

## BURNOUT SYNDROME: AN EVALUATION WITH CIVIL POLICE OFFICERS OF A MUNICIPALITY IN THE MEDIUM PARAÍBA REGION<sup>1</sup>

### *SÍNDROME DE BURNOUT: UMA AVALIAÇÃO COM POLICIAIS CIVIS DE UM MUNICÍPIO DA REGIÃO MÉDIO PARAÍBA*

### *SÍNDROME DE BURNOUT: UNA EVALUACIÓN CON POLÍTICAS CIVILES DE UN MUNICIPIO DEL CENTRO DE LA REGIÓN MEDIA DE PARAÍBA*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper seeks to identify the occurrence of Burnout Syndrome in civilian police officers, based on a descriptive-quantitative study conducted with 28 professionals from a police station in the Medium Paraíba Region. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used for data collection with socio-demographic and professional data questions. The cutoff points of the MBI developed by the Study and Research Group on Stress and Burnout Syndrome (GEPEB) were used as reference for correction. There was a predominance of male police officers, married and with children, graduated at a higher level, occupying the position of police inspector. The presence of the syndrome was found in 50% of the professionals researched and high level in the dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and Low Professional Achievement. It was concluded that there is a need to look at mental health, with care strategies aimed at ensuring the physical and emotional integrity of police officers.

**KEYWORDS:** Burnout syndrome. Civil police. Worker's health.

**RESUMO:** O presente artigo busca identificar a ocorrência da Síndrome de Burnout em policiais civis, a partir de um estudo descritivo-quantitativo, realizado com 28 profissionais de uma delegacia de polícia da Região Médio Paraíba. Na coleta de dados, foi utilizado o Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) com questões de dados sociodemográficos e profissionais. Como referência para correção foi utilizado os pontos de corte do MBI desenvolvidos pelo Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas Sobre Estresse e Síndrome de Burnout (GEPEB). Houve predominância de policiais do sexo masculino, casados e com filhos, com graduação em nível superior, ocupantes do cargo de inspetor de polícia. Constatou-se o indicativo de presença da Síndrome em 50% dos profissionais pesquisados e alto nível nas dimensões de Exaustão Emocional, Despersonalização e Baixa Realização Profissional. Conclui-se a necessidade de

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*um olhar no que tange a saúde mental, com estratégias de cuidado que visem garantir a integridade física e emocional dos policiais.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Síndrome de Burnout. Polícia civil. Saúde do trabalhador.*

**RESUMEN:** *Este artículo busca identificar la ocurrencia del Síndrome de Burnout en policías civiles, a partir de un estudio descriptivo-cuantitativo, realizado con 28 profesionales de una comisaría de policía de la Región Media de Paraíba. En la recolección de datos se utilizó el Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) con cuestiones de datos sociodemográficos y profesionales. Como referencia para la corrección se utilizaron los puntos de corte del MBI desarrollados por el Grupo de Estudio e Investigación sobre el Estrés y Síndrome de Burnout (GEPEB). Predominó el sexo masculino, casados y con hijos, diplomados en la enseñanza superior, ocupando el cargo de inspector de policía. La presencia del Síndrome se encontró en el 50% de los profesionales investigados y alto nivel en las dimensiones de Agotamiento Emocional, Despersonalización y Bajo Rendimiento Profesional. Se concluye la necesidad de una mirada hacia la salud mental, con estrategias de atención que tengan como objetivo garantizar la integridad física y emocional de los policías.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Síndrome de Burnout. Policía civil. Salud del trabajador.*

## Introduction

Work has always been present in people's lives, and they can be a source of success and joy, as well as of dissatisfaction and failure in various spheres, but, according to Dejours (2015), work does not always enable professional achievement. With technological and scientific development, globalization has taken on great strength, and the dimension of concrete work has given more space to abstract work, in which it is demanded not only the "manual" strength, but also the intellectual of the worker, its time, its qualification. This means that the new demands of the contemporary world place the worker in a situation in which real work demands an activity beyond what is prescribed.

