

## BURNOUT SYNDROME, DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND SUICIDE IDEATION IN PUBLIC SECURITY SERVERS

### SÍNDROME DE BURNOUT, DEPRESSÃO, ANSIEDADE E IDEAÇÃO SUICIDA EM SERVIDORES DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA

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#### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to evaluate the prevalence of Burnout Syndrome, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation in public security workers who work in Minas Gerais. This is a descriptive research, with a quantitative, comparative and transversal approach. The sample consisted of 80 public security officers, male (81,3%) and female (18,7%), including socio-educational agents, military police, prison officers, military firefighters and civil police, chosen at random and who accepted to participate voluntarily in the research. Beck's anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation inventories and Maslach's Burnout inventory were used as instruments, with a descriptive statistic using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. A low prevalence rate of depression, suicidal ideation was found and anxiety among the participants, however the results are not unanimous and considering the employees in a unique way, it is possible to perceive the presence of the psychological sufferings mentioned in a smaller portion of the sample. Regarding the Burnout Syndrome, it was evident that the characteristics of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization showed low prevalence, since work involvement was considered low for most workers, being a factor that contributes significantly to the occurrence of such a syndrome. Despite the prevalence of the researched psychological disorders present low among the participants, the individual analysis shows the prevalence of these sufferings in some professionals, reinforcing that the work stress is experienced in a unique way by each one, being able to evolve to a disorder or be reframed.

**Keywords:** Anxiety. Depression. Occupational Stress. Professional Exhaustion. Suicidal Ideation.

#### RESUMO

O estudo teve como objetivo avaliar a prevalência da Síndrome de Burnout, depressão, ansiedade e ideação suicida em servidores de segurança pública que atuam em Minas Gerais. Trata-se de uma pesquisa descritiva, com abordagem quantitativa, comparativa e transversal. A amostra foi composta de 80 servidores de segurança pública, sexo masculino (81,3%) e feminino (18,7%), incluindo agentes socioeducativos, policiais militares, agentes penitenciários, bombeiros militares e policiais civis, escolhidos de forma aleatória e que aceitaram participar voluntariamente da pesquisa. Como instrumentos foram utilizados os inventários de ansiedade, depressão e ideação suicida de Beck e o inventário de Burnout de Maslach, sendo realizada uma estatística descritiva através do Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Foi verificado baixo índice de prevalência de depressão, ideação suicida e ansiedade entre os participantes, entretanto os resultados não são unânimes e, avaliando os servidores de maneira singular, é possível perceber a presença dos sofrimentos psicológicos mencionados em uma parcela menor da amostra. Em relação à Síndrome de Burnout, ficou evidente que as características de exaustão emocional e despersonalização demonstraram baixa prevalência, já o envolvimento no trabalho foi considerado baixo para a maior parte dos trabalhadores, sendo um fator que contribui de forma significativa para a ocorrência de tal síndrome. Conclui-se que, apesar da prevalência dos transtornos psicológicos pesquisados apresentarem baixa incidência entre os participantes, a análise individual apresenta a prevalência desses sofrimentos em alguns profissionais, reforçando que o estresse laboral é vivenciado de maneira singular por cada um, podendo evoluir para um transtorno ou ser ressignificado.

**Palavras-chave:** Ansiedade. Depressão. Esgotamento Profissional. Estresse Ocupacional. Ideação Suicida.

## INTRODUCTION

When dealing with occupational stress, professionals have the commitment of time, because physical and emotional overload reduce the time invested in activities that favor their growth and professional improvement. Thus, causing demotivation and exhaustion of energy and emotional resources due to daily contact with problems and emotional exhaustion. Thus, work, together with suffering can become factor that causes psychological and bodily stress, consequently causing work stress (MENEZES *et al.*, 2017).

Corroborating this idea, Vasques and Menezes (2015) state that work stress can cause many physical and/or psychological diseases and these sufferings have been analyzed in professionals who provide direct care to service users, such as public security officials, including socio-educational agents, military police, prison officers, military firefighters, civil police, among others.

