

1. Introduction

Police work is a stressful activity (Bittner, 1991; Blum, 2000; Dowler, 2005; Hackett & Violanti, 2003), eliciting burnout, health diseases, and aggression toward own-self (e.g. suicide) or others, such as verbal or physical aggression (Ainsworth, 2002; Thompson et al., 2005; Violanti, 1996). Especially, society and researchers try to understand if chronic sources of stress increase perception of threats in the environment and aggressiveness of responses to those threats (Griffin & Bernard, 2003) that leads to the exercise of coercive power and increase use of force (Euwema, Kop & Bakker, 2004; Manzoni & Eisner, 2006; McCluskey et al., 2005; Sack, 2009). Burnout and aggressive behaviour affect well-being and emotional stability of police officers, reduces quality of police services and relationship with citizens, and have negative impact on social representation of police forces.

Key words: Burnout, Aggressivity, Police Officers

2. Aims

This study aims to investigate the influence of burnout on aggressive behaviour on a sample of Portuguese police officers.

3. Method

Participants: Non-probabilistic sample of **60 male Portuguese police officers** working in Oporto Municipal Police force (police staff who aren't civilian elements but elements of Polícia de Segurança Pública; only Oporto and Lisbon have this type of police municipal force); age between 32 to 53 years (M=43.4 and SD=6.3); 53% with 9th year of school level and 47% with 12th year; 78% married and 87% with children; working in Municipal Police between 1 to 3 years (M=2.02 and SD=0.8); working in Polícia de Segurança Pública between 10 to 30 years (M=19.5 and SD=6.1).

Instruments: Questionnaire to collect individual and professional characterization, *Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey* (MBI-HSS, Maslach & Jackson, 1997); and *Aggression Questionnaire* (AQ, Buss & Perry, 1992), both with adapted Portuguese versions for this study.

Procedure: Data were collected in Oporto Municipal Police, during 2010, using self-completion questionnaire, anonymous and confidential, after formal Municipal Police authorization.

Data analysis: SPSS-18 was used to do a descriptive, correlation analysis (*R Pearson*) and regression analysis.

4. Results

Despite low levels of burnout (especially low depersonalization, low emotional exhaustion and high professional accomplishment) and low levels of aggressivity dimensions (however verbal aggressivity and hostility show moderate levels), results show statistical significant correlations between burnout dimensions and aggressivity dimensions (Table 1). Especially, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are positively correlated with aggressivity dimensions. Stepwise regression shows that each burnout dimension contributes differentially for aggressivity dimensions (Table 2), and total score of aggressivity was predicted negatively by professional accomplishment and positively by emotional exhaustion.

Table 1. Means, Standard deviations, Cronbach's Alpha and inter-correlations of MBI and AQ dimensions

	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
MBI (0-6)	1. Emotional exhaustion	1.60	1.18	.940						
	2. Depersonalization	0.93	1.07	.777	.550**					
	3. Professional accomplishment	4.53	1.26	.917	-.084	-.077				
AQ (1-5)	4. Verbal aggressivity	2.78	0.46	.729	-.222	.133	-.267*			
	5. Physical aggressivity	2.17	0.58	.719	.331**	.279*	-.349**	.547**		
	6. Hostility	2.49	0.67	.735	.537**	.456**	-.146	.465**	.539**	
	7. Irritability	2.06	0.65	.809	.413**	.295*	-.344**	.548**	.782**	.745**
	8. Total aggressivity	2.33	0.52	.908	.471**	.373**	-.321*	.680**	.868**	.849**

*p < 0.050 **p < 0.010 ***p < 0.001

Table 2. Predictive value of burnout dimensions for AQ dimensions

	R ²	R ² change	β	F	t
Verbal aggressivity					
Professional accomplishment	.071	.071	-.267	4.465 *	-2.113*
Physical aggressivity					
Professional accomplishment	.122	.122	-.372	8.039**	-3.167**
Depersonalization	.216	.094	.308	6.857*	2.619*
Hostility					
Emotional exhaustion	.289	.289	.537	23.559***	4.854***
Irritability					
Emotional exhaustion	.171	.171	.387	11.937***	3.401***
Professional accomplishment	.267	.096	-.312	10.389***	-2.739**
Total aggressivity					
Emotional exhaustion	.221	.221	.447	16.490***	4.021***
Professional accomplishment	.301	.080	-.284	*6.511	-2.552*

5. Conclusions

Aggressive behaviour can be explained not only by biological theories (Berkowitz, 1993; Lorenz, 1966) but also by social theories (Bandura, 1973). Furthermore, human evolution is related with violence and aggressivity. However, in actual societies violence is not accepted. Therefore police officers suffer ambivalence of being the target of the aggressivity of citizens and react aggressively only in special situations of danger and damage to the public order. Our findings suggest the influence of burnout on aggressivity, alerting to the importance of negative consequences of burnout that can have negatively impact on police officers and on the organization, contributing to a negative relationship between police officers and citizens.

6. Bibliography

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