The professions that require direct contact with the public are considered the most exposed to various psychosocial stressors related to the nature of work and the institutional and social context to which they are subject. This makes these people vulnerable to opportunistic diseases such as the Burnout Syndrome, which proves to be a serious problem in the professional world because it interferes on the institutional, social and also personal levels.

Burnout Syndrome is a disease that is associated with the world of work and that currently, following the ICD-10 classification (10th International Disease Code) is conceptualized as a result of chronic stress that has not been successfully managed.

In the case of the police profession, which is the subject of this study, it is a career submitted to the public sector, in which direct interpersonal contact with the population is required, and the demand for the work is directly linked to meeting the desires of the users. Police officers tend to deal both with the pressures of society, which demand and demand more effective measures and policies in public security, as well as the physical and emotional overload generated precisely by the difficulty of responding to these demands, hampered by the precarious working conditions in which they live.

This means that the diminished response capacity often causes the agent to use its own resources to alleviate these situations. In this sense, the objective of this research was to evaluate the presence of the Burnout Syndrome in Civil Police officers in a city of the Middle Paraíba Region and the factors involved that may influence its development, from the elucidation of the characteristics and dimensions of this syndrome.

## **Development**

### **History and characterization of Burnout Syndrome**

It was in 1974 that the term Burnout first appeared, mentioned by the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Freudenberger, the etiology of the syndrome highlights as the main individual causes, and the vision of the phenomenon would be more circumscribed to Emotional Exhaustion. He proposes a unidimensional view of the syndrome, not including other related elements brought in.

The first book on the subject translated into Portuguese and sold in Brazil was the translation of a work by Maslach and Leiter in 1999. Social psychologist Christina Maslach began studies adopting a psychosocial perspective with human services professionals, different from Freudenberger's initial proposal. Through her studies, the psychosocial factor of the Syndrome started to be considered worldwide as the most precise, as it is an approach that takes into consideration the behavior of the individuals within a social field in which they are influenced by it, but that also interacts and transforms them.

Currently, the most accepted and widespread definition of Burnout in international scientific circles, according to Cardoso *et al.* (2017, our translation) is the proposal by Maslach and collaborators who define the Burnout Syndrome as “a psychosocial phenomenon

that occurs as a chronic response to interpersonal stressors arising from the work situation”, since the work environment and its organization can be responsible for the suffering and wear and tear that workers suffer.

Magalhães *et al.* (2015) highlights six main sources of the work environment that contribute to the Burnout Syndrome, they are: overwork, lack of control in processes, insufficient remuneration, lack of equity, collapse in union and conflicts of values. The authors also point out that the response of the subject to the factors of occupational stress in the Burnout Syndrome would be composed of three dimensions, which are: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization and lack of Personal Realization.

Emotional Exhaustion refers to the sensations of physical and emotional effort that result from the continuous relationship that workers maintain and must maintain with the user public and among themselves. This factor is characterized by the person realizing that they no longer have the conditions, resources and energy that their work requires.

Depersonalization implies the development of cynical and insensitive attitudes towards the people to whom workers provide services and even with their colleagues. This factor is important because it differentiates the Syndrome from stress. It creates a barrier to not allow the influence of the problems of others on your life, acts indifferently the things that happen.

The third dimension concerns low professional achievement, which is the loss of confidence in personal achievement and the presence of a negative self-concept, destructive attitudes towards oneself, which is commonly accompanied by feelings of low self-esteem and incompetence in relation to one's profession or work.

According to Silva (2019), the Ministry of Health started to include the phenomenon in the set of work-related diseases in 2001, when it defined the syndrome as:

The sensation of being burned out, or Burnout Syndrome, is a type of prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors at work. It has been described as the result of a professional experience in a context of complex social relationships, involving the representation that the person has of themselves and others. The workers, who before were very involved affectively with their clients, their patients or their work itself, wear themselves out and, at a given moment, give up, lose their energy or "burn" themselves completely. The workers lose the sense of their relationship with their work, become disinterested, and any effort seems useless to them. (MINISTÉRIO DA SAÚDE DO BRASIL, 2002 *apud* SILVA, 2019, our translation).

