

Police officers' aggressivity: How is related to psychological variables and how is likely to impact community?

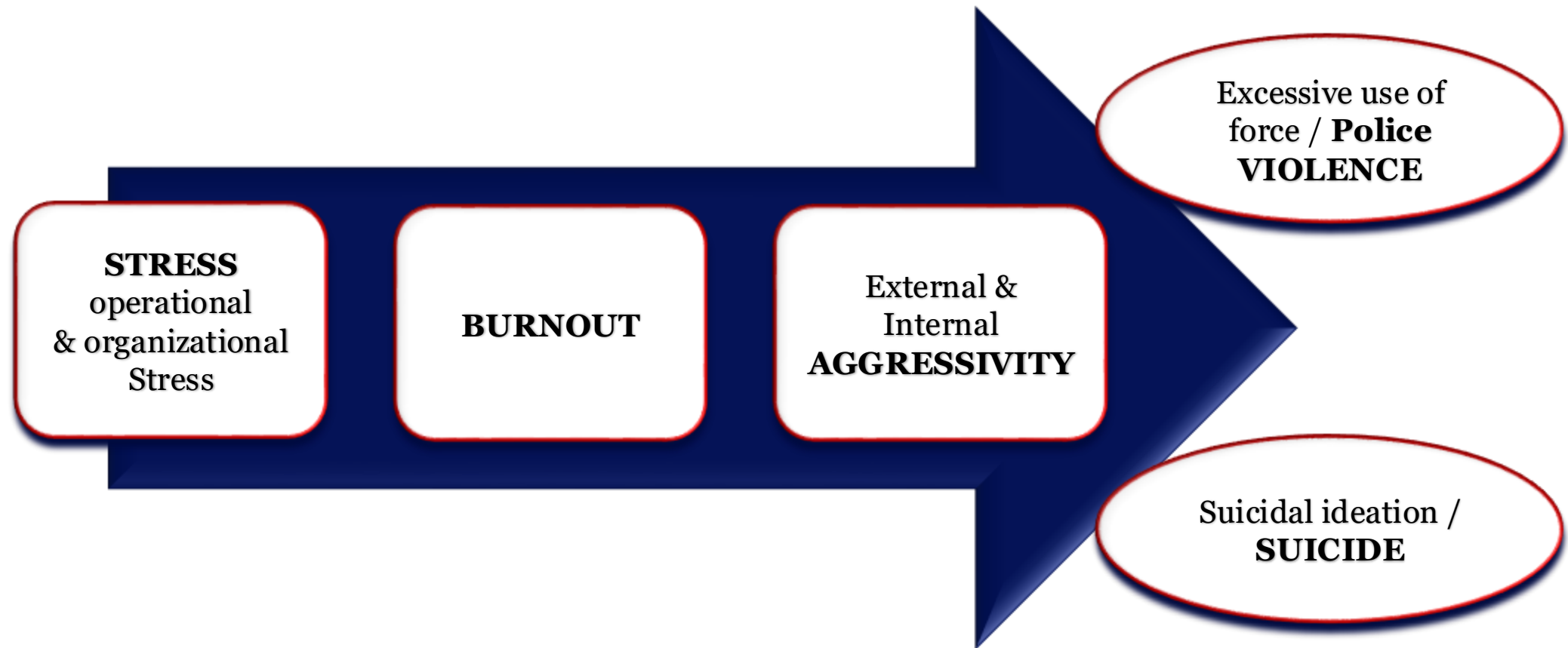
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Context



Context

- **Criminology as an Integrative Science**
Focused on understanding the institution of *Police* as its object of study.
 - **Behavioral Dimension of Security**
Emphasis on the role of human behavior in shaping security dynamics (Clemente, 2023).
 - **External vs. Internal Aggression**
 - *External*: Media amplification of aggression fosters fear of crime (Silva & Guedes, 2022).
 - *Contradiction*: Etymologically. “Police” is rooted in the concept of non-aggression (Clemente, 2010).
 - **Internal Aggression and Police Suicide**
Rising suicide rates among officers reflect societal misperceptions and an inadequate image of policing (Vollmer, 1971).
 - **Feeling of insecurity** (Doran & Burgess, 2012; Agra et al., 2001)
 - **The fatalistic suicide** (Durkheim, 1897)
 - **Total Institutions** (Goffman, 1961; Giddens, 2009)
 - **Self-stigma** (Corrigan & Watson, 2002; Corrigan, 2004, 1998) – **Labeling Approach Theory** (Becker, 2005)
- 
- **Forces of toxic masculinity** (Faircloth & Clark, 2016)
 - and
 - **'Robocop culture'** (Lennie et al., 2020; Prenzler, 1997)

