

THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF TELEMARKETING: THE IMPACT OF TELEWORKING AND NEW INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF JUAZEIRO DO NORTE, CEARÁ

A Precarização do Teletendimento: O Impacto do Teletrabalho e das Novas Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação no Município de Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará

The Precarization of Telemarketing: The Impact of Telemarketing and New Technologies of Information and Communication in the Municipality of Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará



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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the impacts of precarization in telemarketing in Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará, focusing on the effects of telework and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on local workers. Using an exploratory-descriptive approach of a quantitative nature (operationalized through descriptive statistics with simple random sampling), the research examines the profile of professionals and the structure of this labor model, based on specialized literature. The data indicate that respondents face a systemic degradation of working conditions, with exhausting working hours, low wages, and pressure to meet abusive targets. Health is affected by physical and mental illness due to digital surveillance, lack of breaks, and exposure to aggressive clients. The normalization of precariousness and the lack of institutional support reinforce a cycle of exploitation, requiring specific regulations to ensure labor dignity. The results, therefore, highlight the need for a dialogue on the use of ICT in the digital era, and the study reinforces the urgency of practices that preserve labor dignity in this context.

Keywords: Precarization of Labor; Working Conditions; Digital Work; Communication Technologies; Telemarketer.

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RESUMO

Este estudo analisa os impactos da precarização no teleatendimento em Juazeiro do Norte (CE), focando nos efeitos do teletrabalho e das Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação (TIC) nos trabalhadores locais. Utilizando uma abordagem exploratório-descritiva de caráter quantitativo (operacionalizada por meio de estatística descritiva com amostragem aleatória simples), a pesquisa examina o perfil dos profissionais e a estrutura desse modelo laboral, com base na literatura especializada. Os dados apontam que os pesquisados enfrentam degradação sistêmica das condições de trabalho, com jornadas exaustivas, salários baixos e pressão por metas abusivas. A saúde é afetada por adoecimento físico e mental devido à vigilância digital, falta de pausas e exposição a clientes agressivos. A naturalização da precariedade e a falta de apoio institucional reforçam um ciclo de exploração, exigindo regulações específicas para garantir dignidade laboral. Os resultados, portanto, evidenciam a necessidade de um diálogo sobre o uso das TIC na era digital e o estudo reforça a urgência de práticas que preservem a dignidade laboral nesse contexto.

Palavras-chave: Precarização do Trabalho; Condições laborais; Trabalho Digital; Tecnologias de comunicação; Teleatendente.

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza los impactos de la precarización en el teleatendimento en Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará, centrándose en los efectos del teletrabajo y de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) en los trabajadores locales. Utilizando un enfoque exploratorio-descriptivo de carácter cuantitativo (operacionalizado por medio de estadística descriptiva con muestreo aleatorio simple), la investigación examina el perfil de los profesionales y la estructura de este modelo laboral, con base en la literatura especializada. Los datos señalan que los encuestados enfrentan una degradación sistémica de las condiciones de trabajo, con jornadas extenuantes, bajos salarios y presión por metas abusivas. La salud se ve afectada por enfermedades físicas y mentales (dolores, ansiedad) debido a la vigilancia digital, la falta de pausas y la exposición a clientes agresivos. La naturalización de la precariedad y la falta de apoyo institucional refuerzan un ciclo de explotación, lo que exige regulaciones específicas para garantizar la dignidad laboral. Los resultados, por lo tanto, evidencian la necesidad de un diálogo sobre el uso de las TIC en la era digital, y el estudio refuerza la urgencia de prácticas que preserven la dignidad laboral en este contexto.

Palabras clave: Precarización del Trabajo; Condiciones Laborales; Trabajo Digital; Tecnologías de la Comunicación; Teleoperador/a.

1 INTRODUCTION

The context of the restructuring of the Brazilian economy in the 1990s has as its backdrop the adoption of neoliberal reforms, involving trade and financial liberalization, privatizations, and economic and labor deregulation. Its effects are felt in a non-negligible way in the labor market, through a defensive adjustment in different productive sectors, evidenced by: a structural component of unemployment associated with modernization and technological incorporation in Industry, Services, and Agriculture; expansion of outsourcing;

increase in open unemployment, informalization, and the number of employees without formal contracts or self-employed (Coutinho; Baltar; Camargo, 1999; Neri; Camargo; Reis, 2000).

The proliferation of precarious jobs in the 1990s accompanied these structural adjustments, the cycle of restrictions on economic activity with strong fiscal adjustment, and the shift in the orientation of state intervention, marked by the deregulation of economic and labor relations.

In this context of productive restructuring, the incorporation of flexible accumulation and the scientific-technological revolution highlights the centrality of transactions based on information and knowledge. The consolidation of the Services sector as dominant in the national accumulation pattern is strongly influenced by innovation and technology, which condition the functioning, operations, and competitiveness of its segments.

Among the reflections of this scenario, new forms of employment stand out, such as telemarketing, enabled by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), which have altered certain working conditions. According to Oliveira, Rezende and Brito (2006, p. 126), telemarketing constitutes a channel for offering “information and services and receiving criticisms and suggestions from customers, also serving as a vehicle for advertising, disseminating products and services quickly through the telephone device”. According to the Brazilian Association of Teleservices (ABT, 2024), it is an activity developed by telematics and multimedia systems, with standardized and continuous marketing actions, conducted by call centers in an active or receptive manner with consumers or prospects¹.