Currently, the code Z73.0 is registered in ICD 10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Problems Related to Health) and is specifically related to the

labor context, recognized as a disease caused by the organization and working conditions. It can be evaluated through scales applied to employees. Currently, the best known is Maslach Burnout Inventory – MBI, which evaluates these three factors mentioned above. Ascari *et al.* (2016) mention that the conceptual model of the Burnout Syndrome, presents problems of delimitation, due to the similarity of the symptoms with other psychopathologies, such as: depression, anxiety, existential neurosis and disenchantment. The symptomatology of Burnout is since the organism creates blocks and defenses contrary to the stress factors of the work, resulting in altered behavioral responses. Therefore, comorbidities can accompany it, triggering problems of hypertension, cardiovascular, diabetes and others.

### **The police officer's profession**

The 1988 Constitution guarantees us public security as a duty of the State, law and responsibility of all. Although its concept is much more complex than that of policing, security is transformed into a mandate to the police institution, so that the production and maintenance of order are the essence of its mission and work process.

The Brazilian police began in 1530, at the request of D. João VI, who had as his objective the administration, promotion of justice and organization of public service. Today, it is a public service career and its field of action is delimited and subordinated to state governments. Each state of the federation has autonomy to organize its civil police and is also responsible for its maintenance. The civil police are responsible for investigating criminal infractions, in which it will exercise an investigative function, whose activity is focused on repressive action, that is, after the crimes have taken place.

In the state of Rio de Janeiro, Law 7729/17 is currently in force, amending Annex I of Law 3.586/01 regarding the effective positions of the civil police, thus establishing a quantity of 23,386 positions for the civil police.

However, the reality of active police officers is much lower than the number of positions described in the law, according to data made available on the website of the Civil Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro, in the month of March 2019 a total of 8,967 civil police officers were active, with a total of 74,162 records of occurrences, 3,430 arrests made and 6,456 inquiries reported. From these numbers, there is an exacerbated demand for occurrences and arrests and few professionals active in the police.

The advance of crime around money is much greater than that of investments in the police. This difference ends up generating a gap between the physical and technological

structure on both sides. The consequence is that public security, as it does not have enough physical and technological conditions, cannot repress crime. This generates in the population an image of the “corrupt” police officer and unfair for not solving the infractions.

In Brazil, the police class is discredited, and a large part of the population observes this profession with suspicion, and being in direct contact with the population ends up constantly being judged by it, since the police have the role of protecting and investigating crimes against citizens. According to Oliveira and Faiman (2019), several opinions are formed, sometimes positive, seeing the professional as a figure of authority and respect, sometimes negative, when he is associated with the Military Dictatorship and abusive power.

However, if on the one hand the police officer is responsible for promoting public safety and the repression of crime, it is important to look at the police officer as a worker, and police activity as a job, and not forget that this officer is a public servant endowed with rights, including personal safety, like all workers protected by the Federal Constitution. However, literature for this sector is very scarce, there is a clear lack of attention to the health of this public, which has deep historical roots since its inception in the enforcement of the repressive force of the state.

### **Impact of Burnout on civil police officers**

It is evident the lack of research specifically for the Civil Police, most of the work available in the scientific community includes the Military Police. Although they are categories of Public Security professions, they have their peculiarities in terms of organization and working conditions.

The agents end up avoiding exposure linked to their work, because they are subject to retaliation by society, since their demands can cause them a physical and emotional overload in the face of demands that they are unable to meet; this avoidance also occurs because "Feeling that the professional activity exposes them to risks without taking protective attitudes can lead to feelings of less value, of humiliation, in the form of a depressive experience, or anger" (OLIVEIRA; FAIMAN, 2019, our translation).

