

Health, Work and the Environment on the permanent agenda

The chapter on Social Security of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988, and the Organic Law of Health of 1990, gave the relationship between workers and the workplace pride of place when dealing with the definition of health and the need for action in sectoral and inter-sectoral areas of vigilance, prevention of abuse and promotion of healthy environments.

Aware of the importance of these issues, *Revista Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* has already published several editions on the topic, and this one in particular is made up of texts sent spontaneously by the authors. Given the amount and variety of texts submitted, this edition contains a small sample of some of the research being conducted in the field. This selection of texts, for example, shows that researchers are concentrating more on the situation of workers in the service sector, an issue that in past years was of secondary importance. However, they also continue to tackle old themes such as pesticide contamination, mining-related disease, vigilance, exposure to risk and many others that deal with specific categories or link health and the environment.

In the many articles we detect the impact of current changes in labor relations and in many different sectors, in line with the global movement of productive reorganization. This is associated with archaic forms of production, and similarly emphasizes the globalization of markets, the privatization of public services, the rapid incorporation of technology in the production of goods and services, an increase in informal employment and the social exclusion of undereducated and unskilled people. All these aspects, together with the structural problems of the country, have a profound impact on the life and health of workers, as witnessed by major changes in spatial composition, dynamics of employment, unemployment and the degree of formalization by gender, age and categories.

The issue of workers' health in the workplace, encompassing technical, hierarchical, economic and symbolic relations, boosts the vigor of the environmental issue that increasingly underpins a new ethos in the relationship of humans with nature, with the production of goods and services, with consumption and with other living beings.

It is important to stress that the discussion paper emphasizes the interconnections between health and the environment by dealing dynamically and vividly with the inter-sectoral aspects. This is always problematic and difficult to achieve in practice, though it is a core tenet of Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS). The first text in this edition deals with the various possible interactions between professional knowledge and skills to elicit change that benefits workers, the example in question being the sugarcane and alcohol industry. This line of work and commitment seeking to build up strategic knowledge can be used by law and health enforcement officials and can work towards enhanced quality of life for workers, and indeed it appears to be a new trend in academic output of some researchers in the area.

In this sense, the initial article and the accompanying debate may be considered a challenge for researchers to conduct further in-depth study on the environmental and health problems that afflict workers and the public vis-à-vis large enterprises, at this historic juncture when agribusiness is booming and massive infrastructure works are in full swing in Brazil. It represents an important call to arms to adopt an inclusive, open and complex model in relation to the topics of study in which living conditions, health and the environment interlink with actions to promote life and vigilance against abuse, becoming established as an important ecosystemic approach.

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