This modality is linked to the “commodification of telecommunications services,” associated with the privatization of the sector in the 1990s. For Antunes and Braga (2009), the commodification of services under the aegis of financial globalization emerges from the confluence of outsourcing and the precarization of work, associated with information technologies. According to Rosenfield and Almeida (2021, p. 9), telework integrates a structural form in which “[...] platformization makes it possible to transform the worker into a just-in-time worker”, always available to the demands of capital.

According to Cavaignac (2011, p. 47), telemarketing operators maintain unstable relationships of work, marked by subcontracting, high turnover, low wages, and disregard for health issues. Their work combines modern productivity control technologies with traditional forms of surveillance, based on targets, psychological pressure, and the threat of

¹A potential customer who has shown initial interest in a product or service but has not yet completed the purchase.



dismissal. For Macêdo Filho and Sousa (2019), competition among call center workers intensifies the pace of work, with rigorous targets and high levels of stress and exhaustion.

As stated by the General Registry of Employed and Unemployed Workers (CAGED) of the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE)², the sector has been losing formal jobs since 2015, due to the adverse macroeconomic situation, the expansion of service by robots and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and new regulations that limit phone calls. The exception occurred in 2020 and 2021, during the pandemic, when social isolation increased the demand for telephone and digital contact, boosting teleworking as an alternative to maintain activities. In 2022, 35,583 jobs were lost in Brazil (Brazil, 2025).

Despite this, telemarketing remains relevant as a job creator, especially for young people seeking their first job. In 2024, Brazil registered 490,023 formal jobs in the sector. In Ceará and Juazeiro do Norte, there were 24,884 and 5,628 jobs, respectively, according to the Annual Social Information Report (RAIS) (Brazil, 2025).

Although telemarketing is important to the economy of the Metropolitan Region of Cariri (RM Cariri)³, studies on the concrete working conditions in Juazeiro do Norte are still scarce. Considering that the activity reflects transformations in work in the digital age, mediated by ICT, flexibility, and intensified control, investigating the local reality is fundamental to understanding contemporary social processes and supporting public policies and business practices aimed at protecting rights and improving working conditions. Thus, this research aims to analyze the working conditions of operators, their sociodemographic profile, and the impacts of the management model on their physical and mental health, contributing to the debate on the precariousness of digital work.

Although national and international literature recognizes the structural precarization of telemarketing as a phenomenon associated with productive restructuring and the digitalization of work, studies on its specificities in medium-sized cities and peripheral regions of the Brazilian economy are still scarce. This article contributes by providing empirical evidence for the municipality of Juazeiro do Norte (CE), one of the main centers of the Northeastern Semi-Arid region, where the sector accounts for approximately 9.6% of formal employment. By articulating sociodemographic data, working conditions, and impacts on workers' health, the research fills a relevant geographical and socioeconomic gap,

²Among the tele-service activities considered by CAGED are customer service by telephone, SAC (Customer Service Center), call center, contact center, and telemarketing.

³This refers to the metropolitan region located in the southern part of Ceará state, formed by nine municipalities: Barbalha, Crato, Juazeiro do Norte, Farias Brito, Missão Velha, Santana do Cariri, Jardim, Nova Olinda, and Caririáçu.

demonstrating how precarization is territorialized in a particular way in different contexts marked by low wages, high turnover, and weak institutional protection. Thus, the paper not only confirms hypotheses already consolidated in the literature but also offers localized support for the formulation of public policies and for union action in the Metropolitan Region of Cariri.

Geographically, the precariousness of telemarketing in Juazeiro do Norte is not merely a local phenomenon, but an expression of broader territorial inequalities that guide the location of call centers, as in the Brazilian Northeast, in search of lower labor costs and greater flexibility of rights. This dynamic, analyzable through the concept of territorial division of labor (Santos, 2002), reveals how the production of capitalist space subjects entire territories to systematically precarious working conditions, converting geography into a central variable of contemporary exploitation.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research is characterized as exploratory-descriptive with a quantitative approach. According to Gil (2019), exploratory research is indicated for topics that are still little studied or specific phenomena, allowing for the formulation of more precise problems for subsequent studies. The descriptive character, in turn, aims at the systematic measurement of population characteristics and working conditions in the telemarketing sector in Juazeiro do Norte.

The quantitative approach was implemented using descriptive statistics (absolute and relative frequencies), based on primary data collected via a semi-structured questionnaire. Although the instrument contains open-ended questions (10 questions), these were primarily used to illustrate and qualify quantitative findings, without conducting systematic content analysis or seeking theoretical saturation.

Therefore, the research adopts probabilistic sampling procedures (simple random sampling) and primarily quantitative data treatment, based on descriptive statistics (absolute and relative frequencies). This methodological option is compatible with the objective of producing statistically controlled inferences about the population of 4,089 formal workers in the telemarketing sector in the municipality, respecting the previously established confidence interval (90%) and margin of error (10%), as explained below.

The research area is the municipality of Juazeiro do Norte, located in the Metropolitan Region of Cariri (RM of Cariri) in the state of Ceará, conurbated with the

municipalities of Crato and Barbalha, the CRAJUBAR triangle, as illustrated in Figure 1.

According to the 2022 Demographic Census, it is the third most populous municipality in the state, behind only Fortaleza and Maracanaú, registering 286,120 inhabitants, in addition to having one of the smallest territorial extensions (147th in the state with 258.8 km²), culminating in one of the highest population densities in Ceará (3rd), with 1,105.6 inhabitants/km² (IBGE, 2022, 2024). Its geographical position and urban and population dynamics configure an important urban-regional and economic center of the state and the Northeast macro-region, especially when considering non-metropolitan areas.

