

Burnout syndrome in military police officers in a large city in the state of Bahia

Aspectos psicossociais do trabalho e síndrome de Burnout em policiais militares em uma grande cidade do estado da Bahia

Aspectos psicossociales del trabajo y síndrome de burnout en policías militares de una gran ciudad del estado de Bahía

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo do estudo foi estimar a prevalência e investigar a associação entre aspectos psicossociais do trabalho e a Síndrome de Burnout em policiais militares de Feira de Santana, Bahia. **Método:** Foi realizado um estudo transversal, populacional, utilizando um questionário anônimo e validado para coletar dados gerais, além do Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) e do Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) para identificar a Síndrome de Burnout. A prevalência da Síndrome de Burnout, considerando somente o nível alto em suas três dimensões, foi de 12,7%. **Resultados:** Os resultados mostraram uma elevada prevalência e uma forte associação entre a situação de alta exigência e a Síndrome de Burnout entre os trabalhadores estudados. **Conclusão:** Espera-se que os achados deste estudo cooperem para o desenvolvimento de estratégias de intervenção que promovam a saúde nesse segmento ocupacional.

DESCRITORES: Polícia; Esgotamento Profissional; Saúde Ocupacional

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to estimate the prevalence and investigate the association between psychosocial aspects of work and Burnout Syndrome in military police officers from Feira de Santana, Bahia. **Method:** A cross-sectional, population-based study was conducted using an anonymous and validated questionnaire to collect general data, in addition to the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to identify Burnout Syndrome. The prevalence of Burnout Syndrome, considering only the high level in its three dimensions, was 12.7%. **Results:** The results showed a high prevalence and a strong association between high-demand situations and Burnout Syndrome among the workers studied. **Conclusion:** It is expected that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of intervention strategies that promote health in this occupational segment.

DESCRIPTORS: Police; Burnout; Professional; Occupational Health.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El objetivo del estudio fue estimar la prevalencia e investigar la asociación entre los aspectos psicossociales del trabajo y el Síndrome de Burnout en policías militares de Feira de Santana, Bahía. **Método:** Se realizó un estudio transversal, de base poblacional, utilizando un cuestionario anónimo y validado para recolectar datos generales, además del Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ) y el Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) para identificar el Síndrome de Burnout. La prevalencia del Síndrome de Burnout, considerando sólo el nivel alto en sus tres dimensiones, fue del 12,7%. **Resultados:** Los resultados mostraron una alta prevalencia y una fuerte asociación entre la alta exigencia y el Síndrome de Burnout entre los trabajadores estudiados. **Conclusión:** Se espera que los hallazgos de este estudio contribuyan al desarrollo de estrategias de intervención que promuevan la salud en este segmento ocupacional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Policía; Burnout profesional; Salud ocupacional

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Burnout syndrome in military police officers in a large city in the state of Bahia



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INTRODUCTION

The Military Police, as part of the structure of Public Security in the States, presents itself as necessary for the maintenance of social relations and supervision of individual and collective practices that oppose the social order. Military police workers, in relation to other professions, stand out for their high level of tension and emotional exhaustion. He is, at the same time, subject and user of public security. His efforts focus on preventing and combating criminal activities.

The state military brings in its Statute the oath of the greatest sacrifice that can exist for a worker, which is putting one's own life at risk. To do so, he needs to surround himself with technical and heal-

th care, so that the risks to his physical and mental integrity are mitigated.

This work activity requires assertive and, occasionally, energetic decision-making. This worker exposes his physical integrity and his own life every day, in a work day considered exhausting both physically and mentally. Minayo, Assis and Oliveira², in a study that discussed the impact of professional activities on the physical and mental health of civil and military police officers in Rio de Janeiro, concluded that police corporations stand out from other professional categories due to the high workload and suffering and operational police officers are more susceptible to risks and injuries arising from your profession.²

Mesquita³ discusses that work-related stress, if not managed correctly, can lead to the development of diseases such as hyper-

tension, diabetes, anxiety, depression and Burnout Syndrome, which can result in inability to work.