This becomes a fertile field for the Burnout Syndrome to be installed, which many times is not recognized by professionals, and can also lead them to destructive attitudes to themselves, such as suicide or even to the people who live together and the population, because of their easy access to firearms, committing aggression or homicide. The abuse of



alcohol and psychoactive substances can also be used as strategies for police officers to face or escape from stress.

According to Dejours (2015), when the organization of work conflicts with the psychic functioning of subjects, they create "defensive strategies to protect themselves". Affected by Burnout, agents tend to abandon their work or profession because of the psychic suffering it causes them. Many symptoms are aggravated because the employee does not have strategies to confront the feelings and thoughts that cause absenteeism, or else, does the opposite, misses without or creates motives, prolongs the hours of rest during the journey, avoids talking about subjects related to them, such as parties and people. Thus, the employee ends up performing only non-complex tasks.

All these factors leave the police agent exposed to develop physical and mental problems, due to the intensity and chronicity of these events and others mentioned above. Dejours (2015) makes a distinction between the sickening of the body and the mental suffering in the psychopathology of work, in which the sickening of the body takes as basis the working conditions (which would be the physical environment, chemical environment, biological environment, hygiene conditions, safety and anthropometric characteristics of the workplace); to the mental suffering, it results from the organization of work, (designated as the division of labor, the content of the task, the hierarchical system, the modes of command, power relations, issues of responsibility, etc.).

Besides the factors of the work environment it is possible to find in the literature associations of demographic variables related to Burnout Syndrome. Variables such as marital status, schooling, children, are pointed out as factors that may be predisposing to Burnout.

## **Research objectives and methods**

This study aimed to evaluate a team of civilian police officers stationed in a police station in the interior of Rio de Janeiro State, the presence of Burnout Syndrome, as well as to identify its relationship with the variables and risk factors, thus presenting the consequences that can affect the subjects in their level of functioning and individual productivity and also in the relationships between people from social life and work colleagues themselves. During the period from June to July 2019, 28 employees participated in the study, after its approval by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the University Center of Barra Mansa - UBM/RJ, under the opinion CEP/UBM 3,390,576 of June 13, 2019.

The methodology adopted to carry out the study of this research was exploratory and descriptive of quantitative approach. To carry out the research, a self-applicable questionnaire was used to all employees in which socio-demographic and professional data were collected for elucidation of the profile of the participants and also, 22 questions translated and adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), validated in its psychometric characteristics in Brazil by Benevides-Pereira (2001) and also by other researchers such as Tamayo (1997), Carlotto and Câmara (2004), Wheat (2010) and Schuster *et al.* (2015).

The questionnaire questions are grouped according to the three dimensions established by Maslach's Theoretical Model: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Professional Achievement (RP) and Depersonalization (DE). The cutoff points of the MBI developed by the Nucleus of Advanced Studies on Burnout Syndrome (NEPASB) – currently called the Group of Studies and Research on Stress and Burnout Syndrome (GEPEB) related in Figure 1 - were used as reference for correction.

**Figure 1** – Table of reference values for MBI correction

DIMENSIONS	CUTOFF POINTS		
	Low	Medium	High
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	0 – 15	16 – 25	26 – 54
Depersonalization (DE)	0 – 2	03 – 08	09 – 30
Professional Achievement (RP)	43 – 48	34 – 42	0 – 33

Source: Elaborated by the authors from GEPEB cut points (FERREIRA, 2017)

The results, according to the scores of each dimension, were classified in groups that indicate presence, tendency or absence of the Syndrome. To reach this point, the orientation proposed by Ferreira (2017) was followed, which considers the subject with the presence of Burnout when at least one of the two dimensions, respectively Emotional Exhaustion (EE) or Depersonalization, achieve high scores associated with low Professional Achievement (RP) scores.

It should be noted that, unlike the other two dimensions, Professional Achievement has an inverse subscale, that is, the lower the total score is, the higher the Burnout indicative, as you can see in the reference table. This dimension has a reverse value in the evaluation in relation to the other two dimensions because it deals with the positive perspective for the professional. On the other hand, the trend indication occurs when only one of the dimensions



presents a high cutoff point, that is, at least one presents a high trend associated to one with a medium index. Any other result found indicates absence of the Syndrome. The data obtained were tabulated and statistically analyzed using the Microsoft Excel® program.