Figure 1 – Location of the municipality of Juazeiro do Norte-CE



Source: Elaborated by the authors using QGIS software.

The economic relevance of Juazeiro do Norte is evident through robust indicators: its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021 was BRL 5.11 billion, corresponding to 2.6% of the Ceará state economy, making it the 6th largest GDP in the state (IBGE, 2021). The formal labor market, according to RAIS data (Brazil, 2025), registered 58,722 jobs in 2024, with emphasis on the sectors of Civil Construction, Pharmaceutical Industry, Mineral Transformation, Food, Beverages, and Leather Goods.

The telemarketing segment, the subject of this study, accounts for 5,628 formal jobs, corresponding to 9.6% of the formal municipal workforce in 2024, thus characterizing itself as a relevant vector for job creation in the municipality and in the Metropolitan Region of



Cariri (Brazil, 2025).

Therefore, the population of this study refers to the set of formal jobs in the telemarketing sector in Juazeiro do Norte (CE). To determine the sample, the simple random sampling technique for a finite population was applied, using the formula described in Equation 1, adopting a confidence level of 90% ($Z = 1,64$) and a margin of error of 10% on the total population (Vital; Bertolino; Fonseca, 2009).

The calculation indicated a minimum sample size of 66 participants was required, and the survey was conducted by administering a questionnaire to 69 workers, a number that meets and exceeds the established sample requirement, between February and April of 2025. Forty-seven semi-structured questions were developed, divided into two blocks, relating to the socioeconomic characteristics and working conditions of the activity performed, with 30 closed-ended questions, 10 open-ended questions, and 7 multiple-choice questions.

Regarding the choice of a 10% sampling error⁴, difficulties in accessing the target population were taken into account, considering the limitations encountered in the operational context and the exploratory nature of the research.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q \cdot N}{\varepsilon^2 \cdot (N - 1) + Z^2 \cdot p \cdot q} \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

Where: n = Sample size; Z = Chosen confidence level (90%), expressed as $Z = 1.64$; p = Population proportion of individuals belonging to the category of interest = 0.5; q = Population proportion of individuals not belonging to the category of interest ($q = 1 - p$) = 0.5; N = Population size = 4,089⁵; and ε = Maximum permissible error = 10%.

Regarding data collection procedures, the semi-structured questionnaire was applied between February and April of 2025 through two complementary strategies: (i) direct

⁴Regarding the choice of a 10% sampling error, it is justified by two main reasons. First, the operational difficulties in accessing the target population of the telemarketing study in Juazeiro do Norte, characterized by high turnover, fragmented work schedules, and institutional resistance from companies to allowing the approach of their employees. Second, the exploratory nature of the study, which does not intend to establish causal relationships or test hypotheses with high inferential rigor, but rather to produce an initial and localized diagnosis of a phenomenon that is still little investigated in the region. Thus, the 10% error, combined with a 90% confidence level, was considered sufficient to identify general trends and patterns of precarious employment, without sacrificing the operational feasibility of the research. This level of sampling error is widely recognized and adopted in the specialized literature as adequate for exploratory research in Applied Social Sciences, particularly when investigating populations that are difficult to access or subject to institutional restrictions. By opting for this level of error, the study aligns itself with a significant body of research that prioritizes empirical feasibility and contextual relevance over claims of statistical precision that are incompatible with the real conditions of research in peripheral territories and precarious labor sectors.

⁵Formal employment in the sector was available at the time the field research was conducted, referring to RAIS of 2023 (MTE, 2025).

approach to workers; (ii) distribution of an electronic form (Google Forms) to groups of workers in the category, with prior verification of active employment in the sector.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics were adopted, with calculation of absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies, organized in a spreadsheet and subsequently grouped by thematic categories (sociodemographic profile, working conditions, occupational risks, health impacts). The open-ended questions were transcribed and used as illustrative material for the quantitative findings, without systematic content analysis, consistent with the quantitative approach of the research.

3. Job insecurity and its expressions in telemarketing

3.1 Brief overview of the precariousness of work

The precariousness of work expresses the structural deterioration of working conditions in the contemporary context, translated into legal vulnerability, flexibilization or suppression of rights, unhealthy environments, grueling workdays, wages disproportionate to productivity, and financial insecurity resulting from the fragility of social protection.

In this sense, it is not limited to the increase in unemployment and the expansion of the reserve army of labor, but also manifests itself in existing jobs, marked by instability, contractual ephemerality and the absence of minimum guarantees of social reproduction (Araújo; Morais, 2017).

In the context of productive restructuring and the flexibilization of labor relations, employers impose more precarious conditions in vulnerable environments. Workers begin to accept arbitrary demands and invest in qualifications without a guarantee of stability. This logic, according to Araújo and Morais (2017), transforms the worker into a replaceable resource, subject to summary dismissals, accentuating the power asymmetry and consolidating precarization as a mechanism for controlling the workforce.

The relationship between unemployment and precarious work takes on a new dimension with technological advancement. In peripheral contexts, these transformations combine with historical fragilities in the labor market, intensifying hybrid forms of labor insertion. Empirical evidence (Alves; Nascimento, 2024) demonstrates that, in informal activities such as motorcycle taxiing, precarious work involves income insecurity, lack of social protection, and increased exposure to occupational risks, exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

While technology represents a productive solution for business owners, for many workers it constitutes a source of insecurity and digital exploitation (Araújo, 2021), as in telemarketing, a sector with specific characteristics of precariousness.

In Brazil, the 1990s marked the advancement of neoliberalism and the outsourcing of public and productive services. Since then, structural unemployment has taken on new configurations with digital technologies, platforms, and automation, as discussed by Antunes and Braga (2009) and Antunes (2019).

