECENT WORK

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Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) emerged in the academic debate as a strategy for confronting the social exclusion of layers of the population marked by high socioeconomic vulnerability and as a mechanism for territorial development based on a set of collective and self-managed work actions.

However, its contribution to the organization of decent work is far from uncontroversial. From a generalist and Western perspective, the proximity between the ideas of SSE and Decent Work is notorious, although the work/employment practices commonly diverge from these ideas.

Added to this, internal distinctions between the aspects of the Social Economy and the Solidarity Economy need attention. The Social Economy concept emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe as a response from various sectors of society (associationism, socialist thinkers, Catholic Christians, and even liberals such as Walras and Mill) to the vicissitudes of exploitation caused by liberal and industrial capitalism in the form of associative initiatives, cooperatives, and mutualists of a worker and peasant nature (Defourny, 2009). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it received reinforcement from the ideas of freedom of association and other legal figures, such as foundations and social enterprises, within an idea of reformist adaptation to the evolution of capitalist economies.

In addition to the distinctions of legal-institutional forms, the essential thing to capture in this movement is its normative principles and values. The Social Economy adopts as its objectives the production of goods and the provision of services to its members (associates/cooperators) or to the community in general, anchored in management autonomy and democratic control, with decision-making processes and the governance in general, centered on people and work, not capital. However, there is a strong dependence on the State, which often appears almost as a form of extension in the implementation of social policies, very much in line with a welfare and charitable approach.

To differentiate itself from this approach, the concept of a Solidarity Economy emerged and gained distance from “large organizations, almost always old and strongly institutionalized” (Defourny, 2009), with a reformist basis. Also, near this concept, the International Center for Research and Information on Public, Social and Cooperative Economy (CIRIEC) promotes its studies marked by the protagonist of cooperatives, mutual societies, and associations. This field was described as containing two subsectors, one non-market and the other market, referring respectively to the social economy and the solidarity economy, or “the new social economy” (Defourny, 2009).

The “new social economy” is guided by a transformative political project, integrating agroecological production practices, responsible and local consumption, fair trade, social currencies, time banks and exchange clubs, recovery and maintenance workshops, solidarity tourism, and sustainable, microcredit and ethical finance, social canteens, mutual help groups, insertion companies, integral and popular cooperatives (versus large cooperative companies). Its central concern is creating work and income for and by its members from a perspective of independence of individuals who belong to the democratically managed organization or the self-managed collective.

It is a progressive approach that does not fragment life into economic and social relations, aiming to put people back at the center of the economy and the economy at the service of people. Its approach points to a society project inspired by the emancipation of people in local and small-scale action, where Decent Work is central in the transition to societies with conditions of ecosocial justice.

Besides, there is a progressive interest and acceptance in the Social and Solidarity Economy (Moreno & Chaves, 2006). For authors such as Coraggio (2015), the complementarity between mercantile dynamics (sale of goods and services on the market), non-mercantile redistribution (relationships, protocols, contracts with state and para-public institutions), and non-monetary (community, family, of neighborliness, in short, of reciprocity, mutual help and gift), integrates the genesis of productive and reproductive work, as well as non-instrumental logics of rationality, by recognizing all activities necessary for the expanded reproduction of life.

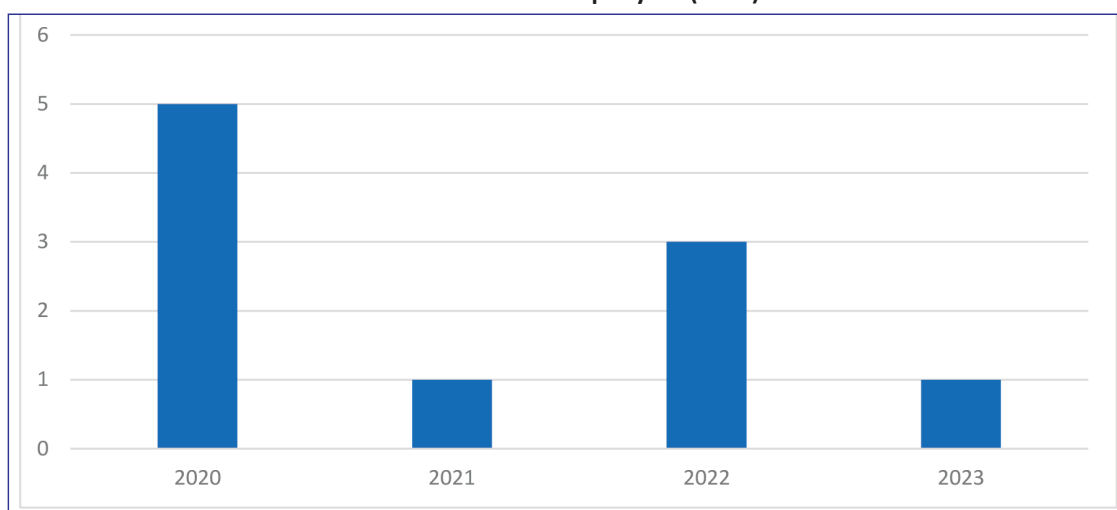
Despite the richness of this field of research, this intersection between the Social and Solidarity Economy in interface with Decent Work began to be investigated in more depth from 2020 onwards, as indicated by the bibliometric survey carried out on Web of Science and SciELO, according to protocol research presented in Box 1.

