Burnout and psychopathological symptoms among police officers: reciprocal predictors

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1. Background & Aims

According literature, policing is one of the most stressful occupations, affecting police officers’ health (Habersaat et al., 2015). They are repeatedly exposed to operational stressors in the form of unpredictable and potentially dangerous or traumatic situations (Albuere et al., 2015; Balmer et al., 2014; Yung et al., 2015). Studies associated burnout and psychopathology, suggesting a decrease in psychological wellbeing elicited by job tasks (Vendel et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2014). Several authors (Kelty & Gordon, 2015; Stanley et al., 2016) referred that police officers have high risk to develop occupational stress and suicidal thoughts, prejudicing individuals and organizations. This study aims to identify burnout and psychopathological symptoms among police officers from Portuguese National Police (PSP), and to know the relationship between burnout and psychopathological symptoms, checking if they are reciprocal predictors.

2. Methods

Data were collected during regular and official psychological assessment done by Psychology Unit of PSP to 952 police officers during their 1st year working on Lisbon. All were male, mean age of 26.29 years (SD=2.44), and they fulfilled Portuguese versions of MBI (Maslach et al., 1997; Marques-Pinto & Picado, 2011) and SCL90-R (Derogatis, 1977; Batista, 1993).

3. Results

Regarding burnout (Table 1) low levels were found, as well low presence of psychopathological symptoms (all psychopathological symptoms were low, less than 1, using a 0-4 scale). Emotional exhaustion correlates stronger with depression, somatization and hostility, while professional achievement correlates negatively with psychopathological symptoms (excepting disease degree). Age only correlates negatively and weakly with depersonalization. Regression analysis (Table 2) revealed that psychopathological symptoms explain 38% of emotional exhaustion, 22% of depersonalization and 11% of professional achievement, with depression contributing more, positively, to emotional exhaustion (30%) and, negatively, to professional achievement (10%), while hostility contributes more, positively, to depersonalization (20%). Reciprocally, burnout dimensions explain 38% of psychopathology severity and 30% of symptoms diversity, and only 10% of disease degree, being emotion-exhaustion the major predictor (between 9% and 34%). Professional achievement didn’t contribute to explain disease degree.

4. Conclusions

Despite the presence of low burnout level and low psychopathological symptoms, depression and emotional exhaustion were correlated, and reciprocal predictors present the same value, alerting for the need to regular assessment of these professionals to prevent occupational stress and to define stress management programs focused on police officers’ needs (Anshel & Brinthaupt, 2014; Garbarino & Magnaniva, 2015; Grubb et al., 2015; Mihara & Martin, 2012; Patterson et al., 2015). As Maslach (2015) referred, “It’s time to take action on burnout”, and to follow EU-OSHA (2016) campaign about workplace stress management.

References