Currently, AI and automation are replacing jobs through bots and scripts. Even so, instability, turnover, and overload persist. Technological introduction demands constant adaptation and versatility, while the worker remains under constant surveillance and performance metrics defined by the technologies themselves.

3.2 Telemarketing: characteristics and new conditions of precariousness

Telemarketing, also known as call center or customer service center, has become established as an expression of productive reorganization supported by ICT. It consists of interaction mediated by telephone or digital channels between companies and customers. With technological advancement, it has incorporated platforms, management software and AI, redefined processes and working conditions (Mello, 2011; Oliveira; Rezende; Brito, 2006).

Teleworking, which includes tele-service, dates back to the 1970s, when the oil crisis and capitalist restructuring stimulated flexible forms of productive organization. The Third Industrial Revolution, with innovations in computing and telecommunications, boosted the Toyota model, marked by flexibility, automation, and intensification of electronic control. The worker came to be conceived as an adjustable part of a flexible and unstable system, subjected to precarious employment and greater surveillance (Lopes, 2022; Pinheiro, 2021; Silva, 2020).

These transformations underpin Industry 4.0, which intensifies digitization, algorithmization, and intelligent automation, expanding the extraction of surplus value through the intensification of working hours and precarious employment (Lopes, 2022). Algorithmic management and the platformization of work (Rosenfield; Almeida, 2021) reinforce continuous availability, converting the worker into a just-in-time resource.

Despite its modern appearance, telemarketing retains Taylorist and Fordist legacies, with repetitive tasks, rigid goals, and constant adaptation to demand (Carneiro, 2021;

Rocha, 2019). According to Macêdo Filho and Sousa (2019), it is a segment with strong automation, managerial control, and internal competition, increasing turnover and hindering union organization.

In Brazil, its expansion was linked to the productive restructuring of the 1990s, amidst neoliberal reforms, privatizations, and outsourcing (Antunes; Braga, 2009). It consolidated itself as a vector of employment for young people and students. The flexibility of schedules appears as an attraction but operates as a mechanism for the exploitation of cheap and replaceable labor (Mello, 2011; Santos, 2017).

The Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021) accelerated teleworking in the sector, with the adoption of home office in the face of social isolation (Rodarte, 2022). Supported by ICT, the process consolidated global hyperconnectivity (Minardi; Teixeira, 2022) but intensified digital overload and monitoring. Real-time supervision software established permanent surveillance, in which every action, from call time to physiological breaks, is recorded and evaluated (Coêlho, 2017; Lopes; Lopes, 2022).

Studies indicate direct impacts on physical and mental health, such as muscle pain, fatigue, hearing and vocal problems, as well as anxiety, depression, and stress (Ricci; Rachid, 2013; Santos, 2017). Pressure from abusive targets, contact with aggressive clients, and the absence of institutional support exacerbate the situation (Rodarte, 2022). Added to this is the predominance of women, young, and black people, configuring a profile marked by social vulnerabilities (Silva, 2023).

Another characteristic is the geographical migration of operations to the North and Northeast macro-regions, in search of lower costs and tax incentives, as well as the flexibilization of rights, reinforcing the exploitation of historically marginalized territories. Juazeiro do Norte, in Ceará, exemplifies this process, consolidating itself as a hub anchored in low wages and high turnover (Silva, 2023). The municipality and its insertion in the Metropolitan Region of Cariri, therefore, configure the notion of space that is continuously shaped by economic flows, tax incentive policies, and business location strategies (Santos, 2002), which, in the case of telemarketing, direct operations to peripheral regions.

Thus, the concentration of 5,628 formal jobs in the sector in Juazeiro do Norte must be interpreted in light of the territorial inequalities that structure the spatial division of labor in Brazil, where precariousness is not an exclusive attribute of the activity itself, but also results from the subordinate position occupied by certain regions in the hierarchy of investments and in the regulation of labor (Santos, 2002). Incorporating this geographical perspective allows us to understand that the labor dynamics of call center workers from

Juazeiro do Norte are simultaneously a local phenomenon and an expression of structural processes of unequal spatial production.

Thus, telemarketing synthesizes contradictions of contemporary work: it combines technological modernization with traditional exploitative practices, naturalizes precariousness, and reinforces inequalities of gender, race, and class. If, on the one hand, it offers an entry point to the formal market, on the other hand, it maintains a management model that transforms workers into "commodities" subjected to intensification, surveillance, and instability (Antunes, 2018; Oliveira; Jacques, 2006).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and analyzes the data collected in the research, focusing on working conditions, including working hours, type of contract, goals, breaks, structure of the work routine, and impacts on the physical and emotional well-being of the participants, among other questions.

4.1 Profile of respondents

The sociodemographic characteristics of telemarketing workers in Juazeiro do Norte (CE) were analyzed, highlighting how gender, age, race, and education level are articulated in the production of specific forms of precarious work.

The sample is female (66.7%), confirming the feminization of the sector under logics of outsourcing and flexibilization. The naturalization of feminine skills, such as "patience" and "delicacy", operates as an ideological justification for wage devaluation and precarious work, converting gender differences into material inequalities (Rocha, 2019).

There is a strong concentration of young people between 21 and 27 years old (70%), with an average age of 25. This data, in line with other research (Coêlho, 2017; Santos, 2011), corroborates the hypothesis that telemarketing functions as a niche for absorbing young labor in situations of social vulnerability, reflecting temporary opportunities for professional entry or "side jobs" during or after studies.

