The psychological illness of police officers in the exercise of their profession

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ABSTRACT

The emotional coercion exercised on police officers in society can lead to several consequences that are in the public interest. Dealing with the continuous coercion directed at the police officer, in view of the role assigned to him to prevent and combat violence in the social sphere, generates some complications from physical to psychological exhaustion. Seeking to understand the phenomena that occur, namely anxiety disorders, depression and often suicide, has been an arduous task and has shown some success since the 90s through studies observing groups of police officers. In the research, a subcategory of psychiatry is created, sicidiology, which was created to analyze these phenomena more deeply and thus elucidate other disorders that contribute to their worsening in relation to the group in question.

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INTRODUCTION[4]

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), workers' health is an area of Collective Health that aims to develop comprehensive care for workers' health, in this sense it aims to promote and protect workers through actions to monitor environmental risks, working conditions, organization and provision of necessary assistance (WHO, 2001).

Studies indicate that being a police officer is among the six most stressful occupations, as well as the profession that has a rate eight times higher than that of civil servants, of acquiring heart disease, ulcers, effecting divorces, as well as pointing to the increase in alcohol consumption and anxiety disorders (COLETA, 2008).

These data may clarify the probable inability to deal with the difficulties of the occupation, which are of a physical and psychological nature. The work environment, the instruments used in the service and the perception that civilians have in relation to the work of police officers, contribute even more to the difficulties faced by them. Added to this is the action generally exercised by imputing and/or favoring violent behavior, consequently the responsibility that falls on the category when they need to answer for their actions, causing frustrations since it demands interfering in the subjectivity of each of the victims (COLETA, 2008).

However, it is perceived that the organization of work, the conditions that are offered to these workers, the exhaustion and insecurity generated by the type of activity, are fundamental factors to understand the impacts on the subjectivity of this subject (FERREIRA, 2017). "The nature of the military police profession is closely linked to the social regulation of other people's conduct, frequent contact in the face of violence, exposure of physical integrity and the risk of death, under an organizational regime that requires conditioned conduct" (FERREIRA, 2017, p. 1808-1809).

Originating from the Greek, police (polis), they have the same meaning as the word politics, thus referring to the constitution and organization of a certain collective authority (COSTA, 2004). This leads to the conclusion that all relationships that are related to power are political (REINER, 2004), therefore, police activity is political from the first findings to the present day (BAYLEY, 2001; MEDAUAR, 1995).

According to Medauar (1995), as time went by, the idea of police underwent modifications. In ancient times, there was an association of the idea of police with power with the focus on the political order referring to the state or city. In the Middle Ages, the influence of power in the administration was highlighted, still characterizing its political character, and in the Modern Age the notion of police began to have a new format in relation to public administration, thus reducing the characteristics of justice and finance.

It is in the Contemporary Age that the models of police are presented according to those presented today, with their police institutions that are legitimized by the people (MEDAUAR, 1995). The police, then, as a model of institution, emerges in modern societies (REINER, 2004), thus understood as a corporation of people who have the same objectives, which are: to maintain order and perform social service functions, patrol public spaces and control crime (MEDAUAR, 1995; REINER, 2004); These activities, according to Bayley (2001), receive authorization from society, which in turn can be performed through physical or psychological force or threat, with the aim of regulating interpersonal relationships.

Police action legitimized by the people is not well understood since it is the use of force, that is, a society against itself, emphasizing aspects of coercion, control and oppression (BAYLEY, 2001). Considering these factors, even if they are considered necessary in a society, Reiner (2004) shows that the police may seem more successful the less they need it.

Nowadays, police reforms are already being considered, with the aim of reducing their oppressive and ostensive character, emphasizing the role of the community police, which understands that social measures must be considered when it comes to the safety of the population (ROSENBAUM, 2002).

Police officers are exposed to daily contact with the risk of death, their professional performance exposes them to conditions and environments that provide triggering risk factors such as mental and behavioral disorders, anxiety, such as stress, recurrent depression with the risk of leading to suicide (ASSIS; ROZA; BERNARDINO, 2020).