## **Results and discussion**

Research participants predominantly occupy the position of Police Inspector, which corresponds to 16 professionals (57%), followed by Notary Officers with 07 professionals (25%). Also participated, 03 civil servants with the occupation of Police Investigator (11%), 01 Police Commissioner (4%) and 01 Police Chief (4%).

From the analysis of the socio-demographic data, it can be observed while the profile of the acting professionals, the prevalence of male professionals, of the interviewed, 23 were men (82%) and 05 women (18%). This leads us to reflect that despite the evolution of female participation in police, there is still the association of police activity with masculinity and its virility, which according to Casagrande (2016, our translation) points to a “claim for gender equality beyond the equity of positions/functions assumed by men and women police officers, but the constant search for resignifications attributed to “male” and “female” in the interface with social relations as a whole” (p. 26).

Of the participating professionals, 16 reported to be married (57%), 05 single (18%), 02 have a partner (7%), 03 reported to be divorced (11%), 02 did not inform their marital status (7%). Regarding the number of children, 17 professionals reported having children (61%), 10 professionals do not have children (36%), 01 server did not provide such information.

Although there are controversies, there is research that points to the factor of having children as an affective balancing act. According to the research conducted by Rodriguez and Carlotto (2014) professionals who have children present a lower degree of distance and indifference towards people, with the association of maternity/paternity to greater responsibility and maturity in the management with the other and development of tolerance with stressors.

As far as professional analysis is concerned, 18 police officers have a degree in higher education (64%), 06 have a specialization (21%), 03 have a high school degree (11%), and 01 has a master's degree (4%). According to Fonseca *et al.* (2017) people with higher education are more prone to Burnout than people with lower education, due to the expectations and responsibilities that their role requires from their individual resources to carry out the work.

**Figure 2** – Percentage Frame of weekly workload of professionals participating in the survey

WEEKLY WORKLOAD	(%)
32 hours	14%
36 hours	4%
40 hours	32%
44 hours	7%
48 hours	18%
50 hours	7%
54 hours	4%
Above 54 hours	14%
WORKING PERIOD (DAYS)	(%)
1-3 days	36%
4-6 days	57%
7-9 days	0%
10-15 days	4%
Not Informed	4%

Source: survey data (2019)

Another facilitator of Burnout Syndrome is related to the work shifts, the literature shows the positive and significant correlation between the weekly hours of work and the 3 dimensions of Burnout. From the surveyed data, shown in figure 2, it can be observed that 43% of the professionals (12 police officers) have a weekly workload that varies from 48 to 54 hours or more, and the prevalence of a work period between 4 to 6 days per week referring to 57% of the professionals (16 police officers), followed by 36% with a period of 1 to 3 days of work per week (10 police officers). Among the participants, it was verified that 29% of the police officers have another job, with a workload that varies from 8 to 50 hours a week.

**Figure 3** – Percentage Frame of the last vacation taken by professionals participating in the survey

LAST VACATIONS	(%)
2015 Or Earlier	14%
2016	4%
2017	7%
2018	43%
2019	29%
Not Informed	4%

Source: survey data (2019)

Although there is no correlation in the literature to the vacation periods enjoyed with Burnout Syndrome, it was observed that only 29% of the participating professionals enjoyed

vacation this year, as shown in the table above. Long workdays associated with overload of activities and precarious working conditions, without appropriate rest periods, act as a risk factor for the health of the police professional (SANTOS, 2019).

As for the analysis of the Maslach Burnout Inventory questions, from the sum of the scores, it was identified that 46% (13) of the participating professionals indicated a high level of Emotional Exhaustion, 64% (18) a high rate of Depersonalization, followed by 61% (17) of servers with a high rate of Low Professional Accomplishment, as follows.