State of the art

- Virtudazo et al. (2025)
 - 180 police officers from the Philippines.
 - Low levels of physical aggression, but moderate levels of verbal, emotional, and hostility aggression; the more years of service, the higher the aggression (physical)
- Bezie et al. (2024)
 - 633 police officers in Ethiopia.
 - 8% high levels in work demands. 48% sleep problems; organizational stress as a strong predictor of burnout
- Nisbet et al. (2024)
 - 1242 police officers from Canada.
 - 34% suicidal ideation, 15% planning. 4% attempts
- Cardenas et al. (2024)
 - 313 police officers from the Philippines.
 - Moderate operational stress and moderate organizational stress; organizational justice influences operational stress.
- Correia et al. (2024)
 - 573 soldiers from the National Republican Guard, Portugal.
 - The belief in a fair world as a protective factor against work-family conflict and work stress
- Farkas et al. (2023)
 - 84 police cadets from Hungary.
 - Anticipation of a stressful event is reflected in greater behavioral control; an unexpected event triggers greater aggression.

Empirical study

Aim

- To investigate internal and external aggression in police officers, their psychological determinants, and their impact on community security outcomes.

Method

- **Questionnaire Survey**
 - Authorized by the Ministry of Internal Administration and distributed via snowball sampling through the three national police forces.
 - Officially disclosed
 - Anonymous and confidential
 - Conducted with informed consent
 - 07/2023-06/2024
- **Data Analysis**
 - Collected data processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics v29.

Sample

- N=2.485 police officers
- Gender: 88% M. 12% F; Age: 18-68 years (M=44.34, SD=9.042);
- Time in the position: 1-40 years (M=20.63, SD=9.540);
- Marital Status: 89% have a boyfriend/girlfriend, partner, or spouse; 78% have children;
- Education: 5% have completed up to the 9th grade, 57% have completed secondary education, and 38% have higher education;
- Place of residence: 77% not displaced; Schedule: 88% working in shifts;
- Service type: 24% Patrol, 33% Administrative, 5% Special Units, 14% Criminal Investigation, 6% Traffic, 4% Rapid Intervention, 5% Community Policing, and 9% Others;
- Type of predominant service: 46% operational, 30% administrative and 24% both;
- Position/function: 68% Agent/Guard, 18% Chief/Sergeant, 13% Officer, 1% other.

Empirical study

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Measures

- Sociodemographic and professional characteristics
- Operational Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ-op) (McCreary & Thompson, 2013a; Queirós et al., 2020a); $\alpha=0.960$
- Organizational Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ-org; McCreary. & Thompson, 2013b; Queirós et al., 2020b); $\alpha=0.960$
- Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT; Schaufeli et al., 2020; Sinval et al., 2020); $\alpha=0.960$ (burnout $\alpha=0.944$; secondary symptoms $\alpha=0.925$)
- Occupational Depression Inventory (ODI; Bianchi & Schonfeld, 2020; Queirós et al., 2021); $\alpha = 0.940$
- Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (SIQ; Reynolds, 1988; Ferreira & Castela, 1999); $\alpha=0.980$
- Aggression Questionnaire (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992; Queirós et al., 2013); $\alpha=0.928$

And also, but not in this presentation...

