

Burnout in Portuguese nurses and police officers: a comparative study

1. Introduction

Burnout appears in jobs in which chronic stress is provoked by emotional demands of patients, clients or citizens (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003). Regarding nurses, studies concluded that they experience burnout (Buunk et al., 2010; Pienaar & Bester, 2011; van Beek et al., 2012) and it can be a contagious process (Bakker et al., 2005). Police officers are a “force under pressure” (Blum, 2000, p.1) vulnerable to burnout (Brown & Campbell, 1994; van Gelderen et al., 2011; Velden et al., 2010) that leads to “law enforcement officers are killed by more job-related stress than they are by criminals” (Ranta & Sud, 2008, p.29). Comparative studies reveal higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in nurses than in police officers (Bakker & Heuven, 2006; Maslach & Jackson, 1997).

Topic: Caregivers support

2. Objectives

This study aims to compare burnout levels in Portuguese male nurses and male police officers, both engaged with stressful professions .

3. Design and method

Participants: Non-probabilistic sample of **345 nurses and 345 police officers**, all male, working in north of Portugal hospitals and security police departments (PSP); age between 23 to 66 years (M= 34.9 and SD=8.4 for nurses, M=36.2 and SD=7.5 for police officers); 77% of nurses having a graduation and 66% of police officers having 12th year of school level; 65% married nurses and 75% married police officers; professional experience of 11.3 years for nurses and 12.9 years for police officers.

Instruments: Questionnaire to collect individual and professional characterization, and Portuguese version of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey* (MBI-HSS, Maslach & Jackson, 1997).

Procedure: Data were collected in north of Portugal hospitals and security police departments (PSP), during 2010-2011, using self-completion questionnaire, anonymous and confidential, after formal authorization of the institutions and after volunteers accepting to participate.

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

4. Results

Despite low levels of burnout (Table 1), results show significant differences, with nurses experiencing higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and lower personal accomplishment than police officers. Age and years of professional experience are negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, but only among nurses (Table 2).

Table 1. Comparative analyses of means and Cronbach's Alpha of MBI dimensions

MBI dimensions (0-6 scale)	α	Nurses M (SD)	Police officers M (SD)	Mann-Whitney test
Emotional exhaustion	0,87	2,29 (1,18)	1,82 (1,17)	0,000**
Depersonalization	0,75	1,40 (1,12)	1,18 (1,04)	0,008**
Professional accomplishment	0,78	4,41 (0,91)	4,52 (1,07)	0,022*

*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01

Table 2. Correlations between burnout dimensions, age, and years of professional experience

	MBI dimensions	Age	Years of experience	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization
Nurses	Emotional exhaustion	-0,181**	-0,152**		
	Depersonalization	-0,227**	-0,162**	0,456**	
	Professional accomplishment	0,067	0,043	-0,264**	-0,344**
Police officers	Emotional exhaustion	-0,030	-0,014		
	Depersonalization	-0,072	-0,067	0,540**	
	Professional accomplishment	-0,061	-0,57	-0,163**	-0,160**

5. Conclusions

Data suggests the influence of age and years of professional experience as protectors from burnout, alerting that young professionals are more vulnerable to burnout. Results are similar to other studies (Bakker & Heuven, 2006) and alert that burnout, especially in nurses affects provided care (Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003) and patient' satisfaction (Vahey et al., 2004). Among police forces, burnout contributes to a negative relationship between police officers and citizens, leading to the excessive use of force (Brown & Campbell, 1994; Ranta & Sud, 2008). Nurses and police officers both provide care to patients or citizens presenting high emotional demands. Thus, they are vulnerable to burnout, that negatively affect organizations and mental health of professionals, especially in main areas for society, such as health and security.

6. Bibliography

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