

PROFILE OF PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATES FROM A UNIVERSITY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE OF THE STATE OF CEARÁ

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the demographic and professional characteristics of Psychology graduates from the Federal University of Ceará's Sobral campus. Conducted via a self-administered questionnaire with 157 respondents, the survey found that a predominant number of participants were female, aged 20 to 30 years. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software (version 22), generating descriptive statistics. Results indicated that most graduates originated from and resided within the Sobral/Ibiapaba macro-region, with a significant number employed as psychologists, particularly in clinical practice. The primary barrier to job market entry identified was limited professional experience. This study suggests that the decentralization of higher education contributes to social inclusion, promoting both access to education and the retention of professionals in less urbanized areas.

Keywords: public university; internalization; psychologist training; job market

Perfil de Egresos de Psicología de una Universidad del Interior Cearense

RESUMEN

El propósito de la presente investigación fue examinar el perfil de los egresados de la carrera de Psicología en la Universidad Federal de Ceará, ubicada en el campus de Sobral. Para ello, se efectuó una recolección de datos mediante un cuestionario autoadministrado, el cual fue completado por un total de 157 participantes. La mayoría de estos eran mujeres, con edades comprendidas entre los 20 y 30 años. El análisis de los datos recabados se llevó a cabo utilizando el software IBM SPSS, versión 22, generando estadísticas descriptivas. Entre los hallazgos, la mayoría de los egresados son originarios y residentes de la macrorregión de Sobral/Ibiapaba. Se observó que un número considerable de los graduados se desempeña profesionalmente como psicólogos, siendo la práctica clínica el ámbito más frecuentemente señalado de actuación. Uno de los principales obstáculos identificados para la inserción en el mercado laboral fue la limitada experiencia profesional de los egresados. A partir de estos resultados, se infiere que la descentralización de las universidades cumple un papel fundamental en la inclusión social, al facilitar el acceso a la educación superior y promover la retención de profesionales en las áreas más alejadas de los centros urbanos.

Palabras clave: universidad pública; interiorización; formación del psicólogo; mercado laboral

Perfil de egressos de Psicologia de uma universidade do interior cearense

RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar o perfil dos egressos do curso de Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Ceará, *campus* Sobral. Realizou-se um levantamento por meio de questionário autoaplicável (n = 157). A maioria dos participantes era do gênero feminino e tinha entre 20 e 30 anos. Os dados foram analisados com o programa IBM SPSS (versão 22). Foram produzidas estatísticas descritivas. Dentre os achados, viu-se que a maioria dos egressos nascera e residia na macrorregião de Sobral/Ibiapaba. Grande parte dos egressos trabalhava como psicólogo e a clínica foi a

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área de atuação mais citada. A principal dificuldade para a inserção no mercado de trabalho foi a reduzida experiência profissional. Depreende-se que a interiorização das universidades está relacionada à inclusão social ao possibilitar o acesso à educação e a fixação de profissionais no interior dos estados.

Palavras-chave: universidade pública; interiorização; formação do psicólogo; mercado de trabalho

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher learning play a strategic role in the educational and economic development of the cities and regions where they are established (Padilha, Rezende, Martins, & Ciquelero, 2018). Furthermore, the formation of qualified professionals is grounded on the triple pillars of education, research, and extension (Pivetta, Backes, Carpes, Battistel, & Marchiori, 2010), as the integration of these domains leads to an education that extends beyond mere technical knowledge, emphasizing ethical values, social commitment, and civic responsibility (Silva, Sousa, Chaves, Sousa, & Rocha Filho, 2019). Therefore, universities must ensure that their educational programs are committed to ethics and competence in the quality of services provided to the community (Amendola, 2014). Accordingly, graduation is expected to meet its context's societal demands effectively.

Since the establishment of the Plano Nacional de Educação (PNE 2001-2010), or National Education Plan, after President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's term, a series of initiatives have been undertaken to facilitate the expansion of higher education throughout various regions of the country. The effort to broaden the reach of federal higher education institutions, initiated in 2003 by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was further extended in 2007 via the Programa de Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais (REUNI), or Program for the Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities. This initiative was instrumental in the decentralization process of Brazilian universities (Bizerril, 2020). In addition to enhancing access to higher education through increased available positions (Carvalho, Lima, Costa, & Júnior, 2018), this decentralization significantly benefited graduating students and had a qualitative impact on the local economy (Bizerril, 2020).