According to Santos (2017) and Pinheiro (2021), early entry into the labor market, characteristic of this segment, occurs in occupations marked by high turnover, temporary contracts, and a lack of job security. This structural precariousness, paradoxically, makes it possible to reconcile work and studies, functioning as an entry point, albeit an unstable one,

for young people in the professional training phase.

The greater presence of young people in the segment is reflected in the predominance of single individuals (87%) (11.6% are married and 1.4% are divorced), a condition that may indicate greater availability for the activity.

Racial analysis reveals that 71% of respondents self-identified as black (26.1%) or mixed-race (44.9%), with black women representing 58% of the total. Analysis at the intersection of gender and race, according to Rodrigues (2018), reinforces the established inequality in labor relations.

The educational profile presents a paradox regarding income and qualifications. Among those surveyed, 34.8% completed high school; 44.9% have incomplete higher education, and 20.3% are graduates. In this sense, the sector operates a true "qualified waste," where university degrees do not translate into upward mobility, but rather into chronic underemployment, indicating signs of structural precarization of work. This phenomenon aligns with what Pochmann (2012) conceptualized as "forced insertion" into precarious occupations, in which formal qualification loses its protective function and begins to operate as a mechanism for internal hierarchization of the working class.

As revealed by the DIEESE Bulletin (DIEESE, 2023), between 2019 and 2022, there was an increase in the participation of workers with higher education; however, this workforce suffered an 8.7% reduction in real income, demonstrating how precarious employment is not residual but constitutive of the business model.

The justification of Interviewee n.o 41 for her placement in the sector – "Only because it gives me the opportunity to study and work at the same time" – far from being an isolated voice, synthesizes a central contradiction. The flexibility promised by telemarketing is not a bonus for the worker. In practice, high education loses its protective character and emerges as a new criterion for distinction and hierarchization within the working class itself.

4.2 General conditions of the activity

Working conditions in the telemarketing sector in Juazeiro do Norte (CE) reveal intense workdays, low pay, and strong pressure to meet targets. The majority (81.2%) work a 6x1 schedule, with 66.6% working between 6 and 8 hours a day – including breaks – and 27.5% working up to 4 hours. Four respondents reported working more than 8 hours a day. Although the workdays are long, 52.2% rate their workload as "neutral", indicating a normalization of precariousness (Barbosa, 2020). This configuration, as Antunes (2019)

points out, reflects the pattern of precariousness typical of the digitalization and "uberization" of work, where the worker's dependence on companies increases and the boundaries between work time and rest become increasingly blurred.

The perception of workers about their working hours presents significant paradoxes: although 66.62% work long hours, 52.2% rate their working hours as "neutral" (26.1% consider their daily working time inadequate and 21.7% rate it as adequate). This apparent contradiction can be interpreted, once again, in light of Barbosa (2020), as a process of naturalizing precariousness, where adverse working conditions are perceived as normal by the worker. This phenomenon is aggravated by the system of intensive targets which, according to Antunes (2018), constitutes a central mechanism for intensifying work in the contemporary service sector, often masked by the introduction and use of innovations in customer service to stimulate productivity.

The right to adequate breaks, fundamental for the physical and mental health and well-being of workers, is also evaluated in the research: 85.5% of those interviewed consider the breaks granted insufficient. This corroborates Dejours' (2011) analysis of the psychological pathologies generated by modern forms of work organization, particularly in high-pressure environments such as call centers, which are intensified by the lack of adequate breaks and extensive working hours.

Compensation is clearly insufficient, with 79.7% of respondents receiving up to one minimum wage and only 20.3% earning between one and two minimum wages, despite the fact that most of these workers have, as observed, completed or unfinished higher education. This reality, combined with the absence of adequate benefits (69.6% consider them insufficient), forces 5.8% of workers to seek supplementary income as self-employed individuals and 4.3% to maintain parallel jobs. These additional occupations are informal and precarious, paying, in 92.3% of cases, up to one minimum wage. Three respondents revealed receiving income from social benefits. As Braga (2012) observes, this constitutes a "precariousness disguised as formality", where apparent contractual stability hides vulnerable working conditions. Inadequate wages in relation to the effort and time invested may contribute to the high turnover in the sector.

The stated reasons for entering the sector reveal the structural dimension of precariousness: 69.6% say the need for employment and income, 43.5% point to the lack of alternatives in the region, and 39.1% mention the flexibility of schedules. Once again, the idea of "forced insertion" into precarious occupations with high turnover, in contexts of scarce opportunities, is present, which can limit opportunities for professional growth and

development and leave people vulnerable (Pochmann, 2012).

Regarding the types of service provided, 82.6% of operators work with phone calls, while 31.9% also work via chat. Service via WhatsApp or other messaging applications (7.2%), email (8.7%), and social media (1.4%) are also reported. This diversification of channels, far from representing qualification, often means a multiplication of simultaneous demands, increasing the psychological pressure on these workers.

These tensions are exacerbated by various factors, which call center workers highlight as challenges faced by the profession. The most cited by respondents are pressure regarding call handling time and constant exposure to aggressive customers (75.4%); excessive call volume (71%); lack of adequate breaks (66.7%); and excessive pressure to meet targets (58%). Technical problems and system instability (49.3%); constant supervision and monitoring (43.5%); and a noisy and stressful work environment (26.1%) were also mentioned.

The telemarketing sector in Juazeiro do Norte presents occupational characteristics typical of what the literature refers to as... Chronic labor vulnerability: formalization that does not guarantee rights, intensification of the pace of work, insufficient remuneration, and normalization of adverse conditions. In other words, this empirical reality confirms once again Braga's (2012) thesis of a "precariousness disguised as formality", in which the formal employment contract does not prevent the existence of working conditions analogous to structural informality.