When performing their function, public security servers are exposed to an environment, often hostile, being vulnerable to factors that can impair their physical, psychological and moral completeness. Taking into account that the activities performed require concentration skills, high rate of productivity with schedule per shift, unexpected situations such as direct or indirect threat of violence, and high level of responsibility, which are considered stressful situations (GRECO, 2011).

Recurrent absence and constant medical absence are factors that reveal the ineffectiveness of rest hours for recovery and the well-being of public safety servants, and greater attention to the psychological and physical health of these workers is necessary (VAILLANT, 2017).

One of the reflexes of this high degree of stress experienced by public safety servants is the relatively high rate of absenteeism. The daily experience experienced by these workers is an environment conducive to the development of syndromes related to work stress, such as Burnout Syndrome, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation.

Burnout Syndrome refers to a syndrome in which the worker loses the sense of his relationship with work and reacts as if the attributions destined to him/her were no longer important, any effort seems useless and without need to be carried out. It involves three components, among them, the emotional exhaustion that is characterized by a lack of energy accompanied by a feeling of emotional exhaustion. The second component is depersonalization, that is, there is an affective hardening or emotional insensitivity on the part of the worker, making more evident the cynicism and affective dissimulation. One more factor is the lack of personal involvement resulting from personal and professional inadequacy and also from negative self-assessment and decreased contact with co-workers through isolation. (MUROFUSE *et al.*, 2005).

For Soares (2009) depression can arise in several clinical conditions, and may occur as a response to stressful situations or adverse social and economic circumstances. Depression includes not only mood changes (sadness, irritability, lack of ability to feel pleasure, apathy), but also cognitive, psychomotor and vegetative changes (sleep, appetite).

The most common characteristics of depressive states are feelings of sadness and emptiness, many workers refer, above all, to the loss of the ability to experience pleasure in activities in general and the reduction of interest in the environment. It is often associated with feeling fatigue or loss of energy, characterized by the complaint of excessive tiredness.

Depression is a common disorder worldwide: it is estimated that more than 300 million people suffer from it (PAHO, s/d), and special attention is needed for both psychological disorder and anxiety.

The latter is characterized by a vague and unpleasant feeling of fear, apprehension, which is characterized by tension or prominent discomfort of anticipation of danger, of an unknown or strange situation. Anxiety and fear are recognized as pathological when they are exaggerated, disproportionate to the stimulus, or qualitatively different from what is observed as a norm in that age group and interfere in the quality of life, emotional comfort or daily performance of the individual (CASTILLO *et al.*, 2000).

A review with 87 studies by Baxter *et al.* (2013), in 44 countries, estimated the current prevalence of anxiety disorders at 7.3% (4.8%-10.9%), being pointed out as one of the problems that lead to suicide.

In this perspective, according to the Ministry of Health (2006), in suicidal ideation there are phases that usually begin with the conception or contemplation of the suicidal act. Soon after, a strategy of how to kill him/herself, which can be elaborated through both realistic and imaginary essays until, finally, result in an effective destructive action.

However, we must keep in mind that the result of a suicidal act depends on a multiplicity of variables that do not always involve planning. It is possible to observe risky behaviors that may signal a request for help, such as behavior changes, social isolation, ideas of self-punishment and pessimistic verbalizations. In the inability to see possible ways of coping with pain, they choose death as a form of escape (FONTENELLE, 2008).

According to WHO data (2012), the worldwide suicide rate is estimated at around 16 per 100,000 inhabitants, with the suicide mortality rate increasing by 60% in the last 45 years. Suicide attempts are estimated to be 20 times more frequent than the consummate act.

Taking into account the prevalence of psychic disorders among public safety servants, Budchen *et al.* (2017) report that exposure to hostility and shift-based work hours are directly linked to the high incidence of occupational stress, threatening their psychological and physical health when exposed to these variables, since functions with high strain, high mental demands and low control have been correlated with minor psychic disorders.

In this context, this study aimed to evaluate the prevalence of Burnout syndrome, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation in public safety servers working in Minas Gerais.

Therefore, the present study becomes relevant in the possibility of identifying the real psychological health picture of these public servants, taking into account that they are more vulnerable to occupational stress. Also showing the need for strategic and educational actions to reduce this serious problem, thus improving the life quality of these professionals.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Federal University of Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri (UFVJM), under opinion n° 123696/2019. The research is descriptive, comparative with quantitative approach and cross-sectional approach.

