

Alumni profiling of dentists who graduated from the Federal University of Ceará and their perceptions on the labor market

João Pedro Coelho de Araujo*; Luiza Maria Dias Firmeza**; Maria Eneide Leitão de Almeida***; Ana Karine Macedo Teixeira***

- * Undergraduate student in dentistry, Federal University of Ceará, Brazil
- ** Masters' student in dentistry, Federal University of Ceará, Brazil
- *** Associate professor, Collective Healthcare field, Federal University of Ceará, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the alumni profile of dentists who graduated from the Federal University of Ceara and to explore their perceptions of the labor market. A cross-sectional study was carried out with the application of a questionnaire to graduates from 2010/1 to 2018/1, via google forms. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and by the Student's and Chi-squared tests with the significance level set at 5%. One hundred and sixty-nine (38.8%) out of 435 alumni dentists participated in the research. The majority of them (83%) started working up to one month after graduation and had also completed a graduate course (87.6%) by the time of the data collection. The working hours of 44.3% of the participants exceed 40 hours per week. The mean salary of the participants is 5.4 minimum wages, and an imbalance between worked hours and salary was found when comparing different genders. Additionally, while 15.7% of the participants worked as professors, associating this occupation with other professional activities, 15% of the alumni dentists worked in private dental offices and 25.3% worked in the public service. After graduating, most of the dentists felt partially prepared for the job market (53.8%), which was evaluated as "regular" (51.5%). Regarding the level of satisfaction with the field of dentistry, 76.8% of the participants perceived the dental profession as good and excellent. However, the alumni dentists pointed deficiencies regarding their education on the topics of private and public management. Therefore, it can be concluded that the alumni dentists were promptly absorbed by the job market, have a high weekly workload, are satisfied with the profession, but consider the job market only as regular. Moreover, this investigation brings light to gender inequalities in the labor market of dentistry.

Descriptors: Education, Dental. Gender Inequalities. Labor Market.

1 INTRODUCTION

Along the years, the number of undergraduate students has grown in Brazil. From 2008 to 2018, the number of graduating students increased 49% in private universities and 32.3% in public institutions¹. Although increasing the number of people with a higher education diploma promotes the multiplication of people highly qualified, it might also lead to difficulty for the individuals to be absorbed by the labor market due to the imbalance in the proportion of job available and people actively seeking employment. Moreover, there is an increasing exigency for professionals with a broad repertory of abilities and competencies².

In dentistry, besides the increasing number of professionals, which is a reflex of the increase in the number of undergraduate courses in dentistry in Brazil, other factors have altered the job market such as the changes in the epidemiological characteristics of oral health problems, the high demand for dental assistance, the commodification of health, the seek for preventive procedures, the sociocultural changes of the population, and the reformulation of the public health service^{3,4}.

In this scenario, the patients actively contribute with their exigencies to the changes in the labor market in the dentistry field due to the easy access to information guaranteed by the new technologies. Such behavior increases the demand for professionals with a specialty degree, who are active in social media and updated on the new technologies. These requirements shape the labor market in which the recently graduated student will have to dive in⁴.

Dental teaching in Brazil is regulated by the CNE/CES, which was issued on February 19 of 2002. This document regulates the National Curriculum Guidelines of the dentistry courses. These guidelines establish that the undergraduate courses in dentistry should prepare humanists,

generalists, and critical professionals to work with scientific rigor in all levels of health care⁵. In this context, it is important to periodically evaluate the curriculum matrixes of the undergraduate courses to guarantee that they are following the national guidelines and to ensure that the new technologies are being incorporated into the curriculum, which will prepare the students for the labor market⁶.

The national guidelines also establish that the undergraduate courses in dentistry must train the students to work with attention to health, decision making, communication, leadership, management, and continuous education. Likewise, the dental schools must watch over to prepare the professionals to be critical regarding their knowledge and practice. The national guidelines also establish that the undergraduate courses in dentistry must incorporate to their curriculum contents of the biological, human, and social sciences⁵.

Although studies have pointed that alumni dentists perceive themselves as prepared to enter the labor market, there are still difficulties and challenges to be overcome by the dental schools to ensure a better teaching and learning process of such professionals^{7,8}.