4.3 Working conditions and risks in carrying out the activity

Although 94.2% do not report typical accidents – compared to 5.8% – the risks manifest themselves in technological, organizational, and psychosocial ways. Sedentary and repetitive work promotes pain, fatigue, and mental illness.

Technological risks are directly associated with the implementation of digital surveillance systems and artificial intelligence in the workplace. The use of voice recognition software, chatbots, and real-time monitoring tools creates a feeling of constant control, limiting the autonomy of operators and increasing the pressure for productivity. As highlighted by Pinheiro (2021), this "algorithmic management"⁶ transforms the nature of

⁶Algorithmic management is the process of managing and controlling work through algorithms and artificial intelligence, where traditional managerial functions are automated to optimize tasks and decisions within organizations.

work, eliminating predictability and intensifying the isolation of workers.

The most prevalent technologies in the researched segment are precisely productivity monitoring tools, cited in 65.2% of the reports, AI for customer service (46.4%), voice recognition software (23.2%), sentiment/emotion analysis and chatbots (29%).

Although some respondents acknowledge that technology has improved their working conditions (31.9%) and reduced repetitive tasks (15.9%), a significant portion reports increased pressure on efficiency (49.4%) and greater complexity in tasks (26.1%), as well as the perception that it makes the work more demanding (39.1%), highlighting the ambiguous effects of these tools. Only seven workers are unable to describe changes resulting from increased automation in their work.

Specifically, the use of AI in telemarketing progressively restricts workers' autonomy, limiting their decision-making capacity and reducing opportunities for creativity and innovation in their work. This dynamic operates under a paradoxical logic: while technology allows for a greater volume of tasks to be performed in shorter time intervals, it demands increasing levels of efficiency, flexibility, and adaptability from operators - skills developed under constant pressure and psychophysical strain.

As a result, workers are subjected to a double burden: the demand for accelerated productivity and the need to manage the cognitive and emotional impacts arising from this interaction with automated systems. Those surveyed describe "being watched and under constant supervision," with constant monitoring and control of the technologies, through the detailed scrutiny of their activities and precise inspection.

As demonstrated by Campos (2024), algorithmic control transforms the very content of work, eliminating predictability and increasing worker isolation through their own subjectivity. This logic, although more evident on digital platforms, is also reproduced in the context of call centers, where operators report feeling permanently evaluated by software that dictates what constitutes performance, with automatic targets and internal scoring systems.

These dynamic updates, in the context of the tele-service of Juazeiro, what Rosenfield and Almeida (2021) called "platformization of work", in which the worker is converted into a just-in-time resource, permanently available and evaluated by algorithms.

Within the organizational context, the pressure to set excessive targets and the inadequacy of breaks during the workday stand out. According to the data, 50.7% of operators consider that targets have a high impact on their mental health, while 42% rate this impact as moderate.

This reality, analyzed by Antunes (2018), reflects the logic of work intensification that converts lifetime into productive time, with the worker being led to take responsibility for not achieving goals, unattainable, creating a harmful environment, generating physical and mental exhaustion. Accounts such as "The supervisor asked what I was doing every time I got up", illustrate the excessive monitoring and lack of flexibility for basic needs, such as going to the bathroom.

Regarding short breaks, the patrolling setup through supervision is reported by another operator as follows: "We have a private break that we are entitled to use for biological needs, but even that our supervisor wants to prevent because he says we can't have more than 40 minutes of private break per day." And he adds: "I believe he doesn't think about it because we work in an extremely cold place, so we need to go to the bathroom frequently, not to mention that we need to drink water frequently because we need to take care of our vocal cords."

The psychosocial dimension proves to be especially critical, with frequent reports of moral harassment, verbal abuse from clients, and a lack of institutional support. Female workers are particularly affected, suffering symbolic violence and subtle practices of domination, which are normalized in the workplace, as Hirata (2007; 2016) points out.

Although 36.2% of respondents reported experiencing violence or harassment, underreporting is a concern, associated with a culture of silence and fear of reprisals. Operators report a lack of confidence in reporting problems and in the company's support mechanisms, as they are ineffective or not functioning as they should, which is evidenced in the following account: "They coerced me into quitting or suing me for something they themselves asked us to do."

Lack of safety in the workplace is another aggravating factor, with only 29% of operators feeling fully protected against threats (44.9% feel partially safe and 26.1% feel not safe at all).

The data, therefore, paints a worrying picture of multidimensional violence in the telemarketing environment, manifesting itself both in customer relations and in the institutional sphere. In the context of interactions with users, operators face everything from recurring verbal abuse, including insults and name-calling, to serious cases of sexual harassment and death threats, the latter reported by more than one worker. In these cases, women are especially vulnerable to situations of attack and belittling, as recorded by one of the operators: "I'm called stupid, told I don't have a higher education, and that I don't earn the same as them." Coelho (2017) describes processes of organizational moral harassment

involving situations similar to the one presented (embarrassment, excessive pressure, name-calling) subjecting the worker to inadequate conditions and a hostile environment for maximum exploitation of productivity and profit growth.

In parallel, institutional violence manifests itself through various organizational practices, including: the coercive imposition of abusive targets that exceed the operational capacity of workers; disproportionate restrictions on break periods, compromising basic physiological needs; the practice of workplace harassment by supervisors and managers; and the recurrent use of threats of dismissal as an instrument of control and subjugation of the workforce. These combined elements create a toxic organizational environment that exacerbates psychological suffering and the degradation of labor relations.

