

# THE IMPACTS OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF MILITARY POLICE OFFICERS IN THE STATE OF AMAPÁ

ttps://doi.org/10.56238/arev6n3-247

Submitted on: 10/19/2024 Publication date: 19/11/2024

Alex Wagner Leal Magalhães<sup>1</sup>, Giselly Marília Thalez Pantoja<sup>2</sup>, Luís Otávio Félix<sup>3</sup>

#### **ABSTRACT**

This article investigates the impacts of work on the mental health of military police officers in Amapá, considering challenges such as exposure to risk, extensive workload, and pressure for immediate results. The goal is to analyze how the work environment affects your mental health, identifying stress stressors and consequences. The literature review highlighted that these working conditions contribute to occupational stress and negatively affect the mental health of police officers. The literature analysis revealed that the main sources of stress include imbalance between effort and reward, lack of organizational support, and exposure to traumatic situations. These factors contribute to the development of conditions such as anxiety disorder, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The study also emphasizes the importance of intervention strategies to mitigate these impacts and promote the mental health of police officers, improving their well-being and effectiveness at work.

**Keywords:** Military Police. Occupational Stress. Mental health. Psychological Interventions. Macapá.

E-mail: lealmagalex@gmail.com

Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4794-8822 Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/3934607594034894

E-mail: gise\_thalez@hotmail.com

Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8706-154X Lattes: https://lattes.cnpq.br/0486823331730561

E-mail: Luisflx27@gmail.com

Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4467-7932 Lattes: http://lattes.cnpq.br/3561914979107134

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology from the Federal University of Pará (UFPA)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Master's degree in Environmental Law and Public Policy from the Federal University of Amapá (UNIFAP)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Specialist in Mental Health and Psychosocial Care from Faculdade Pitágoras Unopar Anhanguera



## INTRODUCTION

The main function of the military police of the State of Amapá is, in general, the maintenance of public order and also the guarantee of the security of society. However, as Costa et al. (2007, p.217) point out, "the profession of military police officer is a high-risk activity, since these professionals deal with violence, brutality and death in their daily lives."

Based on this understanding, the interest in investigating the theme arose from the need to understand how the daily conditions of the police routine can affect the psychological well-being of the agents. In view of this, the study takes into account that coping with "routine challenges has already generated several psychological problems and mental suffering." (Ferreira-Alves; Towers; Mattos, 2024, p.291). These working conditions often leave military police officers vulnerable to disorders such as anxiety, depression, and burnout syndrome (based on mental exhaustion), which compromise not only their performance at work, but also their quality of life.

In line with the authors, Garcia (2007) points out that the constant pressure of police exercise can be challenging and stressful, directly affecting the mental health of its employees, as they go through several situations ranging from exposure to risk conflicts on the streets, to the extensive workload of service, which added to the working conditions, put these professionals on display, both physically and mentally. Thus, based on these conditions, we raise the following question: what are the impacts of occupational stress, according to the literature, on the mental health of military police officers in the state of Amapá?

In this context, the present study aims to identify the main stress factors that affect the mental health of military police officers in the state of Amapá and their consequences. Based on the analysis of the data available in previous studies and the existing literature, we seek to understand the effects of work on the mental health of military police officers. As well as bringing discussions about occupational stress in the workplace and discussing the work of the military police in the State of Amapá.

Keeping in mind that it is important to recognize that the mental health of military police officers not only influences their individual well-being, but also directly affects the community they serve. Mentally healthy police officers are better able to make quick and effective decisions in crisis situations, demonstrate empathy and understanding when interacting with the public, and maintain high standards of professionalism and ethics.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

## DEFINITION OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Occupational stress is a phenomenon widely discussed in the literature. According to Siegrist (1996), occupational stress occurs when there is an imbalance between the efforts made by the worker and the rewards received, which may include salary, recognition, and opportunities for advancement. From the perspective of Genuín9io *et al*:

