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Burnout Syndrome and emotional work in military police: a hierarchical dyadic analysis

Síndrome de Burnout e trabalho emocional em policiais militares: uma análise diádica hierárquica

Michelle Engers Taube¹ , Mary Sandra Carlotto² 

¹ Universidade do Vale do Taquari, Centro de Ciências da Vida, Departamento de Psicologia. Lajeado, RS, Brasil. E-mail: <michelle.engers.taube@gmail.com>.

² Universidade de Brasília, Departamento de Psicologia do Trabalho, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia Social, do Trabalho e das Organizações. Brasília, DF, Brasil.

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Abstract

Objective

To verify whether emotional work (emotional demands, emotional dissonance) affects both the leader and the subordinate (dyad) in the manifestation of the Burnout Syndrome in military police officers.

Method

Participants were 76 dyads (leader-subordinate) who answered a questionnaire with sociodemographic and work data, the Spanish Burnout Inventory, a subscale of the Work Experience and Assessment Questionnaire and a subscale of the Frankfurt Emotion Work Scale. Analyses were performed using the player-partner interdependence model through path analysis.

Results

It was found that emotional dissonance predicts Burnout Syndrome in leaders. In subordinates, the prediction of the syndrome was based on the variables emotional dissonance of leaders as well as on the emotional dissonance, and emotional demands. The results show that there is a cross-relationship in the dyad between emotional dissonance and Burnout Syndrome.

Conclusion

Institutional initiatives are required to avoid the negative consequences of emotional labor.

Keywords: Burnout Syndrome; Emotions; Employee; Leadership; Police.

Resumo

Objetivo

Verificar se o trabalho emocional (exigências emocionais, dissonância emocional) ao nível da díade líder e subordinado opera em conjunto na manifestação da Síndrome de Burnout em policiais militares.

Método

Participaram 76 díades (líder-subordinado) que responderam a um questionário com dados sociodemográficos e laborais, questionário de Avaliação da Síndrome de Burnout, uma subescala

do *Work Experience and Assessment Questionnaire* e uma subescala do *Frankfurt Emotion Work*. As análises foram realizadas utilizando o modelo de interdependência ator-parceiro por meio da análise de caminhos.

Resultados

Verificou-se que a dissonância emocional prediz a Síndrome de Burnout em líderes. Em subordinados, a predição da síndrome foi das variáveis dissonância emocional dos líderes e pela dissonância emocional e demandas emocionais. Os resultados revelam existir uma relação diádica cruzada entre a dissonância emocional e a Síndrome de Burnout na diáde.

Conclusão

Ações institucionais são necessárias para evitar consequências negativas do trabalho emocional.

Palavras-chave: Síndrome de Burnout; Emoções; Empregado; Liderança; Policiais.

The military police are responsible for the enforcement of public security policy in Brazil and their main activity is characterized by ostensive policing, carried out by uniformed police officers in public places, with a preventive purpose, through observation and inspection, with a vigilant attitude, trying to restrain the action of offenders and avoid the occurrence of criminal acts (Rio Grande do Sul, 1997). The military police are made up of senior-level officers (Colonel, Lieutenant-Colonel, Major, Captain, First Lieutenant) in charge of the command and management of troops that are divided into battalions and by mid-level officers (First Sergeant, Second Sergeant, Soldier) who execute the commands of their leader.

Their daily work is characterized by high dedication and commitment to meeting the demands of the community and by the feeling of public safety (Paschoal, 2022). Furthermore, according to that author, responding to incidents imposes a high burden of emotions and feelings. In addition to the technical preparation of these professionals, their daily lives are marked by emotional demands from different target groups with whom they must interact as part of their work, such as colleagues and superiors, the general population, victims and criminals (Guedes & Gondim, 2020). In many cases, they put their own lives at the service of the State and Civil Society to defend the social collective, to undertake strategic plans, often risky and to articulate the implementation of public safety policies (L. R. Santos, 2022).

Several occupational stressors plaguing police forces are reported in the literature; some are related to the demands of the job position, such as lack of control in the work environment, little professional autonomy, extensive work hours, work demands that are performed on days and hours off (L. R. Santos, 2022; Souza et al., 2022), risks of injuries or wounds resulting from the profession (T. R. B. Santos et al., 2022). Other stressors are related to the working conditions, such as the shortage of human resources, excessive bureaucracy, having to respond to legal proceedings arising from police service, use of equipment inappropriate for the service (T. R. B. Santos et al., 2022), high rates of violence to which these professionals are subjected, excessive hierarchical pressure due to the strict rules of the military setting marked by hierarchy and discipline (J. S. C. Alves et al., 2017; L. R. Santos, 2022).