According to (BAYLEY, 2001), police institutions are present in several countries, and their activities are interpreted as actions that use physical force and truculence in situations that are often necessary with the objective of regulating the behavior of a certain group or even a single individual, based on a certain legal reference (BAYLEY, 2001; IVKOVIC, 2008; SILVA; BEATO, 2013).

Military police officers, in the exercise of their duties, assume different positions that are organized by hierarchies such as: major, captain, colonel, lieutenant colonel, sergeant, sub-lieutenant, corporal and soldier, and their attributions are different, according to the Brazilian Classification of occupation (BRASIL, 2020), taking into account that the function assigned to each of these ranks has an important role both in the corporation and in society. Thinking from the perspective of the attributions of each rank, corporals and soldiers are assigned operational tasks, such as the response and solution of occurrences and ostensible and preventive policing. Hierarchically, the warrant officers and sergeants supervise and direct the activities of the group of soldiers and corporals, and following the reasoning of the hierarchical activities, the lieutenant colonels, colonels and majors plan tactical actions, manage administrative activities, as well as ensure hierarchy and discipline.

The performance of work under pressure performed by these professionals generates a very

high stress potential with the risk of losing their lives, and presents with conditions identified regardless of the hierarchy that is peculiar to them (BRASIL, 2010). Cases of military police officers who leave for psychological treatment are very frequent (LIMA; BLANK; MENEGON, 2015). Police officers who use firearms and who carry out high-risk activities, including imminent death, are the ones who are most likely to face high-stress situations, according to Costa et al. (2017).

Military service is considered a work activity that includes risk, from the simplest to the most serious accidents (LOPES; LEITE, 2015). In this sense, it is clear that one cannot compare or define the level of stress that defines other professions. Entry into the police is by passing a public exam (THADEU; FERREIRA; FAIAD, 2012), among all the required requirements, such as written test, endurance test, candidates are also submitted to psychological evaluation that aims to assess the capacity for discernment, understanding and interpretation, among others, and to measure their aptitude for the use of firearms in the exercise of their functions (FEDERAL COUNCIL OF PSYCHOLOGY, 2010).

The process of psychological assessment is recognized by the Federal Council of Psychology (CFP) as an extremely important tool for its technical-scientific character, since it collects data from the individual, provides material for interpretation regarding psychological phenomena through techniques and methods carried out by the professional psychologist duly qualified for this, and the results of these come from the relationship of the individual with society (FEDERAL COUNCIL OF PSYCHOLOGY, 2018).

Entry into the police career is marked by many requirements in its selection process, including psychological evaluation, however, research indicates that there is no periodicity with regard to continuous evaluations within the service (BRITO; GOULART, 2005; COSTA, 2004).

Brito and Goulart (2005) mention that the psychological assessment has the function of a predictor of some unwanted behaviors among police officers, in the case of those that are contraindicated based on the result of the assessment, intolerant behaviors and deviation of conduct are perceived. The main deviations of conduct are torture, arbitrary violence, corruption and drunkenness, embezzlement, aggravated robbery, assaults, homicides, etc., in addition to the deviations mentioned, studies indicate that military police officers who committed suicide had been contraindicated or indicated with restriction in the psychological examination (BRITO; GOULART, 2005).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

These professionals bring with them the feeling of oppression due to the most diverse problems of a social order, where it points to a mistaken culture that they are conflict solvers, on the other hand they are also seen as violent people, in this sense there is a coercion so that they do not

make mistakes in the exercise of their function, whatever it may be. Of the many attributions related to security, it needs to deal with expertise to minimize violence through dialogue and, when this is not possible, to act effectively so that neither the police nor the civilian suffer physical and emotional damage, but this is not always possible, leaving them exposed to such situations on a daily basis.