The sample consisted of 80 public safety servants, being male (81.3%) (18.7%), including socio-educational agents, military police, prison officers, military firefighters and civilian police, chosen at random. The servers that perform their function in public institutions of Minas Gerais on a regular basis and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the search through Google Forms were included and those who did not answer the questionnaires according to previous instruction were excluded.

To assess anxiety, the Beck Anxiety Inventory – BAI (BECK, 1988) adapted in Brazil by Cunha (2001) was used. This instrument aims to measure the level of anxiety of the individual between minimum, mild, moderate and severe through 21 questions that encompass frequent symptoms of anxiety, and these items should be scored on a scale from zero to three by the evaluation, and the higher their score, the symptoms will be more recurrent and severe.

To assess depression, the Beck Depression Inventory – BDI (BECK; STEER, 1993) also adapted by Cunha (2001) was used. It has 21 items with the objective of measuring the levels of symptoms related to depression; each item can be classified from zero to three and should be marked according to their prevalence. As in BAI, the level of depression can be classified as minimal, mild, moderate and severe, from the standardization table.

To evaluate the occurrence of suicidal ideation, was used the Beck Suicidal Ideation Inventory - BSI (BECK; KOVACS; WEISSMAN, 1979), adapted by Cunha (2001). It allows analyzing the occurrence of suicidal ideation through 21 items with three possibilities of answers.

The individual should choose the alternative that most describes how he felt in the last week, and the first group of statements has 19 items that are linked to the prevalence of suicidal desires, attitudes and thoughts. Items 20 and 21 assess factors related to the number of previous attempts at self-extermination and the magnitude of the intention to die in the last attempt, if it occurred.

To evaluate the incidence of Burnout Syndrome, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - MBI (MASLACH; SCHAUFELI; LEITER, 2001) was used, through 16 questions, subdivided into questions related to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal fulfillment, which describe situations experienced in the work environment, and the participant should mark the occurrence between 0 (Never); 1 (A few times a year or less); 2 (Once a month or less); 3 (Sometimes during the month); 4 (Once a week); 5 (A few times during the week); 6 (Every day).

All questionnaires were sent to participants through Google Forms, which also contained the instructions regarding the survey. Those who voluntarily agreed to participate answered the questionnaires. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the data and privacy of those involved, no names were collected. All evaluations were carried out in April/2020.

After data collection, descriptive and comparative analyses were performed with values of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The entire statistical procedure was performed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 for Windows.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample consisted of 80 participants aged 23 to 55 years ( $34.5 \pm 7.1$  years), with a predominance of males (81.3%) and married (61.3%).

Regarding the participants' education, complete higher education prevails with 71.3%. About the occupation that the servants perform in public security, 30% of those surveyed are socio-educational agents, 31.2% are military police, 2.5% are military firefighters, 35% prison officers and 1.3% are civil police officers (Table 1).

**Table 1** - Sample group with values in real and absolute frequency (n = 80)

Variable	Options	N - %
Education	Complete high school	6 - 7.4
	Incomplete higher	17 - 21.3
	Graduated	57 - 71.3
Occupation	Socio-educational Agent	24 - 30.0
	Military police	25 - 31.2
	Military Firefighter	2 - 2.5
	Prison guard	28 - 35.0
	Civil police	1 - 1.3

**Source:** the authors.

Taking into account the notes of the applied tests, the levels and recurrences of the following variables were evaluated: depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety and Burnout Syndrome. When analyzing these four variables, it is possible to perceive the degree (minimum, mild, moderate or severe) of occurrence of mental disorders that the servants may develop resulting from the activities performed in the function.

Regarding the sample group, the mean age of the participants was 34 years. On the other hand, a study conducted with public security officials in the state of Santa Catarina, presents the average age of 42 years among the participants. One hypothesis for the age difference between the states would be that the employees of Minas Gerais enter the public service earlier (SILVEIRA, 2010).