Investigations have also shown that alumni dentists point to insecurities to enter the labor market, such as not feeling prepared to manage services or lead a group. Some dentists also point the lack of experience and fitness to organize services as deficiencies related to the undergraduate curriculum, professors or even the clinical practice during the course⁹. In addition to these difficulties, there are also challenges such as low salary and labor market saturation¹⁰.

Considering the challenges mentioned above, identifying the profile of the alumni dentists as well as their perceptions about the labor market is paramount to improve the teaching and learning process of dental students

once the deficiencies of the undergraduate might negatively reflect on the professional development and acting¹¹.

The dentistry undergraduate course of the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) was created in 1916 and has changed its curriculum matrixes over the years to improve the teaching and learning process of the dental students. Considering that the alumni dentists of the UFC might provide information to improve the structure of the curriculum of the dentistry undergraduate course, our study aimed to identify the profile of the alumni dentists who graduated from the UFC and examine their perceptions regarding the labor market of the dental profession.

2 METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional quantitative study was performed with data collected from January to June 2019. The population of study was composed of dentists who graduated from the UFC from 2010/1 to 2018/1, summing 435 professionals. The participants were identified through the records of graduated students of the UFC dental school.

The participants answered an online survey based on the described by Pinheiro e Noro¹² and Pinheiro *et al.*¹³. The questionnaire was composed of sixteen objective questions divided into four blocks: 1. Sociodemographic profile (age, gender, income, time spent to enter the labor market, academic degree); 2. Field of work (workplace, workload, work regimen); 3. Perceptions regarding the labor market (preparedness to enter the labor market and services and labor market evaluation and satisfaction with the dental profession); 4. Knowledge áreas and habilities/competencies that the alumni dentist consider deficient in their undergraduate course.

The questionnaire was sent by email to each dentist using the email records of the dental school alumni students. Three attempts to contact the alumni student were made via email during two months. After this period, the contact attempts were also made via Instagram and WhatsApp.

The abilities/competencies and knowledge areas were defined according to the National Curriculum Guidelines for dentistry undergraduate courses⁵. To identify knowledge areas with deficiencies, the participants were asked what fields they considered less or non-explored during the undergraduate course.

A 10-point scale was used to measure the satisfaction level of the alumni dentists. Thus, the following satisfaction criteria: 0 to 2 (terrible), 3 e 4 (bad), 5 e 6 (regular), 7 e 8 (good) e 9 e 10 (excellent). The level of satisfaction with the labor market was evaluated using the scale developed based on the study of Pinheiro et al.¹³. Such scale was composed of the following topics: excellent (score 1), good (score 2), regular (score 3), bad (score 4), or terrible (score 5).

The data were analyzed using the program SPSS 20.0 version (IBM, Armonk, NY, EUA). The Chi-squared test was used to evaluate the association between weekly workload and gender. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to evaluate the normality of the income data. Once such data presented normal distribution, the Student's T-test was used to compare the monthly income of the participants by gender. The significance level was set at 5%.

Upon contact, the participants received a link containing the consent form and after Reading the document the participants had access to the questionnaire, which was hosted on the Google Forms platform. This research protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the UFC under protocol number 3.119.154.

3 RESULTS

One hundred and sixty-nine (38.8%) out of 435 dentists who graduated between 2010/1 and 2018/1 participated in the research. Around 1.8% of the participants were not working in an occupation in the field of dentistry. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic profile and variables related to the work of the participants. Most of the participants were female (65%) and were promptly absorbed by the labor market after graduation. Only 12.4% had not completed a graduate course. However, 66% of those who had not completed a graduate course were recently graduated, alumni. The majority (32%) of the alumni dentists had completed a specialty course, which was their maximum degree achieved. The most common postgraduate area was general dentistry (28%), followed by orthodontics (23%), oral surgery (22,3%), dental prosthesis (21%), endodontics, and restorative dentistry (19.5%).

Regarding occupation, the participants reported more frequently that they work as tutors in dental schools, associating this job with other professional activities (15.7%). Followed by such occupation came the option work in private dental offices, reaching 15.1% of the answers. Twenty-five point three percent worked in the public service. Thirteen point three percent of those worked exclusively in this sector. The Family Health Strategy (FHS) were the workplace more frequently reported by those who worked in public service.