Regarding institutional support, the data is worrying: 49.3% of workers say they do not feel supported by the company in situations of conflict, emergency or unforeseen events; 37.7% of those surveyed feel partially supported, and only 13% feel supported by the institution.

This “institutional indifference,” as discussed by Seligmann-Silva (2005), contributes to the invisibility of suffering and social tolerance towards work-related illness. Reports such as “There is no medical assistance if an operator becomes ill, “There is no security of any kind in case of any type of aggression”, or “The worker suffers, but does not feel supported because the company does not see, does not hear, does not respond”, demonstrate the negligence of companies in providing basic conditions of safety and well-being.

Inadequate infrastructure (lighting, furniture, acoustics, and equipment) also emerges as a significant problem, with workers reporting broken chairs and a lack of ergonomic equipment, factors that can lead to health problems. Only 37.7% of teleoperators consider the infrastructure adequate, while the majority express significant reservations: 47.8% rate it as partially adequate and 14.5% as clearly inadequate. One teleoperator reports: “I acquired pain or a spinal deviation because some of the chairs were broken and not suitable for posture.”

The data suggests that formalization through the CLT (Brazilian labor law) does not prevent precarious working conditions in telemarketing, where constant surveillance and intensified work lead to mental illness; in this context, workers face a triple deprivation: the right to make mistakes, to adequate rest, and to critically reflect on their own work. This dynamic, sustained by exploitation, accelerated production, and institutional negligence, demands specific regulations that effectively protect workers.

4.4 Aspects of workers' health

Data on the health of workers in the telemarketing sector reveal a significant picture of physical and mental illness. The majority report constant tiredness (56.5%) or occasional fatigue (40.6%). Sitting for long periods is cited by 62.2% as a negative factor. Other common problems affecting fatigue, as already discussed, involve repetitive work; prolonged use of computers and screens; lack of adequate breaks; absence of emotional support and training. As Ricci and Rachid (2013) observe, this situation often generates invisible symptoms that affect both body and mind, including anxiety and chronic burnout.

The characteristics of the activity, therefore, expose workers to physical and mental problems, which are reported by the group surveyed. The vast majority experience headaches or migraines (79.7%) and joint pain (71%), as well as muscle pain (66.7%). Hearing and vocal problems are reported by 58% and 34.8% of those surveyed, respectively, and circulation problems are mentioned by 29%. Psychological issues are reported by 66.7% of the operators.

Exposure to aggressive clients was reported by 68.1% of workers as a factor with a high impact on mental health (24.6% consider it to have a moderate impact and 7% rate it as having a low impact). Meanwhile, 60.9% highlighted the high stress resulting from excessive demands.

As Oliveira and Jacques (2006) demonstrate, high customer demand and long waiting lines intensify psychological distress in call centers. The lack of adequate training, as exemplified below, coupled with an environment of constant surveillance, reveals that while the company rigidly monitors productivity, it remains silent in the face of the mental health problems of its workers.

These findings corroborate the analyses of Macêdo Filho and Sousa (2019) on the direct relationship between precarious working conditions and illness processes, showing that such phenomena are not mere side effects, but structural elements of the predominant management model in the sector.

As Ricci and Rachid (2013) point out, there is a structural paradox in the management of teleworking: workers' illnesses are systematically disconnected from working conditions, a process that operates through a dual mechanism of naturalizing suffering and individualizing responsibility.

This dynamic is particularly perversely consolidated in the sector, where the requirement to maintain a "soft voice" and an "appearance of normality," constitutive

elements of the emotional labor required, acts as a silencing device that masks the true sources of mental illness. Furthermore, this performance requirement updates, in the context of telemarketing, the concept of "emotional labor," as analyzed by Oliveira and Jacques (2006), for whom the management of emotions in customer service consumes additional psychological resources, extending the strain beyond the physical dimension.

Performance-based pay was also evaluated for its impact on mental health, with the majority of the surveyed group rating it as having a high impact (50.2%); a moderate impact was mentioned by 42%, and a low impact by 7.8% of teleoperators.

The lack of adequate institutional support exacerbates this situation. Although 66.7% of workers have received some type of training to deal with difficult situations, 57.4% consider this training partially adequate and 27.7% consider it inadequate (only 14.9% responded that they had adequate training).

In other words, although the training programs offer useful elements, their current structure proves insufficient to meet the real demands of the workers. A comprehensive review of content and methodology is necessary, aiming to develop more effective approaches applicable to the daily reality of telemarketing operations. This deficiency in support mechanisms is even more evident when 63.8% of respondents state that the company does not offer programs focused on mental health.

Thus, this "institutional indifference" (Seligmann-Silva, 2005) encourages pressure for results, and exposure to difficult clients would require support strategies and specialized training. Despite this, an organizational stance prevails that transfers the responsibility for managing these adverse situations to the worker, without providing the necessary resources.

The operators' accounts reveal crucial contradictions. There is a record of massage therapy in the unit. However, "Massage therapy during working hours, but only if you want to use your 20-minute lunch break", as one of the teleoperators points out. This statement exemplifies the perverse logic that transforms labor rights into concessions, forcing workers to choose between basic needs and access to guaranteed benefits.