- Qualitative research
 - Interviews with stakeholders
 - Analysis of disciplinary processes for aggression (excessive use of force/police violence) - General Inspection of Internal Administration (awaiting formal authorization)

Empirical study

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

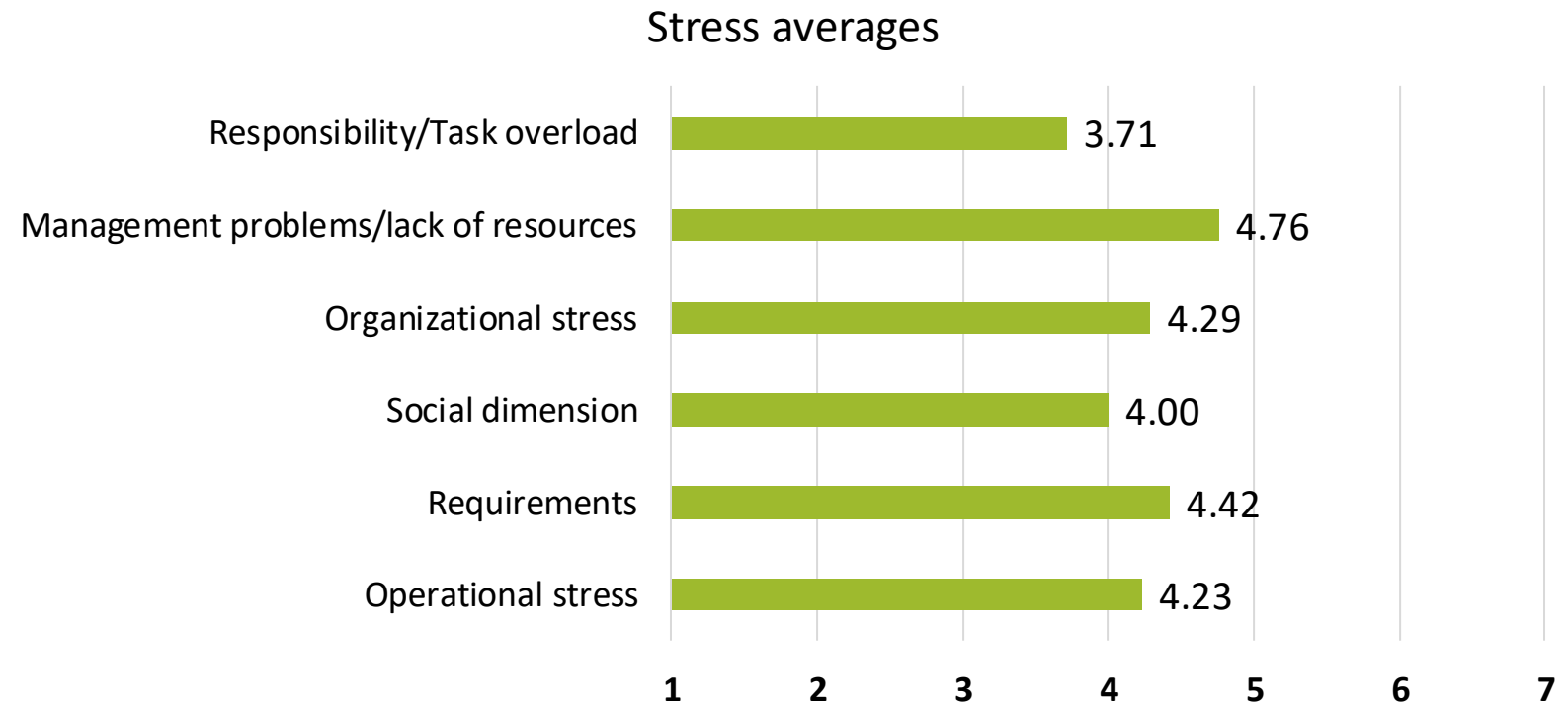
- Evaluation of OUTCOMES

Dimensions	Min	Max	Median	Average	Std dev
Operational stress (1-7)	1.0	7.0	4.40	4.23	1.411
Requirements	1.0	7.0	4.64	4.42	1.456
Social dimension	1.0	7.0	4.11	4.00	1.509
Organizational stress	1.0	7.0	4.45	4.29	1.395
Management problems/Lack of resources	1.0	7.0	5.00	4.76	1.455
Responsability/Task overload	1.0	7.0	3.78	3.71	1.452
Exhaustion	1.0	5.0	3.00	3.05	0.934
Mental distancing	1.0	5.0	2.33	2.50	0.983
Cognitive difficulties	1.0	5.0	2.00	2.34	0.893
Emotional difficulties	1.0	5.0	2.00	2.13	0.911