**Box 1**  
**Procedures for operationalizing the mapping of the decent work category**  
**within the scope of the social and/or solidarity economy**

	Step	Procedure	Description
1	Research' operationalization	1.1	Choise of database: Web of Science and SciELO.
		1.2	Delimitation of terms that represent the field (English and Portuguese): social economy; solidarity economy; decent work.
2	Search procedures (filters)	2.1	In the document titles: solidarity economy and social economy.
		2.2	Filter 1: Delimitation to articles Only – decent work.
		2.3	Filter 2: between the years 2003 to 2023.
3	Selection procedures (database)	3.1	<i>Download</i> of documents in full, when available.
		3.2	Separation of references in their own file.
		3.3	Separation of title, abstract and keywords in a separate document.
4	Adequacy and organization of data	4.1	Analysis of the volume of publications and temporal trends.
		4.2	Organization of analysis matrix in a spreadsheet.
		4.3	Importing data into analysis software.
		4.4	Analysis of title, abstract and keywords and exclusion of unrelated documents.
5	Analysis of the research front (research front)	5.1	Analysis of publication growth.
		5.2	Analysis of citatitons of the most cited articles and authors.
		5.3	Analysis of the journals that published the most.
		5.3	Analysis of authorship and co-autorship.
		5.4	Keyword analysis.
6	Analysis of the intellectual base (intellectual base)	6.1	Analysis of the co-citation network of the most cited authors.
		6.2	Analysis of the co-citation network of the most cited journals.

Source: Adapted by Prado et al. (2016).

**Graph 1**  
Number of articles per year (2023)



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The following magazines published these articles with the respective quantities: Sustainability (3); Revista de Economía Pública Social y Cooperativa – CIRIEC – España (2); APUNTES – Revista de Ciencias Sociales (1); DIXI (1); International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (1); Revista Jurídica Portuguesa (1); Revista Latinoamericana de Derecho Social (1). The most relevant countries in the scientific production of this interface are Spain, France, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico. Box 2 shows the most cited articles.

**Box 2**  
Most cited articles in magazines found in the databases (2023)

Paper	DOI	Total Citations (TC)	TC per year	Normalized TC
Social economy, gender equality at work and the 2030 agenda: theory and evidence from Spain	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/su12125192">https://doi.org/10.3390/su12125192</a>	23	5.75	2.95
Fostering the sustainable development goals from an ecosystem conducive to the Social Economy: the Galician's case	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020500">https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020500</a>	14	3.50	1.79
Indigenous peoples, exclusion and precarious work: design of strategies to address poverty in indigenous and peasant populations in Ecuador through the SWOT-AHP methodology	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020570">https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020570</a>	6	2.00	1.00
Medición del trabajo decente en las cooperativas de autogestión: aplicación en Costa Rica	<a href="https://doi.org/10.21678/apuntes.86.1231">https://doi.org/10.21678/apuntes.86.1231</a>	2	0.50	0.26
Building a better world: the contribution of cooperatives and SSE organizations to decent work and sustainable development	<a href="https://doi.org/10.3390/su15065490">https://doi.org/10.3390/su15065490</a>	1	1.00	1.00
Organizing workers in the informal economy in selected African and Latin American countries: the potential of trade union and social and solidarity economy (SSE) partnerships	<a href="https://doi.org/10.7203/CIRIEC-E.105.24261">https://doi.org/10.7203/CIRIEC-E.105.24261</a>	1	0.50	3.00
Trabajo digno y decente en el modelo de economía solidaria en Medellín, Colombia	<a href="https://doi.org/10.22201/ijj.24487899e.2022.34.16736">https://doi.org/10.22201/ijj.24487899e.2022.34.16736</a>	0	0.00	0.00