Work-related suffering in telemarketing is not limited to working hours, progressively contaminating the private lives of workers. This blurring of boundaries, aggravated by the difficulty of psychological disconnection and the internalization of professional pressures, constitutes a pattern of illness that demands specific protection policies, such as the right to disconnect and psychophysical recovery. In other words, the negative effects persist in the private sphere, profoundly affecting the personal lives of teleoperators. Only 14.5% consider

themselves to have a balance between work and private life, while 43.5% report a marked imbalance. The testimonies are direct and elucidative: "It affected my psychological well-being, love life, personal relationships, and college"; "I couldn't leave the house, I felt incapable of anything." As Antunes (2018) emphasizes, the work is precarious, and thus, the workers suffer.

Contributing to this is the ineffectiveness of training programs. By failing to develop emotional skills and stress management strategies, these inadequate training programs hinder psychological disconnection after the workday, resulting in: (1) contamination of rest time by work worries; (2) progressive deterioration of interpersonal relationships; and (3) reduced psychophysiological recovery capacity.

This perverse dynamic, where educational deficiencies become sources of suffering outside of work, highlights the urgent need for pedagogical reform that considers not only technical skills, but especially strategies for emotional self-management and a healthy separation between professional and personal life.

Reports from the sector echo the concept of "ethical suffering," proposed by Dejours (2011), in which workers face conflict between their moral convictions and organizational demands, between what they think "they should do" or what they believe "is right", in a feeling of "subordinate devaluation". The perception of the profession is revealing: 52.2% rate it as average and 33.3% as extremely poor. Added to this is the extremely low level of recommendation for the activity, with only 7.2% of respondents willing to recommend it fully (56.5% would recommend it partially and 36.2% would not recommend it).

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Following the guiding principles of the investigation, this paper sought to analyze the working conditions, sociodemographic profile, and health impacts of call center workers in Juazeiro do Norte (CE), articulating these three dimensions in light of the literature on structural precarization and digital work. From a methodological point of view, the research was based on a quantitative survey with simple random sampling, whose data were treated using descriptive statistics, as detailed in section 2. The results, systematized below, confirm the hypothesis that formal employment does not prevent the existence of conditions analogous to precarization, revealing a mismatch between formal legal protection and effective labor reality.

The profile of respondents in the survey shows a group composed of women

(66.7%), young people between 21 and 27 years old (70%), and single individuals (87%), reflecting a dynamic of labor market insertion marked by social vulnerability and high turnover. The majority self-identify as black (26.1%) or mixed-race (44.9%), with black women representing 58% of the total, highlighting the intersection between gender and race in the occupation of precarious positions. Regarding education, a high level of training is observed, with 44.9% pursuing higher education and 20.3% already graduated, pointing to a "qualified waste," where diplomas do not guarantee mobility but combine to reinforce the structural precarity of the sector. This scenario exposes a labor market marked by temporary contracts, low wages, and a lack of guarantees, where flexibility, far from representing autonomy, reinforces inequalities and imposes a double burden between work and study.

Regarding general working conditions, telemarketing in Juazeiro do Norte is characterized by institutionalized exploitation of the workforce, reflected in intense work schedules (on a 6x1 schedule), constant pressure to meet targets, and insufficient remuneration, with 79.7% receiving up to one minimum wage. Despite many workers having completed or partially completed higher education, they face a lack of adequate benefits, insufficient breaks (according to 85.5% of those interviewed), and high turnover.

Most enter the profession out of financial necessity and a lack of alternatives in the region, being subjected to a high-pressure environment marked by exposure to aggressive clients, call overload, constant surveillance, and technical problems. Furthermore, the diversification of service channels, far from representing progress, increases the emotional and cognitive overload. There is also a normalization of precariousness, evidenced by the workers' "neutral" perception of working hours, even in the face of adverse conditions.

The adoption of ICTs in telemarketing, far from benefiting both sides, has intensified precarious working conditions due to inadequate management, lack of structural support, and power imbalances that force workers to relinquish rights. This perverse dynamic, where productivity systematically takes precedence over well-being, demands an urgent reformulation of management models to effectively protect workers from the psychosocial risks of the activity.

The risks inherent in this activity are diverse, ranging from digital surveillance to symbolic violence and a lack of institutional support. Key issues include abusive targets; disproportionate restrictions on break periods; workplace harassment by supervisors and managers; and the recurring use of threats and instruments to control and subdue the workforce. These factors combine to create a hostile work environment where the physical and mental health of workers is frequently sacrificed in the name of productivity. The

systemic weakening of employment in this sector demands not only greater regulation but also the implementation of policies that guarantee decent working conditions and effective protection against the risks identified here.

From the perspective of its contribution to the field of study, this article advances in three main directions. First, it offers one of the first systematic diagnoses of telemarketing in Juazeiro do Norte, qualifying the debate on digital work beyond large metropolitan centers. Second, it empirically demonstrates how the intersection of gender, race, and higher education produces a "qualified waste" that challenges optimistic narratives about digitalization as a vector of social mobility. Third, by revealing the gap between legal formality (CLT employment contract) and real precarization (abusive targets, algorithmic surveillance, widespread illness), the article contributes to a well-founded critique of the model of "precariousness disguised as formality", suggesting the need for new analytical categories for the study of platform-based work mediated by information and communication technologies.

The data demonstrates the urgent need for: specific regulations that consider the particularities of digital work, especially those that limit digital surveillance; effective mechanisms for protecting health, particularly mental health; independent monitoring systems for working conditions; union strategies adapted to new forms of work organization; and corporate accountability for psychosocial impacts. These elements are essential and imperative to combat the effects of algorithmic management on employment relationships and mental health. In general, a comprehensive approach is needed that combines state action, collective mobilization, and corporate accountability, aiming to mitigate the current logic that sacrifices workers' health in the name of productivity gains.

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