Burnout (1-5)	1.0	5.0	2.40	2.50	0.804
Psychological complaints	1.0	5.0	2.60	2.72	0.972
Psychosomatic complaints	1.0	5.0	2.00	2.23	0.914
Secondary symptoms	1.0	5.0	2.30	2.48	0.890
Occupational depression	0.0	3.0	0.56	0.73	0.716
Physical aggression	1.0	5.0	1.78	1.96	0.642
Verbal aggression	1.0	5.0	2.60	2.57	0.649
Hostility	1.0	5.0	2.13	2.19	0.781
Irritability	1.0	5.0	2.00	2.05	0.770
Aggressiveness (1-5)	1.1	5.0	2.03	2.15	0.603
Thoughts about suicide	0.0	6.0	0.25	0.79	1.145
Reaction of others	0.0	6.0	0.00	0.34	0.833
Forms of suicide	0.0	6.0	0.00	0.35	0.833
Suicidal ideation (0-6)	0.0	6.0	0.07	0.40	0.838

Empirical study

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

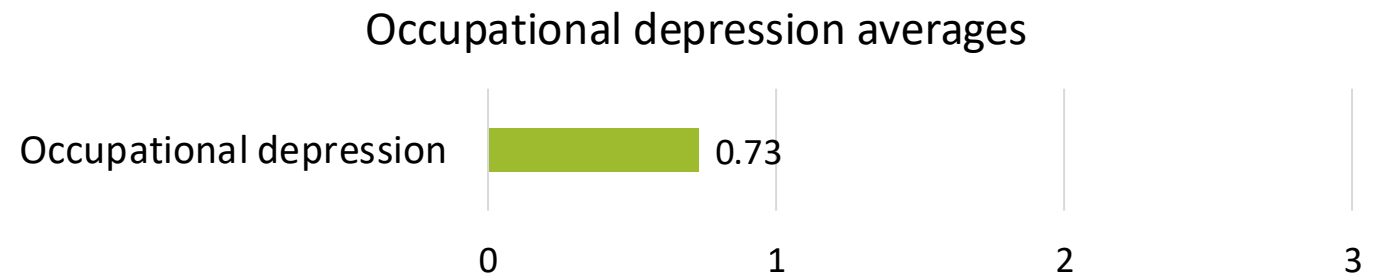
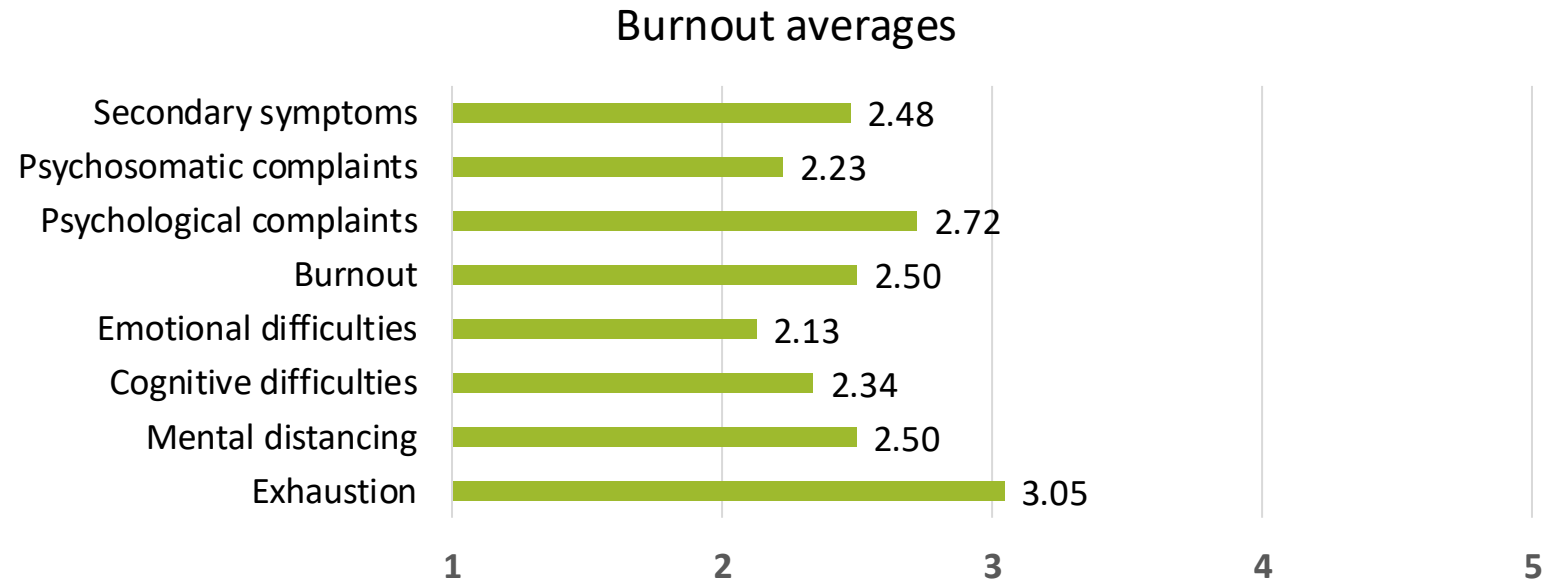
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Empirical study