The Federal University of Ceará (UFC) campus in Sobral exemplifies the expansion and decentralization of public universities. Situated in a city with a well-established infrastructure, this development has contributed to the municipality's growth (Lima, 2014). Within this framework, the psychology undergraduate program was initiated in 2005 and commenced in 2006. By the first semester of 2021, students from ten cohorts had graduated.

The university's role is to equip students with the competencies necessary for professional practice in various areas of psychology (Bardagi, Bizarro, Andrade,

Audibert, & Lassance, 2008). Nonetheless, applying these competencies faces challenges, including the obligation to adhere to practices governed by the needs of underprivileged populations. This is due to a disconnect between academic training and individuals' realities in socially vulnerable situations (Martins, Matos, & Maciel, 2009). Therefore, delineating the profile of psychology graduates could provide valuable insights into the adequacy of the education provided.

From this perspective, various universities have explored the impact of their educational offerings by analyzing the profiles of their graduates. In Bolivia, Siles (2015) found that among a group of psychology graduates from the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés, 86% were employed. However, 22% of this group did not work in psychology. Additionally, 19% were unemployed and cited job opportunities as mismatched with their professional qualifications. In terms of practice areas, the study revealed that 37% of these professionals worked in private practices, 19% in teaching, 14% in project involvement, 5% conducted research for public and private entities, and 25% in various other fields (e.g., micro-enterprises, sales, public defense for minors, and legal and health services). Furthermore, most of these graduates (39%) held temporary labor contracts, 18% had permanent contracts, and 46% were consultants.

In Brazil, a study conducted by Bardagi et al. (2008) on psychologists who graduated from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul revealed that 88% were employed in the field of psychology. Regarding their entry into the workforce, the most significant proportion of these graduates (35.8%) found employment through clinics or private practices. Furthermore, 25% pursued postgraduate programs, 10.8% initially worked in organizational settings on their first employment experience, and 13% embarked on careers unrelated to psychology. The challenges faced in securing employment included limited opportunities within their field of expertise (33%), a lack of experience (29%), and low salaries (22%).

In a study of psychology graduates from a university in western Santa Catarina, Barreto, Lazaroto, and Barreto (2013) found that a notable proportion of the graduates worked in the clinical (26%) and organizational (26%) sectors, followed by the social sector (18%). Most of these graduates (88%) pursued further education, with specialization programs being the most popular choice (77%). These findings are supported by the research of

Souza and Mattos (2020), who examined the career paths of 103 psychology graduates from 2010 to 2017, finding that 84.4% continued their education post-graduation.

In Ceará, Martins et al. (2009) analyzed the profiles of graduates from the psychology program at the Universidade de Fortaleza. They discovered that 81.7% of these graduates were employed in psychology-related activities, while 18.3% were unemployed or working in fields unrelated to psychology. The area of organizational and labor psychology emerged as the most common field of employment (35.8%), followed by clinical practice (30.6%), social/health/community psychology (20%), and school psychology (12%). Additionally, the authors noted that many professionals were engaged in two or three different areas at various locations or by fulfilling distinct roles within the same workplace.

The study conducted by Carneiro and Sampaio (2016), focusing on psychology students nearing graduation and those recently graduated, found that all participants were interested in pursuing careers as psychologists. However, some respondents indicated they would consider working in other fields if those positions offered higher pay. Regarding employability, the participants acknowledged the benefits of engaging in postgraduate studies to improve their job prospects. When discussing entry into the job market, the graduates identified referrals and public service exams as the most effective means of securing professional positions, a finding that was corroborated in a follow-up interview after graduation.

In summary, the studies mentioned earlier highlight the dominance of clinical practice as a career path for psychology graduates, with organizational and social psychology also frequently mentioned. Additionally, these studies reveal that many graduates plan to pursue postgraduate education. Challenges in finding employment within psychology are attributed to perceptions of limited professional opportunities, lack of experience, low salaries, and a mismatch between wages and professional qualifications.

Although the studies provide valuable insights into the primary professional fields for psychology graduates, more detailed investigations are needed into the profiles of these professionals, their regional integration, the fields in which they pursue postgraduate studies, and the types of institutions where they find employment. Furthermore, a notable lack of research on campuses emerged following the decentralization of universities. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the profiles of psychology graduates and the campus of the Federal University of Ceará in Sobral.

This research is justified as the abovementioned undergraduate program has been operational for over a decade, yet no other studies have explored its graduates. Beyond this specific scope, the findings of this investigation could contribute to understanding

the impact of the decentralization of psychology undergraduate programs and highlight their significance in regional development. Furthermore, the study may prompt discussions on political and pedagogical strategies for undergraduate psychology programs by shedding light on crucial aspects of psychology training.