Among the possible health problems for military police officers is Burnout Syndrome (BS). BS, according to the WHO⁴, it is the result of chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. In the 11th revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems - ICD-11 it received the code QD85. BS is characterized by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low professional fulfillment.

Karasek⁵ developed a work analysis model known as demand-control. This model considers two dimensions that can favor burnout at work: psychological demands characterized by the pace and inten-



sity of work and control, which is related to the ability and autonomy reported by the worker with the work performed.

The same author developed the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ), an instrument that allows the construction of quadrants based on combinations of aspects of psychological demand and activity control: low demand (combination of low demand and high control), passive work (low demand and low control), active work (high demand and high control) and high demand (high demand and low control), being adapted to the Brazilian context by Araújo, Graça and Araújo. 6

Studies that investigated the relationship between the psychosocial aspects of work measured by the JCQ and BS observed that high demand and low control (high demand situation) were strongly associated with BS. 6,7,8,9,10 Therefore, from this perspective, this study aims to estimate the prevalence and investigate the association between the psychosocial aspects of work and Burnout Syndrome in military police officers in Feira de Santana, Bahia.

METHOD

This is a cross-sectional, population-based study with workers from the 65th Independent Military Police Company and the George Américo Community Security Base, who belong to the 66th Independent Military Police Company of Feira de Santana, Bahia.

Data collection was carried out from July to November 2020, through the distribution of a validated, self-administered, individual instrument accompanied by the informed consent form. Aiming to minimize inconvenience, for workers who could not interrupt their activities to fill out the instrument, a date was scheduled to collect the duly completed instrument. Weekly meetings were held with the entire team to deliver and review the questionnaires.

A pilot study was carried out in another Police Company located in the Municipality of Santa Bárbara, 50 km from Feira de Santana, to verify the suitability, clarity,

approximate completion time and problems in returning the data collection instrument. A broad campaign was carried out to publicize the study among the workers involved.

To collect data, an instrument divided into blocks of questions was used, including information on: 1st general identification of the participant; 2nd general information about the working environment. 3rd psychosocial characteristics of work, measured by the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ). 4th block: assessment of Burnout Syndrome using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

The JCQ allows the construction of quadrants based on combinations of aspects of psychological demand and activity control; low demand (combination of low demand and high control), passive work (low demand and low control), active work (high demand and high control) and high demand (high demand and low control). 6

To construct the demand and control indicators, the variables referring to each of these indicators were added together, considering the weights provided for in the operationalization of the model. To dichotomize demand (low/high) and control (low/high), the median was defined as the cutoff point. Based on the assumptions made in the demand-control model, work carried out under conditions of high demand and low control (high demands) was considered the situation of greatest exposure. At the other extreme, there is work with less exposure, that is, with low demand and high control (low demands). The other combinations were considered intermediate exposure work situations. 6

The Portuguese version of the JCQ includes 41 questions: 17 about control over work (6 about skills and 11 about decision-making power), 13 questions about demand (8 about psychological demand and 5 about physical demand), and 11 questions about social support. Thirty-eight questions were measured on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree and 4 = strongly agree). 6

To detect BS, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used, which is compo-

sed of 22 statements about feelings and attitudes that encompass three fundamental dimensions of the syndrome divided into three seven-point scales, ranging from 0 to 6, making it possible to describe independently, each of the dimensions. Professional exhaustion is assessed by nine items, depersonalization by five and personal fulfillment by eight. For emotional exhaustion, a score ≥ 27 indicates a high level; from 17 to 26 moderate level; and ≤ 16 , low level. For depersonalization, a score ≥ 13 indicates a high level, 7 to 12 moderate and ≤ 6 , a low level. The score related to ineffectiveness goes in the opposite direction to the others, as a score from zero to 31 indicates a high level, from 32 to 38 a moderate level and ≥ 39 , a low level. 11

As there is no consensus in the literature for the interpretation of the MBI scale, the results were presented according to the criteria suggested by Tucunduva and collaborators 12 who characterized BS as the presence of a high level in the three dimensions.

The collected data was double entered to identify and correct possible typing errors, using the EpiData for Windows version 3.1 program and the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS®) for Windows version 17.0 program was used for statistical analysis.