Continue

Paper	DOI	Total Citations (TC)	TC per year	Normalized TC
The virtual platforms of the social economy and the collaborative economy: one more possibility of access to housing and development of SDGs 8, 11 and 12 intimes of COVID-19	<a href="https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(ne2v3)2022.ic-08">https://doi.org/10.34625/issn.2183-2705(ne2v3)2022.ic-08</a>	0	0.00	0.00
La organización campesina frente a la violencia y la cosificación capitalista: el caso de Sanzekan Tinemi en Guerrero, México	<a href="https://doi.org/10.16925/2357-5891.2020.01.01">https://doi.org/10.16925/2357-5891.2020.01.01</a>	0	0.00	0.00
Incrementando la eficiencia de las licitaciones públicas con la contabilidad social	<a href="https://doi.org/10.7203/CIRIEC-E.100.18109">https://doi.org/10.7203/CIRIEC-E.100.18109</a>	0	0.00	0.00

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Indeed, the gap in the research field prompted us to ask some questions:

- Is the ESS an alternative model to the capitalist system of work and employment?
- Is the ILO Decent Work Agenda a factor in transforming SSE?
- How does SSE combine social, cultural, economic, and environmental objectives to transform local people-centered realities?
- Is it possible to articulate the ESS with the globalized market economy to increase the good life?
- How are SSE's forms of organization managed to guarantee decent working conditions and effectively achieve the common good?

These questions guided the critical reflections that make up this special thematic edition.

## THEMATIC SPECIAL EDITION

The theme of analysis of this **thematic edition** revolves around the possible sociological interpretations of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in the organization of Decent Work, with the guiding principles of self-management, social management of common goods, cooperatives, and associations as a backdrop.

The proposal's objective was to encourage critical reflections to broaden understanding of the potential and challenges of SSE as an alternative economic model centered on people and capable of combining social, economic, and environmental objectives. Likewise, it is a space for disseminating empirical methodologies for incubating collective enterprises and social management practices. In this sense, the editors selected nine articles with national and international contributions to the topic, organized into three large groups.

The first group contains three macro analysis articles on SSE and Decent Work anchored in the European context. The second group contains three articles that analyze the interface between SSE and public policies in promoting decent work in a dialogue in Latin America. The third group contains three articles with an empirical approach to practical experiences in Brazil.

The article "**The solidarity economy beyond the issue of labor**," by Jean-Loius Laville and Jeová Torres Silva Junior, inaugurates the collection by presenting the theoretical limitations of both the classical sociology of work approach and that consummate by the ILO. According to the authors, "the sociology of work presents the solidarity economy as dependent on neoliberalism, while the ILO places it as resistant to neoliberalism." For the Authors, this interpretative paradox results from the insufficiency of the theoretical frameworks adopted by traditional conceptions based on the restrictive conceptual keys of salaried work and the dominant economic activity in companies. Thus, they propose the expansion of these theoretical references based on Southern epistemologies, the substantive approach to economic action in the sense of a plural economy and plural democracy, including the notion of deliberative democracy.

The second article, "**The dignity of work and the social economy in Portugal**," by Pedro Hespanha, through qualitative research on different forms of organization of the Social Economy, analyzes how it established labor relations within it. Initially, the author emphasizes that the legal restrictions on granting legal personality to enterprises "cover up countless informal,

spontaneous, innovative, and democratic experiences.” In sequence, it analyzes the work relationships within cooperatives, mutual associations, private social solidarity institutions, self-managed organizations, and community-based organizations. In effect, it observes the existence of a high rate of salaried workers to the detriment of other forms of work, an average remuneration of workers lower than that of the national economy, the displacement of workers to the Social Economy without recognition of its values and principles, among other findings. His research, in essence, highlights “a set of difficulties in recognizing equal dignity to associated and contracted work” within the scope of enterprises linked to the Social Economy.

The third article, “**Decent work in Catalan solidarity economy**,” by Jordi Estivill Pascual, historically analyzes the emergence of Decent Work and highlights its ambiguities. The author also presents an overview of decent work in the solidarity economy of Catalonia based on qualitative research in which he verified enterprises’ adherence to the principles<sup>2</sup> and values of the International Cooperative Alliance (ACI). Finally, a quantitative analysis is used based on two questionnaires: one in which a geographic mapping of enterprises is made based on 15 indicators, and another that analyzed 47 economic and social indicators, both applied by the Catalan Solidarity Economy Network respectively. In 2007 and 2015, without discontinuity. Their study points to the growth of Solidarity Economy initiatives and the more excellent proximity of this sector to the ideal of decent work. However, he highlights the challenge of the Solidarity Economy being a minority within the dominant system and its contradictions.

The fourth article, “**Solidarity economy and its institutionalization stage: public policy contributions**,” by Daiane Lima da Silva and Vicente da Rocha Soares Ferreira, presents the research that verifies the degree of institutionalization of Solidarity Economy public policies in four federative entities (Bahia, Pernambuco, Minas Gerais, and Federal District). The investigation focused on the analysis of five factors: (i) instruments to support the commercialization of solidarity economic enterprises; (ii) technical support actions; (iii) encouraging the formalization of solidarity enterprises; (iv) credit access programs; (v) intragovernmental actions with organized civil society and the university. The research results describe a vast list of initiatives that can serve as a reference for other federative entities and indicate the absence of an updated national Solidarity Economy database<sup>3</sup> as one of the significant challenges in expanding the institutionalization of sectoral policies. The article also suggests a broad research agenda for development.