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Evaluation of OUTCOMES

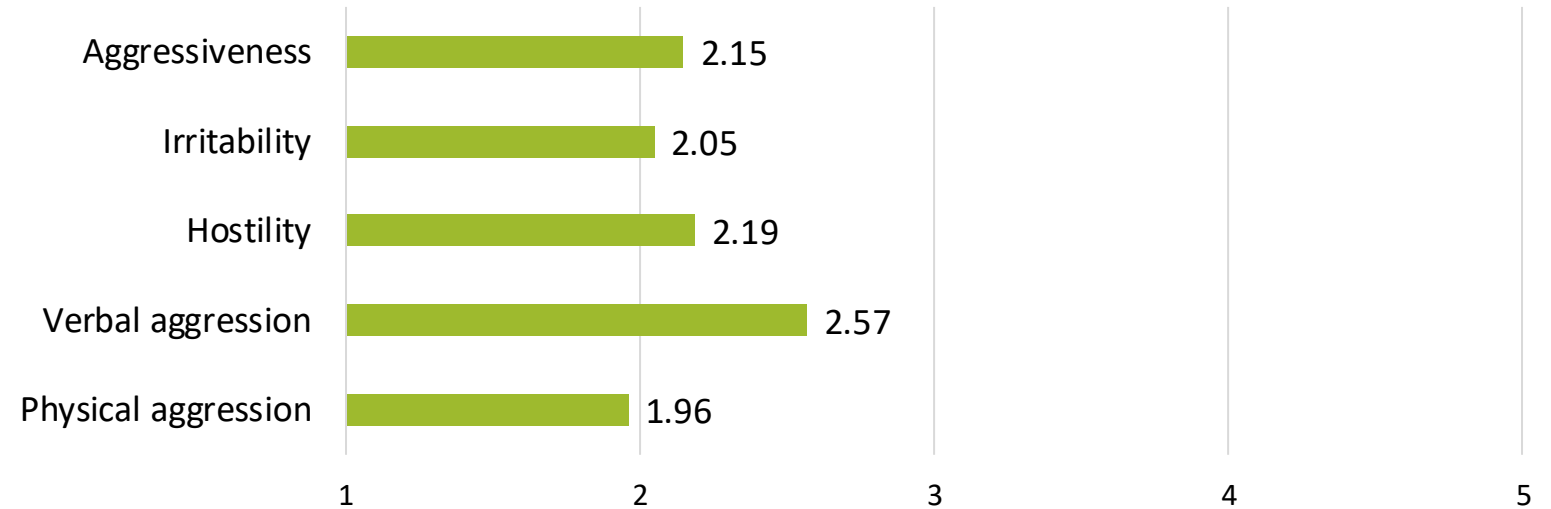


Empirical study

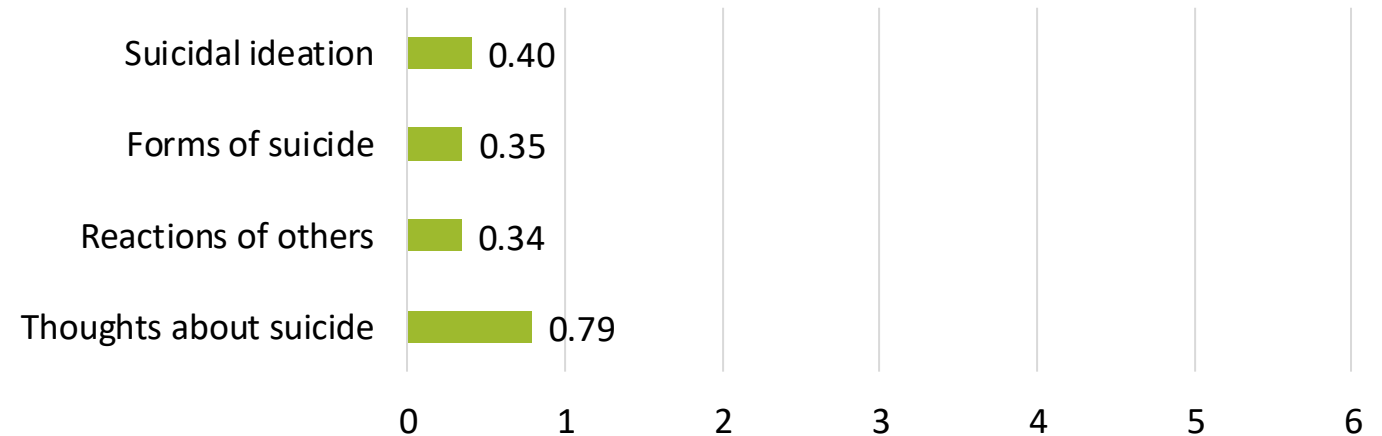
PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Evaluation of OUTCOMES