The descriptive analysis of the data was carried out by calculating the absolute and relative frequency of categorical variables and measures of central tendency and dispersion of continuous numerical variables.

The association between the JCQ result (main predictor variable) was investigated; with the presence of BS (outcome variable). The prevalence ratio (PR) was used to measure the association between the studied variables. As the study was population-based, statistical significance calculations were not used. 13

All participants were informed of the objectives of the study and consented to participate after reading and signing the Informed Consent Form (TCLE). Military police officers with at least 2 years of service participated in the study, regardless of age group. The study was previously approved

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by the Research Ethics Committee through Opinion No. 5,056,852, CAAE No. 50570221.5.0000.0053, following formal recommendations. 14

RESULTS

Data collection resulted in 157 completed questionnaires, representing 95% of the initially eligible population (165), 115 from the 65th Independent Military Police Company (CIPM) and 42 from the George Américo Community Security Base (BCS-GA). Due to the uniqueness of the mission of the Units studied, the results were presented and analyzed separately.

The 65th CIPM operates more towards traditional overt policing. In this Unit, the majority of participants were male (79.1%), who declared themselves mixed race

(65.2%), with an average age of 40 ± 6.9 years, higher education (63.5%), married/stable union (78.3%) and with children (80.9%). The majority do not have a habit of drinking (53.9%) or smoking (92.1%) and declared themselves to be overweight (49.6%).

BCS-GA is characterized as community policing 15, which aims to develop a new partnership between the PM and the community, to seek solutions to the problems experienced together. The results indicated that the majority of participants are male (88.1%), self-declared as mixed race (64.3%), with an average age of 38.6 ± 6.2 years, higher education (78.6%), married/stable union (76.2%) and have children (69%). The majority do not have a habit of drinking (61.9%) or smoking (97.6%) and declared themselves to be overweight

(54.8%).

The staff who participated in the research are mainly composed of Praça, whether at the 65th CIPM (93.9%) or BCS-GA (97.6%). The majority have up to 15 years of service, both in the 65th CIPM (66.1%) and in the BCS-GA (73.8%) and work in an operational role (65th CIPM 69.6% and BCS-GA 76.2%).

The general prevalence of BS in the presence of a high level in the three dimensions was 12.7%. In the 65th CIPM, the prevalence of BS was 13.9% (16) in the presence of a high level in the three dimensions and 44.3% in the presence of a high level in just one dimension and in the BCS-GA it was 9.5% and 59.5% respectively (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 1 - Sociodemographic characterization of military police officers from the 65th CIPM and BCS-GA/66th CIPM, Feira de Santana, Bahia, 2022.

VARIABLE	65ª CIPM		BCS-GA	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	91	79,1	37	88,1
Female	24	20,9	5	11,9
Color of skin				
White	10	8,7	8	19
Yellow	0	0	1	2,4
Brown	75	65,2	27	64,3
Indigenous	1	0,9	0	0
Black	28	24,3	6	14,3
Unknown	1	0,9	0	0
Age				
Up to 39 years old	60	52,2	24	57,1
40 years or older	55	47,8	18	42,9
Education level				
Higher education	73	63,5	33	78,6
Basic schooling	42	36,5	9	21,4
Marital Status				
With marital relationship	90	78,3	32	76,2
Without marital relationship	25	21,7	10	23,8



Do they have children?				
Yes	93	80,9	29	69
No	18	15,7	11	26,2
Didn't answer	4	3,4	2	4,8
Drinking habits				
Yes	53	46,1	16	38,1
No	62	53,9	26	61,9
Smoking habits				
Non-smoking	106	92,2	41	97,6
Former smoker	7	6,1	1	2,4
Smoker	2	1,7	0	0
Do they practice physical activities?				
Yes	87	75,7	35	83,3
No	28	24,3	7	16,7
Ideal weight?				
Yes	51	44,3	14	33,3
Underweight	7	6,1	5	11,9
Overweight	57	49,6	23	54,8
Rank or Graduation				
Praça	108	93,9	41	97,6
Oficial	7	6,1	1	2,4
Service time				
Up to 15 years	76	66,1	31	73,8
16 years or older	39	33,9	11	26,2
Function				
Operational	80	69,6	32	76,2
Administrative	35	30,4	10	23,8
Total	115	100	42	100

Table 2 - Prevalence of Burnout Syndrome and its three dimensions (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Low Professional Fulfillment) in military police officers of the 65th CIPM, Feira de Santana, Bahia, 2022.