Most of the participants were liberal workers (27.5%) or worked by temporary contracts or percentage rate contracts (22.8%) (table 1).

Regarding the workload, the option more

frequently chosen by the participants was “more than 40 hours a week” (44.3%) (table 1). Most of the male participants worked more than 40 hours a week (57.6%), while most of the women (42,6%) worked between 30 to 40 hours a week ($p=0.03$) (table 2).

The monthly average income of the alumni dentists was around 5.422,41 BRL. However, such income differed significantly when compared by gender ($p=0.001$). Men reported an average income of $6.910,41 \pm 4.615,83$ BRL while women reported an income of $4.615,83 \pm 2.436,18$ BRL. Comparing the average income by gender according to the monthly work-load, a significant difference ($p=0,001$) was found in the group of dentists who work more than 40 hours per week (table 2).

The dental student's perception of the job market in dentistry is presented in table 3. The majority of the participants reported that They felt prepared to work after graduating (53,8%). Most of them also reported feeling more prepared to work in public services (53,3%). The participants evaluated the job market as “regular” (51,5%) and exhibited satisfaction with their work in the dentistry area since they chose the options good (53,8%) and excellent (23%).

The main difficulties reported by the alumni dentists after graduation were in the areas of dental office administration (79,8%), request and interpretation of complementary exam (26,6%), and prescription (23,6%) (Table 4). Regarding the deficiencies of the undergraduate course, the participants mentioned dental office administration (88%), public services administration (54,8%), temporomandibular joint pain and disorders (54,8%), and geriatric dentistry (51,8%) (table 4).

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile and work-related variables of alumni dentists of the Federal University of Ceará

Variables	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	110	65.1
Male	59	34.9
<i>Time taken to the first job opportunity</i>		
Up to 1 month	140	82.8
Between 1 and 3 months	24	14.2
Between 4 and 6 months	2	1.2
More than 6 months	3	1.8
<i>Highest degree achieved</i>		
None	21	12,4
Diploma	17	10,1
Specialty Program	54	32,0
Residency Program	8	4,7
Master's degree	16	9,5
Ph.D. degree	5	3,0
Graduate program (<i>Stricto Sensu + Lato Sensu</i>)	43	25,4
<i>Workplace</i>		
Own/rented dental office	25	15.1
Exclusive public services	22	13.3
Teaching	6	3.6
Graduate programs	17	10.2
Dental insurance companies	18	10.8
Public services + Private offices and/or dental insurance	20	12.0
Teaching + Others	26	15.7
Graduate programs + Others	13	7.8
Others	19	11.4
<i>Work placement in the public service sector</i>		
Family Health Strategy (FHS)	33	68.8
Centers for dental specialties (CDS)	5	10.4
Emergency care units (ECU)	2	4.2
Hospitals	4	8.3
Centers for dental specialties + Emergency care units or Family Health Strategy /Emergency care units + Military assistance	4	8.3
<i>Weekly workload</i>		
Up to 30 hours	29	17.4
Between 30 to 40 hours	64	38.3
More than 40 hours	74	44.3
<i>Type of contracts</i>		
Public service	18	10.8
Under the labor laws consolidation (LLC)	37	22.2
Liberal workers	46	27.5
Short-term/Percentage rate contract	38	22.8
Scholarship holders	24	14.4
Under LCC + liberal workers	3	1.8
No contract	1	0.6

Table 2. Weekly workload and monthly income (R\$) according to the gender of alumni dentists of the Federal University of Ceará

	Female		Male		Means	p*** value
	n (%)	Mean income	n (%)	Mean income		
<i>Weekly workload</i>						
Up to 30 hours	22 (20.4)	4.388,63	7(11.9)	5.277,14	4.603,13	0.80
30 – 40 hours*	46 (42.6)	4.418,67	18(30.5)	6.400,50	4.976,06	0.08
>40 hours*	40 (37.0)	4.852,35	34(57.6)	7.313,64	5.983,21	0.001

* Chi-squared test p=0.03 ** Students' t-test

Table 3. Perceptions on the labor market and satisfaction with dentistry of alumni dentists of the Federal University of Ceará

Variable	N	%
<i>Felt prepared for the labor market</i>		
No	47	27.8
Partially	91	53.8
Yes	31	18.3
<i>Felt more prepared to what type of sector</i>		
Both	58	34.3
Private	10	5.9
Public	90	53.3
Felt able to none	11	6.5
<i>Satisfaction level with Dentistry</i>		
Terrible	8	4.7
Bad	4	2.3
Regular	27	15.9
Good	91	53.8
Excellent	39	23.0
<i>Evaluation of labor market</i>		
Terrible	8	4.8
Bad	34	20.4
Regular	86	51.5
Good	36	21.6
Excellent	3	1.8

Table 4. Professional abilities/skills and deficiencies during undergraduate course according to alumni dentists of the Federal University of Ceará.