**Figure 4** – Table describing the percentage of MBI dimensions in levels, based on the results presented by the professionals participating in the survey

DIMENSIONS	LEVELS		
	Low	Medium	High
Emotional Exhaustion	11%	43%	46%
Low Professional Accomplishment	4%	36%	61%
Depersonalization	0%	36%	64%

Source: survey data (2019)

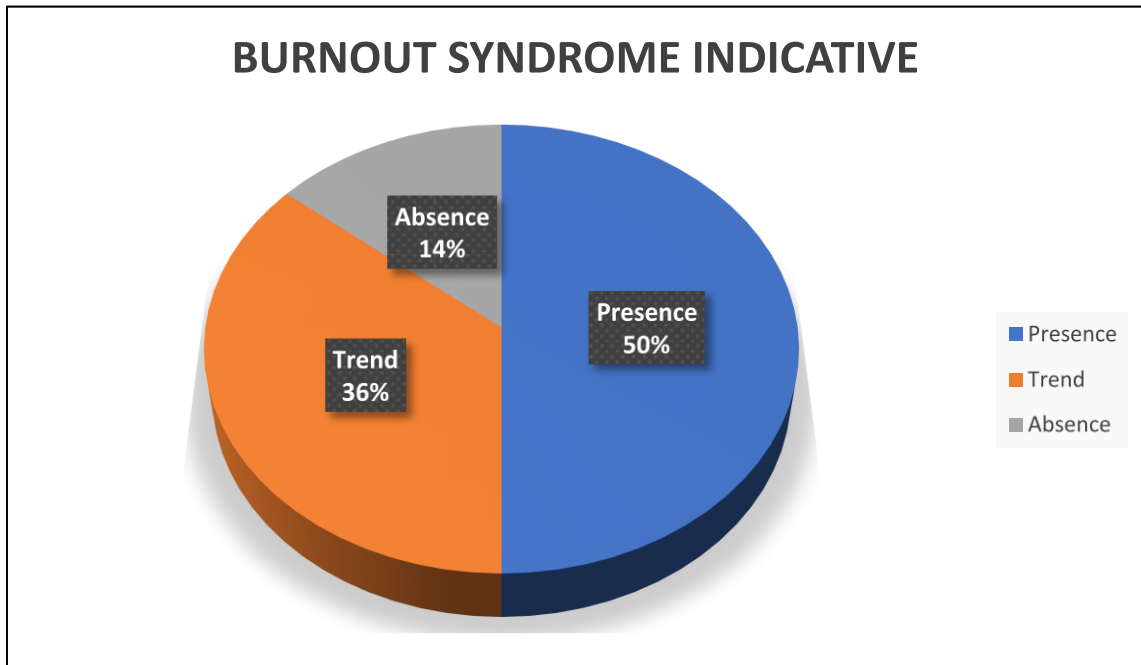
Such results call the attention for identifying high levels in the 03 dimensions, indicating the presence of Burnout Syndrome among the police officers participating in the survey. By observing the average Emotional Exhaustion pointed out in this study, one can relate the tiring work with long working hours, shifts, internal and external charges that police officers receive, both from the organization and bureaucratization of work and from the population in general.

The little time for rest, associated with a great workload, frustrated expectations regarding career and profession, low salaries, direct contact with violence besides resulting in stress and emotional wear and tear end up leading the subject to an emotional hardening, depersonalization, thus creating a barrier not to be influenced by the problems of the other, assuming a cynical and even hostile posture with the public.

Based on the studies of Maslach and collaborators, Cardoso (2017) states that professional achievement, generally influenced by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, leads the professional to make a self-evaluation in which it tends to perceive several negative aspects about its professional life, devaluing its work, generating a

performance of just fulfilling the obligation, with a drop in the quality of the work performance and low self-esteem.

**Figure 5** - Frame showing Presence, Trend and Absence of Burnout Syndrome



Source: survey data (2019)

From the sum of the scores and use of the MBI cutoff points developed by GEPEB it was found that 50% (14) of the professionals indicate the presence of Burnout, 36% (10) professionals indicate the tendency to Burnout Syndrome, and 14% (04) professionals indicated the absence of Burnout Syndrome.