Emotional Exhaustion	N'	%
High	51	44,4
Moderated	35	30,4
Low	29	25,2
Depersonalization		
High	29	25,3
Moderated	40	34,7
Low	46	40,0

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Ineffectiveness		
High	30	26,1
Moderated	25	21,7
Low	60	52,2
Total		
Prevalence of Burnout Syndrome		
Three dimensions	16	13,9
One dimension	51	44,3

Table 3 - Prevalence of Burnout Syndrome and its three dimensions (Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Low Professional Fulfillment) in military police officers from BCS-GA – 66th CIPM, Feira de Santana, Bahia, 2022.

Emotional Exhaustion	N'	%
High	20	47,4
Moderated	13	31,0
Low	09	21,4
Depersonalization		
High	13	31,0
Moderated	16	38,0
Low	13	31,0
Ineffectiveness		
High	10	23,8
Moderated	14	33,4
Low	18	42,8
Total		
Prevalence of Burnout Syndrome		
Three dimensions	04	9,5
One dimension	25	59,5

It was observed that situations of high demand and passive work presented the highest prevalence of BS both in the 65th CIPM and in the BCS-GA with 17.6% and 17.8%; 18.2% and 9.0% respectively (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4 - Prevalence and Prevalence Ratio (PR) of the association between the psychosocial aspects of work (demand-control model) and Burnout Syndrome in military police officers from the 65th CIPM, Feira de Santana,

VARIABLE	BURNOUT FINAL RESULT				N	%	PREVALENCE RATIO
	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE				
	N	%	N	%			
High Demand*	6	17,6	28	82,4	34	100	-
Passive Work	4	17,8	19	82,2	28	100	1
Active Work	5	17,4	23	82,6	23	100	1



Low Demand	1	3,3	29	96,7	30	100	5,3
Total	16		99		115	100	

Table 5 - Prevalence and Prevalence Ratio (PR) of the association between the psychosocial aspects of work (demand-control model) and Burnout Syndrome in military police officers at BCS-GA/66th CIPM, Feira de Santana, Bahia, 2022.

VARIABLE	BURNOUT FINAL RESULT				N	%	PREVALENCIA RATIO
	POSITIVE		NEGATIVE				
	N	%	N	%			
High Demand*	2	18,2	9	81,8	11	100	-
Passive Work	1	9,0	10	91,0	12	100	2,0
Active Work	1	8,3	11	91,7	11	100	2,2
Low Demand	0	0	8	100,0	8	100	-
Total	4	9,5	38	90,5	42	100	

DISCUSSION

The general prevalence of BS in the military police officers surveyed was 12.7%, an expressive result, as it was considered a high level in the three dimensions of the MBI.

In a study carried out by Nascimento Sobrinho and collaborators 7 o estimate the prevalence of BS in a population of intensive care physicians in Salvador, Bahia and by Góis and collaborators 10 in Feira de Santana, Bahia, a prevalence of BS of 7.4% and 1.9% respectively, when considering the high level in the 03 dimensions of the syndrome.

Tironi, and collaborators 8, in a study carried out to estimate the prevalence in a sample of intensive care physicians from five Brazilian capitals, they estimated a prevalence of 5.0% of BS, when considering the high level in the three dimensions simultaneously.

Considering the high levels of burnout found in this and other studies, Barros and collaborators 16 suggest that this syndrome can be considered an occupational health problem, producing implications for professionals, family members, service users and the organization. The work context (policing philosophies) is an important starting point to indicate possible contributions of this research for military police officers.

In a study on preliminary identification of BS in military police officers, Lima and collaborators 17 observed a prevalence of BS of 17.3% in male police officers and 4.8% in female officers. The authors also describe that the majority of police officers with burnout were in the age group between 18 and 30 years old, with 17.3%, followed by those between 41 and 53 years old, with 16.7%. In the study of BS and factors related to the Mexican police workforce, Torres-Vences and collaborators 18 did not observe an association between age group and burnout dimensions.