METHOD

A survey study was carried out through a self-administered online questionnaire targeting psychology course graduates from the UFC campus in Sobral. The data collection occurred between May and June 2021. Participants were contacted via email, and the study was further promoted through social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram.

The authors designed the questionnaire, which comprised 33 questions segmented into four blocks. The first block focused on the socio-demographic profile, including gender, age, and race. The second block addressed academic formation, for example, asking whether participants had pursued postgraduate studies. The third block pertained to professional practice, asking, for instance, if individuals were employed in their graduation field. The final block explored the relationship between university education and the job market, querying factors that facilitated the transition into professional employment.

As of the survey date, students from 10 cohorts had graduated, totaling 317 psychology graduates. Of these, 157 responded to the questionnaire, representing 49.52% of the graduates.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS software (version 22), which is known for its user-friendly graphical interface and comprehensive suite of statistical analysis modules. Initially designed for use in the human and social sciences, SPSS has broadened its applicability across various fields of study, serving as a robust tool for data preparation, analysis, and report generation.

In this study, researchers used SPSS to calculate descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. In certain instances, the reported results exceeded 100% because participants had the option to select multiple answers.

Among the participants, 75.2% identified as female. Concerning age, 61.8% fell within the 20 to 30-year-old range. Ethnicity-wise, over half of the participants (50.3%) identified as white, 40.1% as mixed race, and 9.6% as black. The majority of participants were single (65%). Regarding income, 49.4% earned between 1 and 3 minimum wages. Additionally, more than half (52.87%) reported being Catholic, while a third (33.12%) stated they had no religion. Although most participants resided in Brazil (97.45%), there were also graduates from foreign countries (2.55%).

Ethical Considerations

The project underwent evaluation by the Research

Ethics Committee of the State University of the Vale do Acaraú and was authorized under number CAAE 44528621.0.0000.5053. It adhered to all guidelines and regulatory norms outlined in Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council. Informed consent was individually obtained from all study participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the graduates were born in the Sobral/Ibiapaba macro-region (58.3%), with 63.7% originating from the municipality of Sobral itself. Regarding residency at the time of the study, 61.1% of participants lived in the region, as mentioned above, with 49.9% residing in Sobral. Table 1 provides additional details concerning birthplaces and residences.

Table 1 - Macro-Regions of Ceará Where the Graduates Were Born and Resided (n = 157).

Macro-regions	Place of birth n (%)	Residence n (%)
Sobral/Ibiapaba	91 (58,3)	96 (61,1)
Fortaleza and metropolitan region	25 (16,0)	24 (15,3)
Central hinterlands	9 (5,8)	10 (6,4)
West Coast	14 (9,0)	7 (4,5)
Inhamuns hinterlands	4 (2,6)	3 (1,9)
Cariri/South-center	2 (1,3)	2 (1,3)
Baturité	1 (0,6)	-
Other Brazilian cities	9 (5,8)	11 (7,0)
Foreign countries	1 (0,6)	4 (2,5)

The predominance of participants born and residing in the Sobral/Ibiapaba macro-region reflects on one hand, the region's capacity to employ recent graduates and, on the other, the impact these graduates have on the local economy through their qualifications (Bizerril, 2020). Consequently, the decentralization of universities is associated with social inclusion, facilitating access to education, and enabling professionals to establish themselves in less urbanized areas (Rieder, 2011). This shift also contributes to the dispersal of knowledge capital, previously confined to major urban centers (Camargo & Araújo, 2018). This interpretation is supported by the fact that 70.3% of respondents indicated that their attendance in the psychology program was made possible by the presence of the Federal University of Ceará campus in Sobral.

Most graduates (77.7%) pursued postgraduate studies, with 61.5% completing their programs in private institutions. Among those who continued their education, 69.7% enrolled in specialization courses, 13.9% participated in specialization programs with a residency component, 27% pursued master's degrees, and 0.8% engaged in doctoral studies.

These findings align with previous research indicating a trend among psychology graduates to continue their

academic education (Bobato, Stock, & Pinotti, 2016; Souza & Mattos, 2020). In this context, postgraduate studies offer a pathway to professional development (Mattos & Souza, 2020). The tendency for participants to attend private institutions raises a critical discussion regarding the availability of specialization courses in public universities. This is because public institutions play a crucial role in addressing the educational needs of broader societal importance and moving away from purely market-driven interests while ensuring quality education (Silva, Simon, & Leal, 2018).