Variable	N	%
<i>Skills/Skills with deficiencies</i>		
Dental office administration	135	79.8
Request and interpretation of medical exams	45	26.6
Drug prescription	40	23.6
Epidemiological diagnosis	32	19.2
Leading healthcare teams	30	18.0
Diagnosis and treatment planning	27	16.2
Performing multidisciplinary activities	20	12.0
Communication with patients	18	10.8
Dental office organization	9	5.4
Clinical/technical difficulties	6	3.6
Health promotion activities	2	1.2
<i>Deficient areas</i>		
Private service management	146	88.0
Public service management	91	54.8
Temporomandibular disorders	91	54.8
Geriatric dentistry	86	51.8
Patients with special needs	46	28.0
Collective health care	23	14.0
Orthodontics	14	8.5
Prosthodontics	11	6.6
Implantology	10	6.0
Dental esthetics	09	5.4
Endodontics	08	5.0
Stomatology	06	3.6

*Participants could indicate more than one alternative for skills/skills with deficiency during the undergraduate course

4 DISCUSSION

The majority of alumni dentists were promptly incorporated into the labor market (within a month after the commencement ceremony), corroborating with other findings^{6,12,13}. Regarding working place, most of the participants (15.7%) associate teaching roles with other activities. Other studies revealed that alumni dentists balanced public and private services as working places^{8,14}. This evidence signals a paradigm shift from an exclusively private-oriented service. This transition can be associated with the awareness of difficulties faced in the labor market, incorporation of the dental health to FHS, and perception of the public service benefits such as financial stability and labor rights^{6,10}.

In this study, most of the dentists who are in public service worked in the FHS, similar to what Pinheiro *et al.*¹³ reported in 2011, who also analyzed alumni dentists from this same institution. When comparing these investigations, it was observed an expressive reduction of the percentage of alumni working in public services, given that Pinheiro *et al.*¹³ reported numbers around 46.5%, whereas our study indicates values around 25.3%.

During 2010-2018, there was a slight increase in the population coverage for oral health in the primary care system in the state of Ceará, suggesting that there were no job closures¹⁵. Thus, the decrease in the number of respondents in the public service field could be due to an increase in the number of dentists

graduating each semester nationally and in Ceará¹⁶. According to the Brazilian Federal Dental Board, in only four years, 2015-2019, the number of institutions that offer the degree in Dentistry rose by 87%, from 220 to 412. Thus, the FHS cannot incorporate all graduating students¹⁷.

Due to this scenario, it is suggested that the variability of job sectors perceived in this study by alumni dentists from the Federal University of Ceará indicates that these professionals find other opportunities beyond the public service sector. In this sense, we highlight that the increase in the number of undergraduate courses in Dentistry in the state of Ceará may have opened opportunities to alumni to take on teaching roles, enabling them to work in another sector other than in the public services.

The majority of alumni dentists reported a workload above 40 hours per week, which is different from Pinheiro *et al.*¹³, whose findings pointed out only 9.7% of alumni taking over 40 hours a week, whereas most of them worked between 31 to 40 hours weekly (75.7%), a percentage higher than the one found in our study. We suggest that this increase in workload is due to market saturation in urban areas, rendering it highly competitive. In the state of Ceará, the ratio between inhabitants/dentists is 619, while in small municipalities this ratio reaches 2,992¹⁸.

Most of the alumni dentists who participated in this study felt fully or partially prepared for the labor market, similarly to a study by Melo *et al.*¹⁴, in which 76% of alumni considered themselves able to work as dentists after graduating. They pointed out as reasons for their preparedness internships, tutorship programs, and short-term courses (diploma), as well as issues related to their undergraduate courses and academic personnel¹⁴.