Occupational stress refers to stimuli in the work environment that require adaptive responses from the worker and that exceed his or her ability to cope; these stimuli are called organizational stressors. The characterization of a stress phenomenon depends on the individual's perception of evaluating the events as stressors, so the cognitive has an important role in the process that occurs between the potentially stressful stimuli and the individual's responses to them, being able to perceive and evaluate work demands as stressors that, exceeding their ability to cope, cause negative reactions at the psychological level in the subject. physiological and behavioral. (Genuine *et al*, 2010, p.4-5)

In this way, the authors highlight the importance of individual perception in the development of stress, showing that the characterization of a stress phenomenon does not depend only on external events, but mainly on how the individual perceives and evaluates it. In this context, it is perceived that the role of cognitive is fundamental, as it is the mental process that allows the individual to identify and interpret certain stimuli as stressors. When a person perceives the demands of the job as excessive and beyond their ability to cope, this perspective emphasizes that stress is a subjective response, where cognitive evaluation of events plays an important role in how stress manifests in the individual.

Further on, Lima (2018 p.25) defines that "occupational stress can occur when workers are exposed to some situation of threat or overload, which can interfere with professional fulfillment. In addition to harming mental/physical health, bringing consequences to the day-to-day work". Since these are considered triggering factors for mental disorders, it is emphasized that it is necessary for the worker to pay attention to the signs from the beginning so that it is possible to carry out the necessary interventions.

From this perspective, this type of stress can manifest itself in various ways, including fatigue, anxiety, depression, and a series of physical health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and sleep disorders. Thus, it can be understood that it arises as an adverse physical and emotional response when the worker is unable to cope with the demands of the routine of his function. For the authors, Sardá Jr, Legal and Jablonski Jr:



ISSN: 2358-2472

Occupational diseases generate costs and damages for organizations and workers, when an adequate work environment is not developed, which promotes well-being. Reinhold (1985) defines occupational stress as an unpleasant state resulting from aspects of work, which the individual considers threatening to his self-esteem and well-being. Environments that favor contact with stressful factors — such as, for example, excessive activities, long working hours, pressures, fear of losing one's job, can lead to illness and absenteeism. As pointed out by Figueroa (2001), the elements perceived in the work situation can act as stressors and can lead to tension and stress reactions. If stressors (e.g., role ambiguity, role conflict, uncertainty about the future at work) persist, and if individuals perceive their potential for confrontation as insufficient, then psychological, physical, and behavioral stress reactions may be produced, and thus eventually lead to illness and absenteeism (Sardá Jr; Legal: Jablonski Jr, 2004, p.38)

In this sense, it is understood that an inadequate work environment, where stressful factors are present, can lead to occupational stress, which, in turn, causes illness, absenteeism and losses for both the worker and the organization. Thus, when there is an imbalance between the significant effort at work and the rewards provided, it can result in chronic stress. This scenario occurs due to the increased risk of various health conditions.

However, it is important to emphasize that occupational stress is a complex phenomenon, resulting from the interaction between various demands of the work environment and the individual's ability to deal with these demands. In the next chapter, the work of the military police in the State of Amapá will be addressed, examining the particularities, their competencies, their main attributions. The organizational structure of the Amapá Military Police (PMAP) and the guidelines that govern its operations, both at the state and federal levels, will be explored. As well as the daily responsibilities of the military police in the State of Amapá will also be detailed.

## THE WORK OF THE MILITARY POLICE IN THE STATE OF AMAPÁ

The Military Police of the State of Amapá performs a fundamental job in maintaining public order and the safety of the population. In this way, its office is organized according to state and federal guidelines, which in general, aim to ensure effectiveness in the provision of security services.

Considering that it follows the principles of article 144 in section V of the Federal Constitution (1988) that incubates the work of the military police officer with ostensible policing and the preservation of public order by the military.