It is essential to highlight that the data on *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs reveal a relatively low engagement of psychology graduates in master's and doctoral programs (Martins et al., 2009). This may be attributed to a lack of public policy investment that expands access to such programs (Mourão, Travassos, Abbad, & Carvalho, 2019). Additionally, it is noteworthy that the master's program in psychology and public policies at the Federal University of Ceará campus in Sobral was only established in 2019. Furthermore, no doctoral programs are available in the city or the surrounding areas.

Health-related fields were the most popular postgraduation option (46.7%), while organizational, labor, and clinical psychology appeared as options for respectively 12.3% and 8.2% of the respondents. These results differ from other findings, in which it is possible to observe a greater prevalence of the last two areas mentioned as choices for formation among psychology graduates (Martins et al., 2009).

The notable preference for health-related postgraduate studies among the participants in this study can be attributed to the absorption of graduates into the local context, potentially tied to the progression of public health policies in the region. Sobral stands out as a benchmark in healthcare, particularly benefitting from advancements in primary education. The area boasts residency programs in mental and family health and various facilities. Moreover, the federal university offers master's programs in family health and health sciences, further supporting this trend.

Table 2 - Fields of Study Pursued by Graduates in Postgraduate Programs (n = 122).

Postgraduation areas	n (%)
Health or mental health	57 (46,7)
Organization and labor	15 (12,3)
Clinical practice	10 (8,2)
Non-specified areas	7 (5,7)
Others	73 (59,8)

Note: the total sum of values surpasses 100% because the respondents could choose more than one option.

Regarding professional practice, most participants (88.5%) were employed in psychology-related fields,

including clinical practice (58.3%), health (31.7%), school/educational psychology (13%), social psychology (8.6%), organizational and labor psychology (7.2%), and teaching (6.5%). These findings concur with prior research indicating clinical psychology as the most common area of practice (Bardagi et al., 2008; Barreto et al., 2013; Siles, 2015). Furthermore, 41% of the respondents reported working in at least two fields. This corroborates earlier findings (Martins et al., 2009), showing that numerous psychology professionals are engaged in multiple sectors across various workplaces or fulfill dual roles within the same organization.

Table 3 - Fields of Psychology Where Graduates Were Employed ($n = 139$).

Psychology areas	n (%)
Clinical practice	81 (58,3)
Health or hospitals	44 (31,7)
School and education	18 (13)
Social	12 (8,6)
Organization and labor	10 (7,2)
Teaching	9 (6,5)
Other areas	23 (14,6)

Note: the total sum of the value surpasses 100% because the respondents could choose more than one option.

Participants not employed in psychology roles reported working as bank employees, municipal guards, and entrepreneurs. They cited low salaries, scarce professional opportunities, and dissatisfaction with the field of psychology as reasons for their career choices. This observation is consistent with findings from an earlier study, which noted that practicing psychologists and students nearing graduation expressed openness to working in other fields for better compensation (Carneiro & Sampaio, 2016).

Most participants (63.1%) reported securing a job as a psychologist within six months post-graduation. Concerning the transition from university to the job market, 42% rated their experience as satisfactory to extremely satisfactory. The primary challenges identified during this transition were the lack of professional experience (61.5%) and the scarcity of job opportunities near their residences (50%). Conversely, the most beneficial factors in finding employment were success in selection processes or public service exams (47.7%) and referrals by friends or relatives (40.6%), echoing findings from Carneiro and Sampaio (2016).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study aimed to examine the profiles of psychology graduates from the Federal University of Ceará, Sobral campus. We conducted a survey to gather sociodemographic data, academic backgrounds, professional practices, and the connection between university education and the job market.

Most graduates hailed from and resided within the Sobral/Ibiapaba macro-region. A significant number of participants pursued specialization courses at private institutions, less than one-third undertook master's programs, and only one pursued doctoral studies. The health sector emerged as the most preferred area for postgraduate studies. Most respondents worked in psychology, with clinical practice being the most reported field. Nearly half of the participants indicated they worked across multiple psychology domains. The findings also highlighted a swift transition into the job market, with limited professional experience and job acquisition through competitive selection or public exams identified as key challenges and opportunities, respectively.

A notable study limitation was the response rate, representing less than half of the targeted population, potentially due to reliance on social media and email for recruitment, which may not have reached all graduates. Future research could explore the integration of psychologists from this university into postgraduate programs and investigate the predominance of clinical practice. Additionally, examining factors facilitating successful job market entry for graduates is recommended.

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