Maslach, Schaufelli and Leiter 19 argue that the factors that influence the occurrence of BS are: chronic stress, excessive pressure, conflicts and low recognition. Nascimento Sobrinho and collaborators 7 state that the biggest challenge is still identifying the main factors related to the syndrome. In this sense, both personal and work characteristics and psychosocial aspects of work should be studied as possible factors associated with the syndrome.

According to Ferreira and collaborators 20, more than half of PMs identified their work as low control (56.4%) and high physical demand (53.9%), being identified as high demand by 27.8%. This classification concentrated the greatest risks to the health of police officers. According to Alcântara and collaborators 21, work environments

with high professional demand have a direct effect on work ability. Participants with high professional demand showed 3.17 times more depersonalization when compared to those with low demand. 17

The main dimension of BS present among the police officers studied was emotional exhaustion, which is considered the first reaction to stress generated by work demands. Once exhausted, workers feel physical and emotional tiredness, making it difficult to relax and carry out their activities. 19,8 The characteristics of this dimension, in comparison with the others, allow it to be easily accepted and assumed by the professional when expressing consistent aspects of burnout. 22

Faced with the evolution of psychological and physical symptoms, the professional develops depersonalization, characterized by cold and negative attitudes, offering derogatory treatment towards people directly involved with the work. The worker starts to behave with cynicism and irony towards the recipients of his work 19,22,23 and 16. This dimension had the second highest prevalence in this study.

According to some authors, this situation can evolve into a situation of ineffectiveness, with decreased self-confidence and a feeling of failure, resulting in a feeling of reduced personal and work fulfillment. 24,25,23,16 In this study, ineffectiveness

was observed in almost a quarter of the studied population. It is important to highlight that this dimension is considered, by the authors, as the last reaction to the stress generated by work demands.^{24,25}

The high prevalence of burnout observed in the highly demanding situation of the demand-control model confirms the main prediction of the model: highly demanding work concentrates the greatest risks to workers' health. The high prevalence of burnout in passive work situations, when compared to active work, suggests that work carried out under low control, even in low demand situations, may be more harmful to the mental health of military police officers. These findings suggest that control may play a more relevant role than psychological demand in producing psychological distress in these workers. This result does not differ from those obtained by Tironi and collaborators⁸ and for Góis and collaborators¹⁰ in intensive care physicians.

It is understood that the objective of this study was achieved. He is a pioneer in estimating the prevalence and investigating

the association between the psychosocial aspects of work and BS in military police officers in a large city in the interior of Bahia. However, it is necessary to make some methodological considerations. Initially, the limitations of the cross-sectional design must be considered, as this study design does not allow establishing a causal link but rather identifying associations. However, this characteristic is in line with the objective of the study, as the design has the potential to raise hypotheses and support intervention proposals.

Another limitation of this study was the use of a self-administered questionnaire, as the research subject may not answer all the questions, making it difficult to control information losses. To minimize this limitation, a pilot study was carried out with the aim of verifying understanding and time for returning the questionnaire. A research dissemination campaign was also carried out in the police units studied, seeking to minimize limitations related to understanding the instrument and, as a consequence, reduce the loss of information.

CONCLUSIONS

The results found revealed a high prevalence of Burnout Syndrome among the military police officers studied. This prevalence was higher among police officers from the 65th CIPM when compared to police officers assigned to BCS-GA.

The high demand situation in the JCQ (high demand and low control) showed a high association with BS both in the 65th CIPM and in the BCS-GA. The Passive Work situation in the JCQ (low demand and low control) was associated with BS in the two units studied (65th CIPM and BCS-GA), indicating the greater importance of the control dimension for the workers studied.

The results of this study made it possible to identify peculiarities about the work and health of military police officers in different Police Units in Feira de Santana and, in this way, offers support for the discussion about the health of these workers, which can contribute to the debate on public security in Feira of Santana and the state of Bahia.

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