The devaluation of monthly income (Souza et al., 2022), the lack of infrastructure, and the demands of the media and of part of the organized civil society (L. R. Santos, 2022) should also be mentioned. F. B. Santos et al. (2021) add as stressors the lack of career growth prospects, training deficiencies, the presence of discrimination/favoritism in the workplace, the way tasks are distributed, the type of control, and the deficiency in the spreading of information about organizational decisions.

During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, police officers were considered essential workers and were more affected by the pandemic than the community, because in addition to the direct impact of the disease, they interacted with the population that was experiencing

high levels of stress due to social isolation, scarcity of resources, economic insecurity and fear of contagion (Stogner et al., 2020). Furthermore, according to those authors, the military police work was changed due to safety protocols that included the mandatory use of personal protective equipment and by new patrolling routines, shift schedules and working hours that caused stress in the workplace and mental health problems.

Occupational stressors, when persistent, can lead to the Burnout Syndrome. Those chronic occupational stressors arise from a subjective analysis composed of negative cognitions, emotions and attitudes towards the job (Gil-Monte, 2011). The syndrome is the result of the combination of poor working conditions and failures in self-regulation to cope with the workplace stressors (Bakker & Vries, 2021).

Gil-Monte (2005) developed a theoretical model consisting of four dimensions: 1) Illusion of work, characterized by the worker's desire to achieve his/her job goals and perceived as a source of personal and professional pleasure. Evaluated inversely, low scores in this dimension indicate high levels of Burnout Syndrome; 2) Psychological exhaustion, defined by the emergence of emotional and physical exhaustion resulting from interpersonal relationships established with people who have problems; 3) Indolence, described by the presence of feelings of indifference towards clients, colleagues and the organization; and, 4) Guilt, defined as a social emotion linked to interpersonal relationships resulting from negative behavior and attitudes developed at work towards people with whom he/she has to establish his/her work relationships. The worker believes that he/she is violating some norm derived from the social prescription regarding his/her professional role.

Burnout entails a series of adverse consequences for both individuals and the organizations in which these professionals operate. These consequences are initially of a psychological nature (concentration and memory problems, difficulty in making decisions, reduced coping capacity, anxiety, depression, dissatisfaction with life, low self-esteem, insomnia, irritability and increased consumption of alcohol and tobacco), which, if maintained over time, can cause adverse effects on physical health (musculoskeletal pain, gastric changes, cardiovascular disorders, headaches, increased vulnerability to infections, as well as insomnia and chronic fatigue) and deterioration of behavioral health (job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, increased presenteeism and absenteeism, turnover intention, reduced performance), which in turn will bear consequences for the organizational objectives (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).

Specifically in the case of military police officers, one of the professional categories that has been little investigated in Brazil, the numerous stressors in their daily work have caused this profession to bear a high risk of developing Burnout Syndrome (L. Alves et al., 2023; Baek et al., 2022). Military positions are characterized by rigorous routines and long shifts and require the practice of sensitivity and empathy, high diligence and attention (Atias et al., 2022). According to the authors, prolonged exposure to such conditions can cause Burnout Syndrome and affect military policemen's ability to perform their duties at work.

Military police officers' Burnout Syndrome has been investigated by Aguwa et al. (2022); Baek et al. (2022). A systematic review carried out by Dias and Andrade (2020) found a high number of military police personnel with a high level of Burnout Syndrome and, as risk factors, longer time in the profession and working for the institution, job dissatisfaction, lack of feedback, overload, and relationship between police professionals and the public. These factors can generate negative results, causing symptoms such as anxiety, low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness on the job, difficulty concentrating, memory loss, poor emotion control, negligence, problems with superiors

and subordinates, avoidance of social contact in the workplace, feelings of exhaustion, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, and intention to leave work.

Emotional labor is one of the variables investigated as predictor of the Burnout Syndrome. This is characterized as a process of regulating feelings and their expressions to meet organizational objectives, a concept opposite to emotional harmony, which occurs when the feelings expressed by the individual are congruent with the emotions experienced, rules of feelings and expectations that the worker holds for himself regarding emotional expression (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

The work setting helps to inform and to externalize its culture and the way workers should behave (Grandey, 2000). The country's and the organizational cultures bear a strong implication on the dynamics of emotional labor (Yang & Chen, 2021).