As a general result, this survey was predominantly male, married, mostly with children, occupying the position of police inspector. From the data collected by the MBI in comparison to the data related to the working hours of the participating professionals, we have 43% of the professionals working more than 44 hours per week and 57% with a working period of 4 to 6 days in a row that contribute to this high presence of the syndrome and that corroborates with the correlation proposed in the literature between the weekly working hours and the symptomatology of Burnout.

Considering the date of the survey, 68% of the participating professionals had not yet taken a vacation this year of 2019. Considering the working day, long periods without vacations, besides 29% of the professionals who have another job, there is an overload of work on a large scale, which ends up leading the professional to develop his activity with low

income and favoring the triggering of high rates of Emotional Exhaustion, besides acting as a positive and significant predictor of Depersonalization.

Another factor to be scored is the schooling, in agreement with the literature, which points out the level of education to the Burnout Syndrome, 64% of the professionals researched have a complete university degree and 21% have some specialization. The schooling can serve as a disincentive to the professionals for not being valued in the career progression, being able to contribute for the high rates of low Professional Realization. In the studies of Boechat and Ferreira (2014), schooling was identified as a factor with significant relation to Professional Achievement.

From the results presented, it can be affirmed that the civil police officers suffer a wear and tear in the development of their labor activity of different impacts and intensities that deserve attention and care in stress management. In a survey conducted by Silva *et al.* (2018) on the Burnout Syndrome among civilian police officers, it was found that on average the police officers “feel emotionally exhausted due to their work”, confirming the need for a careful look at these professionals who act between danger and fear in the repression of crime, needing constant vigilance in the exercise of their activity against violence and crime and not to be exposed to risks.

## **Final considerations**

The police officer profession is considered stressful because it is an activity developed during marginality and criminality, besides having as a work tool the firearm, which by itself has a risk and characterizes as a stress factor (RIBEIRO, 2015). In addition to these damages, police officers need to deal with the negative effects of police work on society, precarious working conditions, excessive work hours, which cause damage to their activities and consequently damage to their psychic and physical health.

The sickening of the police officers needs attention from mental health areas, considering the complexity of the relationship between health x work x disease, which have significant impact on public safety and other spheres, such as economy, culture, health and others. Therefore, early identification of stressful situations makes it possible to find ways to face and modify the conditions and work organization that cause suffering, and thus reduce the risk of the police officers getting sick with the Burnout Syndrome.

It is evident the lack of research specifically to this target audience even though the police officers' profession has specific characteristics that can contribute to illness. Closing

this reflection, attention is drawn to the production of studies and effective action proposals to minimize the vulnerability of these professionals, both in the modernization and improvement of work processes and in the promotion of health care and quality of life of this worker avoiding the disease.

This research awakens the need for discussion about the long working hours and hours in which civil police professionals are submitted, as well as the importance of opening offers of prevention, diagnosis and treatment services to professionals who work in an activity with dangerous characteristics and that their illness impacts directly on their professional performance, from serving the public, being more rude and hostile, even putting themselves and others at risk.

Physical tiredness associated with emotional imbalance can lead these professionals to inefficiency in the performance of professional exercise by assuming risky attitudes and exposing not only themselves but the population in general to potential dangers.

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## How to reference this article

CASTRO, L. P. de; CARVALHO, C. de S.; MIRANDA, E. de F. Burnout Syndrome: an evaluation with civil police officers of a municipality in the Medium Paraíba region. **Doxa: Rev. Bras. Psico. e Educ.**, Araraquara, v. 22, n. esp. 1, p. 299-314, out., 2020. e-ISSN: 2594-8385. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30715/doxa.v22iesp.1.14135>

**Submitted:** 20/04/2020

**Revisions required:** 15/06/2020

**Approved:** 20/08/2020

**Published:** 30/09/2020