Abstract Book

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SENSATION SEEKING AND BURNOUT IN POLICE OFFICERS

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Abstract

Introduction:
Actually police officers deals with strong demands coming from society and citizens, especially when crime and violence increases. They are more vulnerable to aggressions, they must cope with situations that requires cognitive and emotional decisions done quickly, they have a lack of support, inadequate material resources and work overload. Criminals are more violent and have better resources, and sometimes courts making decisions that are feel as unfair by police officers who risk their life to protect citizens from crime. All those situations lead police officers to burnout, eliciting physical diseases, depression, aggressive behaviors and even suicide (Blum, 2000; Brown & Campbell, 1994). Numerous researchers studies personality traits of police officers (Grant & Terry, 2005) and sensation-seeking appears as a pro-social behaviour/trait frequently present in police officers (Gomà-i-Freixanet, & Wismelker, 2002; Hornant & Kennedy, 1993). Officers with these personality traits prefer risky activities, don't feel fear and seem to need a high level of stimulation. Some portuguese recent studies (Mendes, 2005; Oliveira, 2008) found the presence of this personality trait in police officers and formulate the hypothesis that this trait can be a factor that protects from burnout.

Objectives:
Identify burnout levels in police officers and verify if burnout is related with sensation seeking as a protective personality trait.

Method:
To assess burnout we have used a translated version of M.B.I. done by Oliveira (2008). To assess sensation seeking we have used SSS-V (Sensation Seeking Scale, form V; Zuckerman, 1994) translated by Oliveira and used in another research with police officers. Data were collected in a non-probabilistic sample of 70 police officers working in Policia Municipal of Oporto (police staff that are also elements of Policia de Segurança Pública, and not civilian elements; only Oporto and Lisbon have this type of municipal force).

Results:
The results are similar to other studies done with portuguese police officers, revealing the presence of some burnout and some dimensions of sensation-seeking, as well a negative correlation between both variables. Boredom susceptibility, a dimension of sensation seeking trait seems to explain the facility that police officers have to deal with routine activities such as patrolling the same places.

Conclusions:
Sensation seeking as a personality trait seems to be a protective factor of burnout. The knowledge of personality traits can help to prevent burnout and to help police officers to have better social interactions with citizens, especially because burnout can increase depersonalization, cynism and aggressiveness.

Keys words: burnout, sensation-seeking, police officers