Aggression averages



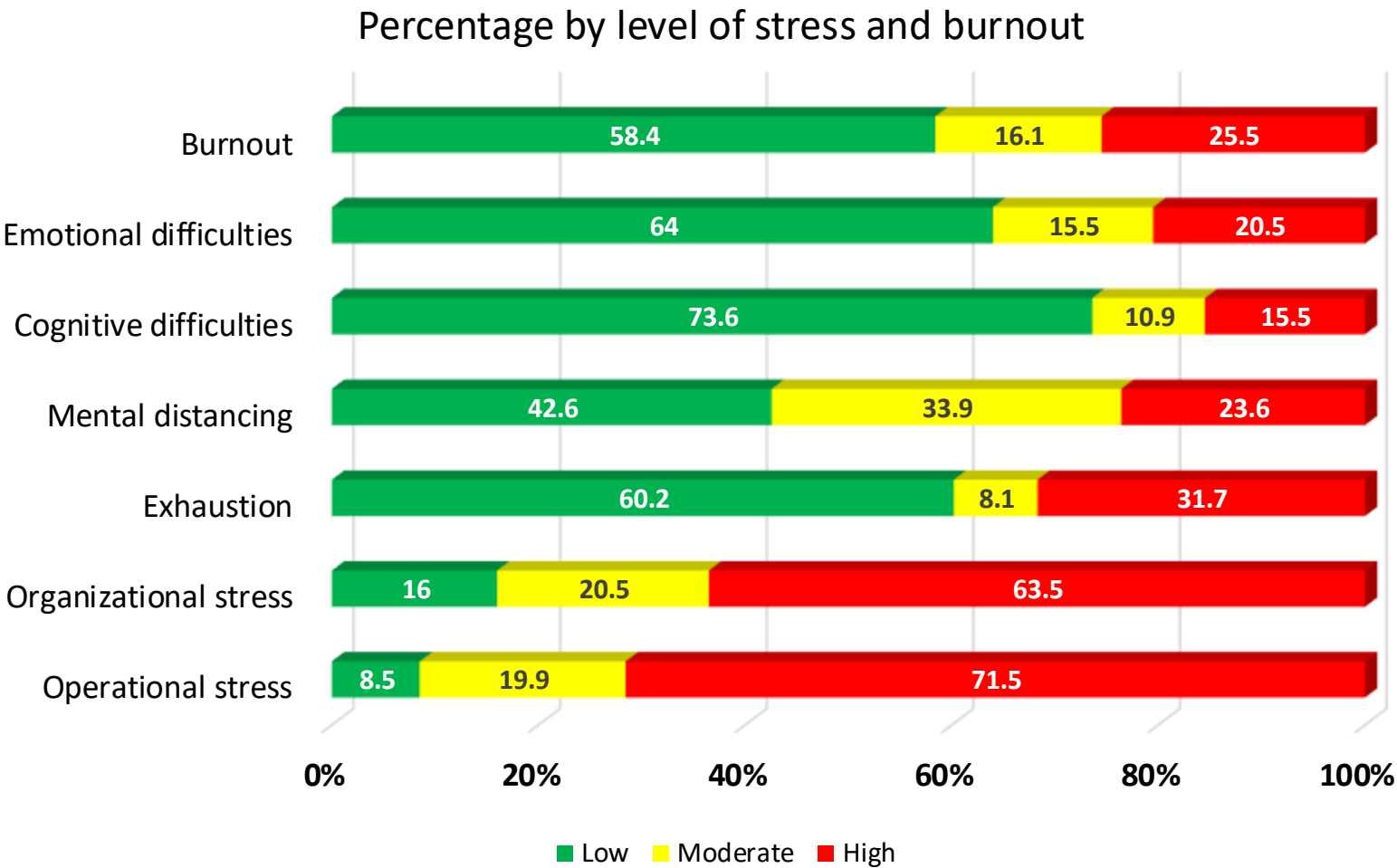
Suicidal ideation averages



Empirical study

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

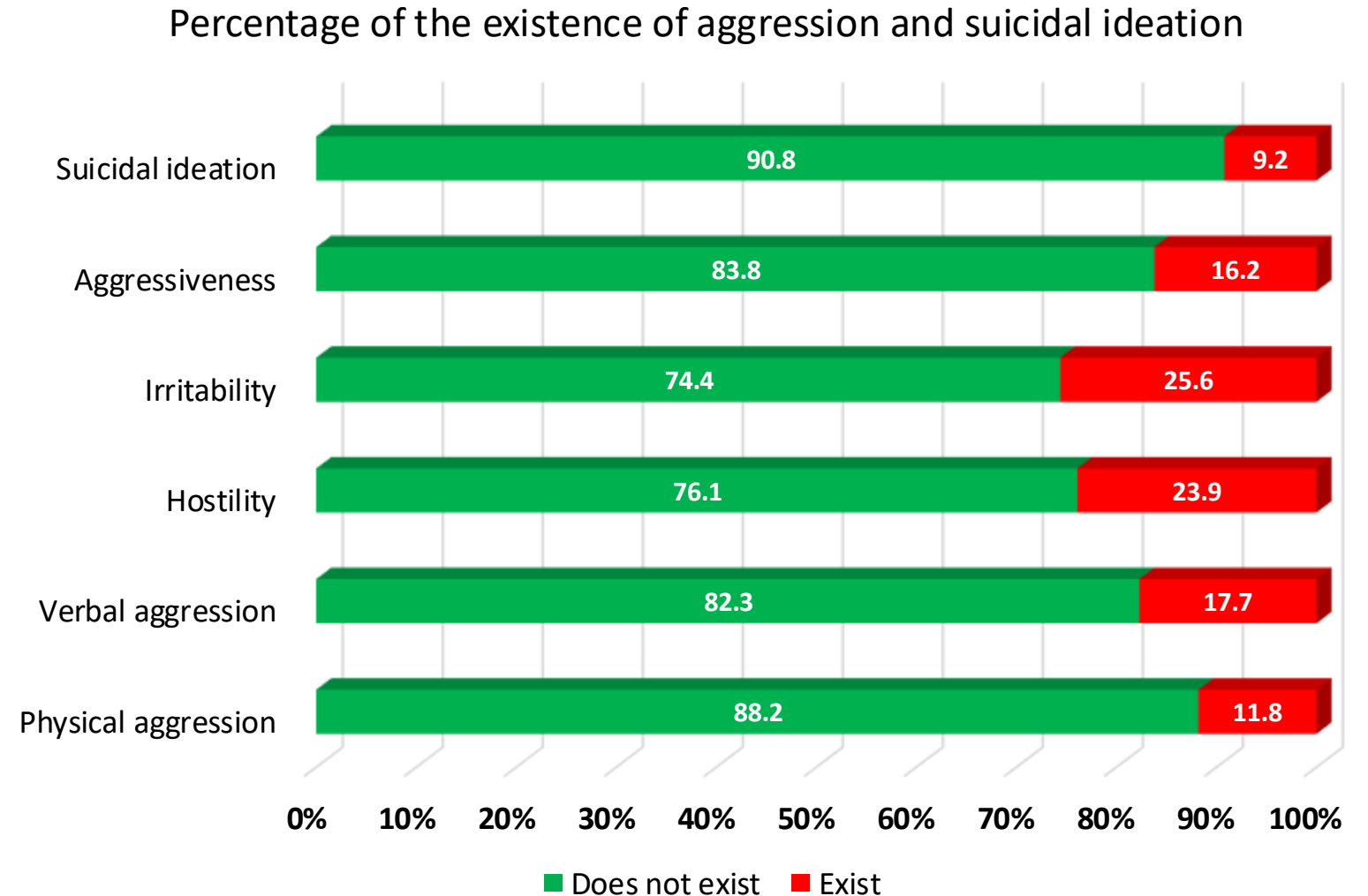
- Evaluation of OUTCOMES



Empirical study

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Empirical study

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Evaluation of OUTCOMES

	Operational stress	Organizational stress	Burnout	Occupational depression	Agressiveness
Organizational stress	.814**				
Burnout	.586**	.617**			
Occupational depression	.519**	.526**	.788**		
Agressiveness	.408**	.459**	.623**	.629**	
Suicidal ideation	.311**	.310**	.455**	.550**	.478**

Concluding remarks

- ✓ Significant positive correlations were identified among the psychological variables studied.
- ✓ Stress and burnout show moderate to strong positive associations with aggressivity.
- ✓ Organizational stress levels slightly exceed operational stress; the most prominent contributors are management difficulties and resource scarcity, while responsibility and task overload appear less influential.
- ✓ Within the burnout dimensions, exhaustion emerged as the most prominent factor, particularly reflecting the perception of “I can’t take it anymore.”