Police officers are subjected to live under a disciplinary regime with strict rules that are specific to the Corporation, they are forced to adopt a type of behavior, thus causing a limitation in relation to the expression of their subjectivity.

The disease process is triggered by several factors, which are biological, social or psychological, and can affect any individual regardless of gender, age or ethnicity, causing temporary or permanent consequences in relation to productivity and quality of life.

In this way, the work of the police officer exposes him to triggering factors of behavioral and social disorders, thus causing the emergence of various pathologies such as depression, stress, anxiety, and can lead to suicide (ASSIS; ROZA; BERNARDINO, 2020).

The symptoms of these diseases are characterized by tiredness, loss of interest, low self-esteem, lack of concentration, sad mood, discouragement, burnout syndrome, etc. Another problem found is work under stress and in extended shifts, which predispose these police officers to poor sleep quality, and this in turn causes damage to health and increases the risk of death. It contributes to signs and symptoms, among them: circadian dysregulation, sleep insufficiency, in addition to causing disruption of family and social life, which can lead to an increase in allostatic load, altered homeostasis, immune deficiency and endocrine dysfunction.

OSAS (Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome) presents clinically in individuals who present symptoms of snoring, breathing pauses during sleep, and daytime sleepiness or a feeling of non-restorative sleep. This event usually causes reduced oxygenation of the body and sleep fragmentation, leading to systemic consequences and decreased sleep quality. The identification and treatment of these disorders in relation to sleep are extremely important and useful in the policy of prevention of occupational accidents among military police officers so that these problems arising from the lack of quality and time of sleep are solved.

The World Drug Report points out that one in every 100 adult deaths is attributed to the use of illicit drugs, one of the predisposing factors may be sensitivity to anxiety, for example, in the relationship between substance use and emotional disorders. Some scholars consider the use of drugs, licit or illicit, as a result of problems of self-esteem, self-confidence, lack of ability to deal with adverse situations and psychic suffering, thus leading these people to seek temporary relief from the use of these substances, thus relating the factors triggered and possible significant consumption rate by these agents (SOUZA et al, 2013).

According to Bastos (2010), it was from the 1950s onwards, through a subspecialty of psychiatry called suicidology, that the phenomenon of suicide began to be considered a public health problem. Suicide is the death resulting, directly or indirectly, from acts performed by the victim himself aware of the production of such a result. Suicidiology seeks to produce knowledge about this phenomenon, including biochemical, pharmacological, psychiatric, sociological, and psychological explanations.

Correlated to this, symptoms of post-traumatic stress increased significantly in addition to the associations between lack of organizational support and hopelessness, an important risk factor for suicide in police officers, who in turn suffer as previously said from coercion at work, which they can develop problems such as anxiety and depression becoming an easy target for this sad practice (PEREIRA; EARLY MORNING; KAWAHALA, 2020).

METHOD

This article is a documentary research in a qualitative approach, based on documents, legislation and studies related to the subject. The methodology applied was through qualitative bibliographic research, with scientific articles, books, periodicals being consulted in order to address the theme with greater intensity and clarity. (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2011). The article aims to demystify the function performed by the police officer and understand the stressors that may interfere with their psycho-emotional health. Thus, for a better understanding of the theme, different studies were carried out that supported the article. To build the theoretical framework, we chose the following scholars from Dejous (1992), Lipp (1996), Santos, Hauer and Furtado (2019) among others who will contribute to the theoretical basis and deepening of the theme in question.

DISCUSSION

According to Dejours (1992) and Lipp (1996), human suffering can be associated with the work process and, therefore, it is necessary to understand its causes in order to modify it and reorganize contingencies that are more favorable to the work process. Stress, in this context, results from the interaction of the individual's characteristics and the influences suffered by him through the environmental context. That is, it is the relationship between internal and external environments, together with the individual's perception of his own capacity to respond and cope (DEJOURS, 1992; LIPP, 1996, apud OLIVEIRA; SANTOS, 2010).