Most of the alumni dentists affirmed to be

able to work in the public service sector (53.3%), whilst only 5.3% felt able to work in the private sector. This evidence appears to be aligned with findings from another study⁸ that revealed high confidence levels in performing clinical procedures in the primary health care system, as well as difficulties to perform specialized procedures such as root canal treatment of multi-rooted teeth, impacted teeth surgery, and fixed dental prostheses.

Similar to Pinheiro *et al.*¹³ who also evaluated alumni dentists from the Federal University of Ceará in 2011, we observed a less satisfactory evaluation of the labor market among the participants since most of them scored it as “regular”, while the majority of the surveyed graduating students back in 2011 considered the labor market “good”. Besides, 4.8% of the alumni dentists evaluated the labor market as terrible in our study, contrary to the study of Pinheiro *et al.*¹³ in which no participant classified the labor market as such. The percentage of students who classified the market as excellent was lower in our study (1.8%) compared to Pinheiro *et al.*¹³ in 2011 (4.9%).

Although the labor market has been classified as “regular” by most of the participants (51.5%) and only 23.4% of them considered it to be good or excellent, such evaluation did not influence the participant’s satisfaction with dentistry. This is because 76.8% of alumni dentists reported good or excellent satisfaction levels with their profession just as other studies^{8,10,14}. This finding reveals that, although the difficulties faced in the labor market, the dentists consulted are satisfied with their profession.

Sousa *et al.*¹⁰ found similar results because, even though the unfavorable perception toward the labor market regarding its saturation, insufficient financial conditions of the population, and lack of professional training,

most of them would do a degree in Dentistry again and were satisfied with their profession. It can be observed that admiration for the profession, vocation, and influence of relatives are factors that motivate students to choose dentistry, suggesting that aspects, beyond the labor market situation, can play a role in satisfaction with the profession⁸.

Most of the alumni dentists had a postgraduate qualification, corroborating with other findings^{9,12,14}. This evidence can suggest either demand of the labor market or a professional qualification directed to the biomedical model, which prioritizes specialized dentists over generalist professionals. Yet, this finding can signal deficient learning during the undergraduate course, leading alumni dentists to seek postgraduate courses to complement their professional qualification^{9,12,14}.

In our study, general dentistry was the most reported postgraduate qualification, which can be due to the postgraduate program in this area in the Federal University of Ceará. The second most reported area was orthodontics, which reinforces the data from the Brazilian Federal Dental Board (2019)¹⁹ that pointed out this area as the one with the highest number of specialists in Brazil, approximately 26,897 registered professionals.

The mean monthly income of alumni dentists in this study (R\$5,422,41) was higher than the monthly income in the city of Fortaleza (2,8 SM)²⁰ and in the State of Ceará (R\$ 2,095,00)²¹. The mean monthly income was lower among women, as well as the weekly workload. When analyzing the income as a function of workload, we highlight that even if both genders work 40h/week, women earn less than men, which points out an inequality of gender in the dental labor job. Such difference corroborates with the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics²² that showed that women earn less than men when both have equal

professional qualifications and workloads.

Further, the proportion of women in the Dentistry degree courses increased overtime^{6,7,16}, but such change does not seem to be followed by gender equality in dental labor. We highlight that the category gender faces off social and historical issues that favor male individuals over female ones. From a gender perspective, there is a culturally-determined imbalance that reaffirms inequalities between men and women, putting them socially apart. Thus, with this perspective, a rupture of biological determinism is proposed to justify women's oppression and the uneven relationship powers²³.

In this sense, Thuler and Bandeira (2008)²⁴ pointed out that the choice for dentistry by women could be associated with the autonomy of time-management, seeking more time to triple shifts, since this is still done by women predominantly. Thus, women tend to reduce workload due to conflicts between family and professional matters, which could justify the results pointed in this study regarding workload and gender issues.

A deeper analysis is still necessary to explain gender inequalities in the group that worked 40h/week. This is necessary to verify how these alumni entered the labor market of different dental specialties by gender, workplace, and time dedicated to professional qualification. Study observed a predominance of gender in some dental specialties, as well as more females working in the public service sectors¹⁶, which can result in different profitability per gender.