- ✓ The prevalence of aggressiveness and suicidal ideation underscores the relevance of the dimensions of irritability and hostility, as well as overall suicidal ideation. Although the percentage of suicidal ideation appears modest (9.2%), it corresponds to approximately 200 police officers!

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- Possible bias? Respondents can respond according to social desirability, fear of lack of anonymity in the workplace (police culture), and the myth of the healthy worker

ONGOING AND FURTHER RESEARCH

- Extended statistical analysis with data collected on the questionnaire.
- Include qualitative research with interviews with stakeholders, and even with the community itself as a way to understand the feeling of insecurity arising from this reality.
- Analysis of disciplinary processes with police officers criminally convicted of assault.

IDEAÇÃO SUICIDA EM POLÍCIAS: ESTUDO COMPARATIVO 2021-2024

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INTRODUÇÃO

Nas últimas décadas os temas do suicídio e da ideação suicida em polícias apresentam um interesse crescente na comunidade científica (O'Reilly et al., 2025; Violanti & Steege, 2021), apesar do seu estudo já existir nos EUA desde a década de 70, com inúmeros estudos na década de 90 (Cantor et al., 1995; Heiman, 1977), tendo em 1996 o investigador americano John Violanti alertado para uma *"epidemic in blue"*. Em Portugal alguns estudos têm sido realizados (Costa et al., 2019; Pereira et al., 2023), assistindo-se a uma preocupação social, com Portugal a noticiar em 2025, entre 1 de janeiro e 31 de março, 3 suicídios (o mais recente em 27 março), enquanto em Espanha foram noticiados 8. Acresce a existência de estudos sobre o reconhecido impacto da pandemia COVID-2019 na saúde mental dos polícias (Brown & Fleming, 2021; Nielson et al., 2022), alertando para o adoecer psicológico numa profissão na qual o estigma de pedir ajuda é pouco estudado (Grupe, 2023; Velazquez & Hernandez, 2019) e o recurso fácil e imediato a arma de fogo enquanto fator facilitador da passagem ao ato (Pereira et al. 2023).

OBJETIVOS

Pretendem-se comparar os níveis de ideação suicida em polícias portuguesas com recurso a dados recolhidos em 2021 e 2023/2024.

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THANK YOU!

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