Regarding the gender of the participants, the male sex prevailed (81.3%). In agreement with the results, a previous survey on public safety professionals shows that 85% of the interviewees are

also male, which shows that in this sector women are still in the minority, but there has been a reduction in the gender disparity (SILVA; SILVA, 2018).

The most prevalent marital status was married (61.3%) and most of the surveyed have completed higher education (71.3%). In disagreement with this research, a study conducted with military personnel from a northeastern Brazilian state shows the predominance of stable union (79.2%) and high school (35.6%) between participants. These results show the cultural differences between Brazilian states (ALVES; BENDASSOLLI; GONDIM, 2017).

Among the participants, the most recurrent public security occupation was that of Prison Officer (35%). However, another survey also conducted with public security officials shows that the professionals who most adhered to the survey were Military Police officers (44.5%) (SILVA; SILVA, 2018).

Regarding depression, the results obtained showed that 70% of the interviewees had a minimum degree of depression, 21.2% mild to moderate, 5% moderate to severe and 3.8% severe depression (Table 2).

**Table 2** - Depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation, with values in real and absolute frequency (n = 80)

Variable	Options	N – %
Depression	Minimum	56 – 70.0
	Light	17 – 21.2
	Moderate	4 – 5.0
	Serious	3 – 3.8
Anxiety	Minimum	55 – 68.7
	Light	14 – 17.5
	Moderate	4 – 5.0
	Serious	7 – 8.8
Suicidal ideation	Has no suicidal ideation	70 – 87.3
	Has suicidal ideation	7 – 8.8
	Has suicidal ideation and has attempted suicide	2 – 2.6
	Currently has no suicidal ideation, but has attempted suicide	1 – 1.3

**Source:** the authors.

In line with the results of the present study, a study conducted with military personnel using the Beck Depression Inventory also shows that most of the researched (66%) showed minimal symptoms in relation to depression. When the mild to severe levels of depression were added, in this study, 30% was obtained, in the same way in the study compared, 34% was observed, emerging a presence of depressive symptomatology on a smaller scale (COSTA; ESTEVAM, 2014).

Regarding anxiety, among the participants of the study, 68.7% were classified with minimal anxiety, 17.5% with mild anxiety, 5% moderate and 8.8% with severe anxiety.

Civil servants in the security area play an important role in the functioning of the institutions they represent, and need to work as a team, be in a constant state of alertness, demonstrate keen attention, self-control, proactivity, initiative and ability to circumvent adverse situations. Considering these factors, this percentage of anxiety is considered low. This may be related to the internalization of pressure as being inherent to work in this area.

A study conducted with Prison Agents of Santa Catarina also shows that the majority of participants (94.3%) presents minimal anxiety and only 5.26% pathological anxiety, noting that most servers can control their anxieties and emotions, and contain anxiety (BONEZ; DAL MORO; SEHNEM, 2013).

For suicidal ideation, the results showed that 87.3% of those evaluated do not have suicidal ideation, 8.8% have suicidal ideation, 2.6% have suicidal ideation and have tried suicide and 1.3%

do not currently have suicidal ideation, but have already attempted suicide. Considering the characteristics of the work, the risks involved, the environment, the occurrence of suicide cases committed by public safety officials, this percentage is low, since the environment in which these workers work constitutes a constant risk factor to mental health due to pressures and risks.

A study conducted with prison agents, 100% of the participants do not have suicidal ideation (BONEZ; DAL MORO; SEHNEM, 2013).

The results obtained with this research demonstrated a low prevalence rate of depression, suicidal ideation and anxiety among public servants working with public security in Minas Gerais. However, it is important to emphasize that professionals have different reactions to work stress, reacting in a unique way, and may or may not trigger psychological disorders. In addition, workplaces, through the relationships that professionals establish with superiors and colleagues and the work routine intensity can also facilitate or mitigate the prevalence of these mental sufferings.

Based on this principle, Silva e Silva (2018), in a literature review research, according to the research reviewed, employees who work in public safety are affected with psychological suffering, triggered by stress, aggravating for major mental disorders. In some cases, reaching ideations and suicide attempts.

Our study revealed that the risk of suicide, although low among professionals working in public safety, is associated with the presence of anxiety and depression and low involvement at work, a variable of Burnout Syndrome.