Several factors related to working conditions must be considered in order to identify the causes of psychological suffering with regard to the professional performance of police officers, problems such as dissatisfaction with working conditions, stress, overload, long working hours,

unconditional obligation not to be fragile, among other factors can trigger the development of psychological disorders. (SANTOS; HAUER; FURTADO, 2019).

It is possible, therefore, to think about effective interventions within the corporation for stress management, such as a program that aims to diagnose and measure the level of stress; recognition of internal and external stressors that are present in their daily lives; food program accompanied by a nutritionist/nutritionist and recreational activities at a certain time of the day, that is, it is important that there is a set of interventions that cover the social, affective and physical health of professionals (COSTA *et al*., 2007; LIMONGI FRANÇA, 2002).

In summary, the study presented here sought to bring to light some aspects of fundamental importance in the social environment, since the vulnerability of military police officers in relation to stress is perceived through social media. This study is relevant in view of the emotional crisis to which the vast majority of military police officers are subjected.

Thus, there is a need for more in-depth and complementary studies to the one presented here, which are capable of qualitatively and quantitatively evaluating the data obtained under observation, since stress in the profession of military police is very common and should not go unnoticed.

CONCLUSION

The present research made it possible to verify that the work environment in which the Police Officer is inserted can be a trigger for diseases, such as stress, depression, anxiety, among others. Due to the rigidity of the principles of one's own work, discipline and military hierarchy, low salaries, exacerbated workload, psychological tension regarding the protection and guarantee of life, always being exposed to life-threatening situations.

The lack of assistance, and sensitivity of the Military Corporation itself, not having adequate psychological health service to assist the police officers on active duty, mainly. The low salary encourages many of these police officers to seek other services to increase family income, consequently reducing their rest hours. Poor sleep quality considerably aggravates the risks of both errors in practical action and logical reasoning, often leading the police officer to use illicit substances.

The risk of suicide is also a point to be considered within this context. All these factors provide the police with a great conflict, in protecting and having to seek their own protection, where they are to take care of, serve the population, but they do not receive specific care from their own institutions, thus causing fears and uncertainties.

In order for the situation in relation to stress to improve, it is important first of all to admit the problem, because many police officers are affected, but neither seek nor accept help because they do

not recognize that their work causes damage, in this sense it is necessary that there is involvement on their part.

Psychology can offer several preventive and prophylactic works in relation to the treatment of the emotional health of police officers, some such as: individual monitoring, behavioral training, individual or group psychological guidance. Some very useful suggestions are the practice of activities that are not related to function that promote well-being and relaxation, such as some sports that do not generate competition, but socialization, meditation, yoga, stretching, pilates, etc. Stimulate the search for reliable friendships that are not from the preferred work environment. It is important to note that stress is most of the time not identified immediately, for this, it is necessary that police officers and those who are part of their life are aware of the first signs, remembering that each case is unique with its characteristics and specific method of dealing.

In this sense, it is concluded that stress in police officers is a very complex demand, but that from an awareness and acceptance of the problem by the affected person, it is possible to treat it, minimizing the emotional consequences. It is necessary that the Corporation offers this service responsibly, and sustains this place in front of its subordinates, without imputing to them any value judgment or debique so that such professionals can have their quality of life and well-being assured in their work environment and outside it.

The study made important contributions to the field of mental health. Usually, research with military police officers focuses only on specific aspects of the profession, in this sense, mental illness and aggressiveness are not analyzed in a more detailed way, a factor that would be of paramount importance for understanding the phenomenon more broadly.

It is important to consider that the actions mentioned here can be useful as strategies for health promotion and prevention of mental illnesses in the category. Provide public security agencies with spaces to think about short, medium and long-term projects to improve the work context of police officers.

Therefore, it is suggested that from this work, the competent bodies can identify and intervene more effectively in the quality of life of military police officers, so that they can offer them decent working conditions, continuous psychological follow-up thinking about the promotion of mental health.

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