Further on, dealing specifically with a local document, when referring to the competencies of the military police function, Complementary Law No. 0084 of April 7, 2014,



which provides for the Statute of the Military of the State of Amapá in line with the Federal and State Constitutions, states in the sole paragraph of Article 2 that:

The Military Police, in accordance with the provisions of the State Law, is also responsible for:

I-The military judicial police, under the terms of federal legislation:

II- The guidance and instruction of the Municipal Guards, in the Municipalities where they exist, by means of an assistance and authorization agreement entered into between the respective federated entities;

III- The guarantee of the exercise of the Police Power, of the powers and public bodies of the State, especially those in the judicial, finance, sanitary, land use and occupation areas, cultural heritage, the environment and land traffic;

IV – The execution of the function of ostensive police on state highways;

V- To act in a preventive manner as a deterrent force, in specific places or areas, where it is presumed that it is possible to disturb order;

VI – To act in a repressive manner, in case of disturbance of order, prior to the possible use of other forces;

VII – Other attributions provided for by law. (AMAPÁ, 2014, p.1-2)

In this sense, the breadth of work and the diversity of the attributions of the military police in the State of Amapá are understood. Because, analyzing each of the items, we can observe how the police officer has a multifaceted role since he has a wide range of functions and this multifunctionality makes the work of the Military Police of the State of Amapá essential for the safety and well-being of society. According to Fraga:

The execution of the work of military police officers is characterized by repetitive and uncertain activities that are paradoxically mixed in the daily routine of ostensive policing, due to the constant visibility of the uniform. Repetitive because they follow a routine of standing for hours in a row, often in the same place, attentive to performing a job such as ostensive policing, which consists of a daily and uninterrupted commitment, in a direct intervention in events considered "abnormal" in the public space. Paradoxically, this routinization is also mixed by uncertainty in the face of the constant suspense of danger, a fundamental ingredient in ostensive policing. (Fraga, 2006, p.7-8)

In this way, Sporde and Merlo (2004, p.362) add police work as "a professional category that is very vulnerable to the production of psychic suffering, since the exercise of work is marked by a daily routine in which tension and dangers are always present". Considering that the constant exposure to situations of conflict and violence can have a significant impact on the mental health of military police officers in the State of Rio Grande do Sul.

Amapá. The pressure for immediate results, combined with the need to make quick and often risky decisions, contributes to a work environment full of stress and anxiety.



These professionals face not only the physical challenge of maintaining public order, but also the psychological burden of dealing with traumas and often traumatic incidents in their work routine, which makes them susceptible to the development of psychic problems such as stress disorder and depression. In this sense, within this perspective, we have:

Chronic occupational stress, also known as Burnout Syndrome, is currently considered a serious psychosocial problem that has been affecting the world of work. [...] *Burnout* syndrome is characterized by three dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (EE), which refers to the feeling of physical and mental exhaustion; Personal Involvement at Work (TPE), characterized by the feeling of low self-esteem, dissatisfaction with their activities and lack of motivation; and finally, Depersonalization, characterized by the development of negative attitudes, lack of sensitivity, impersonal and cold treatment of care recipients (Ferrari *et al.*, 2013, p.84)

Based on this understanding, when turning to the context of police work, the effects of Burnout Syndrome can be even more pronounced, because emotional exhaustion is a natural consequence of daily exposure to high-pressure and high-risk scenarios, where the police officer deals with violence, danger and the need to make quick and impactful decisions. Personal engagement at work can deteriorate, leading to discouragement and the feeling that the effort expended is not rewarded or valued. And finally, depersonalization, in turn, can lead the police to develop cold and distant attitudes, as a defense mechanism in the face of human suffering and the pressures of work.

In line with the authors, Wisner (1994 *apud* Silva; Vieira, 2008, p.66-67) point out that "the work situation is composed of three components: physical, cognitive and psychic. Each of these components can be characterized by a set of efforts undertaken to meet the demands of the tasks, which can determine an overload of work."

In this sense, Wisner highlights the complexity involved in work activities, especially in high-pressure professions such as military police. Physical load refers to the body effort required to perform functions, often involving long working hours, strenuous activities, and risky situations. Cognitive load, on the other hand, is related to the processing of information, quick and accurate decision-making, and the constant vigilance necessary to deal with emergencies and unforeseen situations. Finally, the psychic burden involves emotional stress, the responsibility to protect lives and property, and exposure to traumatic situations.