In this sense, studies conducted by Bertolote, Mello-Santos and Botega (2010) proved the difficulty to prevent suicide, given the complexity of discovering the imminent risk of suicidal behavior. However, risk assessment, identification of risk factors and use of strategies including use of methods of tracking and identification of people at risk, suicide risk management, education of the general population, coverage of responsible media, diagnosis and effective treatments and permanent education of professional teams may contribute to suicide prevention.

In the evaluation of Burnout Syndrome (Table 3), the first component evaluated was "emotional exhaustion" that encompasses feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, depression, anger, impatience, irritability, tension, decreased empathy; feeling of low energy, weakness, worry; increased susceptibility to diseases, headaches, nausea, muscle tension, low back or neck pain, and sleep disorders. In this research, participants presented 80% as low level, 8.8% medium and 11.2% high.

**Table 3 - Burnout syndrome**, with values in real and absolute frequency (n = 80)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Options</b>	<b>N – %</b>
Emotional exhaustion	Low	64 – 80.0
	Medium	7 – 8.8
	High	9 – 11.2
Depersonalization	Low	55 – 68.7
	Medium	14 – 17.5
	High	11 – 13.8
Personal involvement in work	Low	62 – 77.5
	Medium	18 – 22.5
	High	0 – 0

**Source:** the authors.

Another characteristic evaluated in the same test was the "depersonalization" resulting from affective distancing and feeling of alienation in relation to colleagues in the profession. Among the participants, 68.7% had a low rating, 17.5% average and 13.8% were high.

The last characteristic evaluated by the MBI Inventory was "involvement at work". Of the participants, 77.5% considered the involvement low, 22.5% medium and 0% high. This result shows that the lack of involvement in work points to interpersonal relationships, satisfaction with

work, relationships with managers - factors that directly interfere in the motivation of people who are fragile.

Regarding burnout syndrome, it was evident in this study that the first two variables showed low prevalence in most of the professionals evaluated. In contrast, a survey conducted with military personnel, also through the Maslach Burnout Inventory, found a high level of police officers with emotional exhaustion and an average level of depersonalization. Work involvement was considered low in this study for most workers. This is a worrisome fact, being a factor that contributes significantly to the occurrence of such a syndrome. Conversely, in the study conducted with military personnel, it was observed that the participants have a high level of involvement at work (ASCARI *et al.*, 2016).

This low involvement in work may be linked to work stress, but also to other stressful situations that can alter the functioning of the individual, both physically and psychologically. Among the main demotivation factors that increase the absenteeism rate are career plans that do not encourage professionals to progress, overload of activities, salaries incompatible with functions, among other factors that contribute to the low involvement of employees and possibly to the prevalence of Burnout Syndrome (SILVA; SILVA, 2018).

The lack of personal involvement at work is an aspect that needs to be observed, as it says about the feeling of personal and professional inadequacy. There is a probability that the worker evaluates him/herself negatively, this evaluation ends up affecting the ability to perform the work, the contact with people, as well as with the institution in which he/she works.

The present study presents inherent limitations of cross-sectional research, in the impossibility of the cause-effect relationship.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected, it is concluded that, in general, the prevalence of Burnout Syndrome, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation among the public safety servants surveyed was lower than the data recommended by the World Health Organization - WHO. However, although these psychological disorders present low incidence among the participants, in an individual analysis, a prevalence of these sufferings was observed in some professionals, reinforcing that work stress is experienced in a singular way by each one, and may evolve to a disorder or be reframed.

Thus, psychological suffering scans can be triggered not only by work stress itself, but it has other factors that can contribute and that must be taken into account to make a diagnosis, such as: age, schooling, marital status, among others.

One data presented and that deserves attention was the low rate of involvement in the work of the participants, which can greatly contribute to the occurrence of Burnout Syndrome. Therefore, it is salutary that the institutions to which the servants are linked and the State work the prevention of these psychological disorders among their collaborators, so that they do not evolve, for example, to suicidal ideations, and that allow the discussion of the theme mental health in these spaces, providing therapeutic support for workers.

Further studies based on the results found here should be done.

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