The fifth article, “**A typological study based on the attributes of solidarity economy workers for the improvement of public policies for job and income generation**” by Eliene Gomes dos Anjos and Carlos Eduardo Crispim de Oliveira Ramos, investigates the basis of sample data from SENAES, prioritizing similarities and differences through Multiple Factor Analysis (AFM) on personal attributes and economic activities carried out by individuals in the Solidarity Economy. In effect, the data was grouped into three sets, revealing constitutive features in each, constituting an essential tool for formulators and executors of public policies aimed at the Solidarity Economy.

The sixth article, “**New municipalism and management of the common: the experience of Red de Municipios Cooperativos (Argentine Republic, 2016-2022)**,” by Ariel Oscar García and Aldana García Tarsia, recovers the history of the emergence and challenges of the Argentine initiative of articulation between local bureaucracies and the sector cooperative. Based on the theoretical bases of management of the commons and Social Economy, the authors connect the initiative’s sustainability to the trust relationships between the parties within community management. For them, the expansion of the network can expand the sphere of autonomy of municipalities concerning political decisions at a higher level. On the other hand, they point out that the federalization of the local purchasing tool could constitute “a way of taking advantage of local economies and the comparative advantages of each region of the country.”

The seventh article, “**Rural social innovation in practices of solidarity economy in the Cooptar collective in Southern Brazil**,” by Denise de Oliveira, Adriane Viera Ferrarini, and Denize Grzybovski, analyzes, from the lens of Rural Social Innovation (ISR), the practices of the Cooperative of Cascata Agricultural Production (Cooptar). The authors conducted a case study based on semi-structured interviews to verify this Solidarity Economy enterprise’s learning and transformation processes, which have existed for over 30 years.

<sup>2</sup> Principle of open doors and voluntary participation, democratic control and participation of members, autonomy and independence, economic collaboration between cooperatives, concern for community-oriented results.

<sup>3</sup> The National Register of Solidarity Economy Enterprises: CADSol already exists, established in 2014 (Ordinance 1,780), but without more structured registration and mapping actions and restricted to formalized enterprises.

The eighth article, **“Forecasting of relationship between university extension and social participation in social and solidarity economy: the case of the rural territory collegiate of Ilha Grande Bay (RJ),”** by Patrick Maurice Maury, Lamounier Erthal Villela, Rafaela Chaves Cardoso, and Isabella Dias de Carvalho, investigates the influence of social management in breaking the cycles of insertion and dismantling of public Social and Solidarity Economy policies. Through participatory field research, the authors conduct a retrospective to situate the historical context of rural extension and differentiate it from university extension. They also analyze the relationship between university extension and the organizations in the territory that comprise the Collegiate Boards, characterizing it as a social management process. The research highlights the rural territorial Collegiates as instances of coordination of public policies related to family farming, decentralized in the municipalities, in addition, “points out the emancipatory nature of participation in these spaces, leading individuals to the critical capacity necessary to recognize the interest well understood as a reference of a democratic society.”

The ninth article, **“The organic management of conflicts developed in enterprises formed by women in the solidarity economy: a post-colonialist analysis of a feminist practice of self-management,”** by Maria de Nazaré Moraes Soares, Sílvia Maria Dias Pedro Rebouças, and José Carlos Lázaro, concludes the thematic edition. The article presents the results of field research from 2018 to 2021 with a group of women within the scope of the Feminist Solidarity Economy Network (RFES). The study identifies a specific feminist way of managing conflicts that the authors call organic conflict management, which requires reframing the notions of efficiency, rationality, and conflict, among others. The research also identifies three characteristics specific to feminist conflict self-management practices that differentiate it from other coping methods.

Ultimately, this thematic edition brings a set of theoretical and practical reflections to advance studies of the social and solidarity economy in interface with decent work.

We hope you have a good reading!



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**Stefania Becattini Vaccaro:** Conceptualization (Equal); Data curation (Equal); Formal analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Equal); Supervision (Equal); Writing- original draft (Equal); Writing- review & editing (Equal).

**José Roberto Pereira:** Conceptualization (Equal); Data curation (Equal); Formal analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Equal); Supervision (Equal); Writing- original draft (Equal); Writing- review & editing (Equal).

**Cristina Parente:** Conceptualization (Equal); Data curation (Equal); Formal analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Equal); Supervision (Equal); Writing- original draft (Equal); Writing- review & editing (Equal).

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was published in the article itself.