These three components, when combined, can generate a significant overload, affecting not only the efficiency and performance of the professional, but also their mental



ISSN: 2358-2472

health and overall well-being. Thus, it is essential that psychological support policies and practices be implemented to mitigate the negative effects of these overloads and promote a healthier and more sustainable work environment for military police officers in the State of Amapá.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts the integrative literature review method. According to Souza, Silva and Carvalho (2010, p.103) it "is the broadest methodological approach regarding reviews, allowing the inclusion of experimental and non-experimental studies for a complete understanding of the phenomenon analyzed". In this way, the integrative review organizes and synthesizes research results on a specific topic, expanding the discussions.

Then, based on the integrative review, the following steps were followed throughout this work (as shown in figure 01): 1-Definition of the guiding question; 2-Selection of the database, descriptors and criteria for inclusion and exclusion of articles; 3- Extraction of information from the selected articles; 4- Evaluation of the study/data; 5- Discussion of the results and 6- Presentation of the review. (Souza; Silva; Carvalho, 2010)



Figure 01: Stages of the Integrative Literature Review

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024)

In this sense, the first step involved the clear definition of the research question, which guided the entire integrative review. In the context of this study, the guiding question focused on investigating the impacts of occupational stress on the mental health of military



police officers in the State of Amapá? Based on this questioning, the second stage consisted of conducting a systematic search in the databases, *Scielo* and *Google* Scholar.

However, it is worth mentioning that when searching *Scielo*, no studies corresponding to the theme were found. Thus, the database used in this study was only *Google* Scholar. Thus, during this phase, the relevant descriptors for the research were defined, such as "Police mental health", "Police mental health Amapá". These terms were used to identify the most pertinent studies on the subject. At this stage, the selection of articles was made based on the defined descriptors.

It also involved the evaluation and selection of studies based on specific criteria such as: a) the relevance and methodological quality of the studies; b) scientific articles and dissertations published between 2010 and 2024, which addressed the impacts of occupational stress on the mental health of military police officers in Amapá; c) scientific productions written in Portuguese. And as exclusion criteria: studies that did not present empirical data or that were not available in full.

Once the selection was made, the next step was to read the abstracts of the papers to extract the information from the articles that were selected. Then, in the fifth stage, it was time to organize the discussion of results and finally, the sixth stage involved the presentation of the results obtained in the integrative review, highlighting the main conclusions and discussing the impacts of occupational stress on the mental health of military police officers, with a specific focus on cases in the State of Amapá, as we will see below.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

In all, 4,820 publications were found in the *Google* Scholar database, however, when reading the abstract of the works, 4,817 articles were excluded because they did not meet the same objective of the study. Thus, only 03 works were selected for analysis and discussion.

The first work found was the study by Mendonça (2017) on the stress in the radio patrol activity of military police officers in Amapá. The author, through an exploratory quantitative and qualitative analysis, applied questionnaires to 87 police officers and found that "54% equivalent to (47 police officers) presented a degree of stress and only 46% equivalent to (police officers) surveyed did not present any type of symptoms." (Mendonça, 2017, p.)



In this sense, these data are worrying, as they indicate that more than half of police officers are exposed to factors that affect their mental health. Chronic stress is a form of occupational stress and can have several negative consequences, such as decreased responsiveness, increased risk of operational errors, and impact on the personal lives of police officers. Therefore, Bradley, Dinan and Lipp *apud* Silva emphasize that:

Chronic stress can be the trigger for numerous genetically programmed diseases, which would remain latent in the absence of stress, and opportunistic diseases that take advantage of the drop in immunity to install themselves in the body. These diseases can be both physical and psychological. (Bradley; Dinan 2010 *apud* Silva, 2015, p.3).