The management of private and public services are the areas mostly reported as deficient by alumni dentists, which indicates the need to better address them in the undergraduate course similar to other institutions^{25,26}. The study of Mania, Vargas, and Ferreira (2018)⁹ also revealed the insecurities of dental students to manage public/private services, to take on

positions in organizations, or to lead teams. These findings suggest a possible limitation of institutions to provide training in these areas. Thus, we suggest that these needs should be met by institutions, which in turn should offer disciplines/subjects to address these limitations in the dentistry degree curriculum such as administration of workplace and entrepreneurship.

The deficiency pointed out by alumni dentists regarding their knowledge of temporomandibular dysfunctions and geriatric dentistry could be due to the incorporation of these subjects within others so that no specific subjects for such themes exist. However, recently, the discipline of Occlusion was reformulated, increasing the content on temporomandibular dysfunctions, which could revert this scenario in the long-term.

Regarding the deficiencies more indicated by alumni, we highlight difficulties to request and interpret complementary medical exams and prescribe drugs. Considering that these issues are covered by the Federal University of Ceará curriculum, it would be worth investigating the methodology of learning strategies along the dentistry degree course. This is important so students can apply theoretical concepts to a clinical setting, leading to autonomy.

As limitations of this study, we point out the number of respondents as only 39% of alumni dentists of the analyzed period participated; such sample loss can be related to changes in their e-mail addresses. Knowing these numbers, it is necessary to be cautious when analyzing these findings so that inference is not made to the total population of alumni dentists for that period. Further, as the questionnaires were self-administered online, response biases could be present, but this does not disqualify our study since this methodology has been used elsewhere^{12,27}. We hope this study can enable the follow-

up of alumni dentists of the Federal University of Ceará, allowing the dentistry course to detect changes in the labor market to adapt its curriculum to better prepare dental students.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrated a prompt insertion of dentists in the labor market, a high workload with varied workplaces. Most the alumni dentists said to be satisfied with the profession although the labor market was not seen as favorable. Our study also demonstrated gender inequality in the dental labor market and revealed the need to better address issues related to public and private management in the undergraduate course.

RESUMO

Perfil dos egressos do curso de Odontologia da Universidade Federal do Ceará e suas percepções acerca do mercado de trabalho

O objetivo do estudo foi identificar o perfil dos egressos de Odontologia da Universidade Federal do Ceará e suas percepções acerca do mercado de trabalho. Realizou-se um estudo transversal com aplicação de questionário *online* aos egressos de 2010/1 a 2018/1. Foram abordadas questões referentes ao perfil sociodemográfico, campo de atuação e percepção do mercado de trabalho e das suas limitações de formação. Realizou-se análise descritiva das variáveis e utilizou-se o teste t de Student e qui-quadrado, considerando um nível de significância de 5%. Dos 435 egressos, 169 (38,8%) participaram da pesquisa. A maioria (83%) se inseriu no mercado de trabalho em até um mês de formado e possuía alguma titulação acadêmica de pós-graduação (87,6%). A carga horária de trabalho de 44,3% dos egressos é maior que 40 horas semanais, com remuneração média de 5,4 salários-mínimos, verificando-se uma desigualdade salarial e de carga horária de trabalho entre gêneros. Ainda, 15,7% atuavam na docência aliada a outra atividade, 15% no consultório particular e 25,3% possuíam vínculo com serviço público. A maioria dos egressos

sentiram-se parcialmente preparados para o mercado de trabalho (53,8%), sendo este avaliado majoritariamente como “regular” (51,5%). Quanto ao nível de satisfação com a Odontologia, 76,8% afirmaram ser bom ou excelente. Ademais, foram apontadas deficiências na formação nos conteúdos de gestão privada e pública. Conclui-se que os egressos apresentaram rápida inserção no mercado de trabalho, alta carga horária semanal de trabalho, boa satisfação com a profissão, apesar de considerarem o mercado de trabalho regular. Além disso, esse estudo sinaliza uma desigualdade de gênero no mercado de trabalho odontológico.

Descritores: Educação Odontológica. Desigualdade de Gênero. Mercado de Trabalho.

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Correspondência para:

Luiza Maria Dias Firmeza
e-mail: luizafirmeza@gmail.com
Avenida Abolição, 3090
60165-078 Fortaleza/CE Brazil