In line with the authors, Carvalho, Porto, and Sousa (2020, p.15204) state that "among the professional categories, the PM is one of the most likely to suffer conditions that cause chronic stress." From this perspective, the high incidence of stress among military police officers highlights the need to implement psychological support measures and occupational well-being programs for these professionals, aiming not only to mitigate adverse effects on mental health, but also to promote a healthier and more sustainable work environment over time.

The article by Costa (2021), the second work found, presents the Cardiovascular risk factors in military police officers from a military police battalion in Macapá, where at the time, the author collected data through the laboratory tests of 101 military police officers in the State of Amapá.

Thus, with regard to the stress in police work of these professionals, it was found that "45.6% of police officers are at risk for work stress (in passive work and in high exhaustion). " (Costa, 2021, p.41) Within this perspective, this percentage indicates that almost half of the professionals interviewed are exposed to working conditions that can lead to the development of severe occupational stress.

In the study by Gama *et al.* (2024), the third study found addresses the health of security agents in the State of Amapá. The authors used the questionnaire on stress at work as a research instrument. Therefore, the data revealed that "more than 35% of the participants consider that they have high or very high stress and more than 40% judge that the stress is regular. About 15% have low stress and 10% say they have no stress at work. " (Gama *et al.* 2024, p.8) In this way, it can be understood that 75% of the participants report moderate to high stress, thus, it is evident that stress is a significant problem for this professional category and ends up affecting the mental health of the military.



Thus, it is understood that these numbers highlight the significant prevalence of stress among military police officers in the State of Amapá, reflecting a substantial challenge to the mental health of these professionals. Since military police officers in Amapá are exposed to various sources of stress in their daily work, among the most common are constant exposure to situations of violence, whether through direct confrontations with criminals or when dealing with violent crime scenes, which can lead to psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

Therefore, other factors that can affect the mental health of military police officers, such as the demand for results and the need to perform efficiently in high-risk and emergency situations, significantly increase the pressure on police officers, contributing to occupational stress, long working hours and irregular schedules make it difficult to reconcile professional and personal life. which can lead to physical and emotional exhaustion.

## CONCLUSION

The integrative review presented provided a comprehensive view of the work of the Military Police of the State of Amapá and the impacts of the work performed in the Corporation on their mental health. In this way, the complexity and importance of the functions performed by this institution in ensuring the public safety of society became evident.

The results of this study highlight that occupational stress is a critical issue for the mental health of military police officers in the State of Amapá, with the majority of military police officers having moderate to high levels of stress. This underlines the urgent need for interventional measures to protect the well-being of these professionals.

It was possible to evidence in the studies by Mendonça (2017), Costa (2021) and Gama *et al.* (2024) the significant prevalence of stress among military police officers, with a considerable proportion reporting high or regular levels of stress. These numbers not only underline the worrying reality of these professionals, but also warn of the potential risks to their physical and psychological health.

The review also emphasized the negative impacts that police work can have on the mental health of military police officers, sources of stress, such as constant exposure to violence, pressure for results, and long working hours, contribute to a high incidence of mental disorders, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and burnout.



The consequences for the mental health of police officers not only affect individuals, but also the effectiveness and safety of the corporation as a whole.

The analysis also revealed a dearth of research on the mental health of police officers in the state of Amapá, with only three relevant studies selected from 4,820 initial publications. Based on this, this study not only contributes to the existing knowledge, but also seeks to encourage, even if in an embryonic way, new investigations that deepen the understanding of this problem and promote effective strategies to mitigate the impacts of occupational stress on police work.

However, it should be noted that the mental health of military police officers is an extremely important issue that deserves attention not only at the individual level, but also in public policies aimed at the well-being of these professionals in order to ensure healthier and more sustainable working conditions for those who dedicate their lives to the protection of society.

Therefore, investing in prevention and intervention strategies, improving working conditions, and promoting an environment of psychological support are fundamental steps to ensure the well-being of police officers. With these measures, it is possible not only to reduce the negative impacts of work on the mental health of police officers, but also to strengthen the corporation, making it more resilient and effective in its mission to protect and serve the population of Amapá.



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