Emotional demand is defined by the frequency of interpersonal interactions and the variety and intensity of emotions expressed. Emotional dissonance occurs when the emotions expression satisfies the feeling rules but clashes with the internal feelings (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional demand is considered its quantitative dimension and emotional dissonance its qualitative dimension (Pujol-Cols et al., 2021).

The emotional demands of the job combined with emotional dissonance can result in even higher levels of burnout syndrome (Zapf et al., 2001). The emotional demands placed on police officers as a consequence of their role, organization and unique culture and emotional dissonance contributes to the development of the burnout syndrome (Schaible & Six, 2016).

The quality of the leadership-subordinate relationship is related to the Burnout Syndrome (Kafetsios et al., 2012; Parent-Lamarche & Biron, 2022). In their daily work, leaders and subordinates express and regulate their emotions, and subordinates need to manage their feelings towards the leader as a result of the influence that those feelings exert on their behavior (Campos et al., 2021).

Workers with Burnout Syndrome feel emotionally exhausted, ineffective, distant, and indifferent to the people they interact with professionally, and other coworkers may experience the same feelings and behaviors (Chullen, 2014). This phenomenon is described by (Hatfield et al., 1993) as the tendency to automatically imitate and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, converge emotionally. Emotional contagion, allows dyads, work groups, and even entire organizations to converge in emotional states, displays, or any other emotional process (Elfenbein, 2023). This process that helps explaining the transfer of affect and emotions in the dialogical relationships is quite common (Herrmann et al., 2023).

In recent years, there has been a growing concern among military organizations' leaders, the category itself, and researchers about the potential risks of this type of occupational illness (Sentone, 2023). A systematic review conducted by that author highlights that, in Brazil, there has been a significant increase in studies with military police officers. However, there are still few studies that seek factors associated with the burnout syndrome in this professional category.

Although studies have sought to investigate the dyadic relationship between leaders and subordinates, they generally use an approach based on the impact of leadership styles (Scott & Zweig, 2021; Wang et al., 2019). In a recent international systematic review, Kim et al. (2020) identified 62 articles with pure dyadic analysis with samples in pairs, composed of leaders and subordinates, of which only one evaluated the Burnout Syndrome. A search in the main Brazilian databases (Scientific Electronic Library online [SciELO], EBSCOhost, Scopus, *Periódicos Eletrônicos em Psicologia* [PePSIC, Electronic Journals in Psychology], Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library

[SPELL]) did not find any articles with dyadic analysis of leaders and subordinates in which the outcome was the Burnout Syndrome.

Therefore, our study aimed to verify whether emotional labor (emotional demands, emotional dissonance) at the level of the leader-subordinate dyad affects jointly the manifestation of the Burnout Syndrome in military police officers. The hypothetical theoretical model was developed based on the interdependent nature of close relationships and the theory of social contagion. Thus, it is based on two hypotheses: H1) Emotional labor (emotional demands, emotional dissonance) positively predicts Burnout Syndrome in leaders and subordinates; H2) The emotional labor (emotional demands, emotional dissonance) of leaders and the emotional labor of subordinates (dyadic), act jointly to influence the Burnout Syndrome.

Method

Participants

The survey study used a non-probabilistic sample of dependent dyads (Kim et al., 2020) with dyad control, consisting of 90 military police officers, 14 leaders and 76 subordinates, from a Regional Police Command in a city in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The inclusion criteria were: individuals professionally active and having worked for more than one year in the current position/institution.

In the composition of the dyads for analysis purposes, subordinates associated with each leader were invited. Therefore, a leader could compose the dyads with his or her corresponding subordinate. The total sample included 76 dyads with an association between leader and subordinate of at least six months; this allowed us to infer that there was some level of proximity in the dyad possibly causing the emergence of the phenomenon in question.

In the group of police leaders, the majority declared to be male (85.5%; $n = 12$); marital status: with a partner (92.9%; $n = 13$); with children (100%; $n = 14$) and their mean age was 42.86 years ($SD = 4.40$). Regarding education, half of the sample had a specialization level (50.0%; $n = 7$), followed by a higher education degree (35.7%; $n = 5$). Regarding the position, 14.3% ($n = 2$) belonged to the strategic leadership (Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Major); a total of 71.4% ($n = 10$) were at the intermediate leadership level (Captain, Lieutenant) and 14.3% ($n = 2$) were part of the operational leadership group (Officer Candidate and Sergeant). The average time spent in leadership positions was 13.31 years ($SD = 9.241$; Min = 3, Max = 32) and in the current position the average was 6.17 years ($SD = 7.895$; Min = 1, Max = 30). The average number of people the leader led was 72 ($SD = 89$; Min = 5, Max = 236) and the average monthly salary was R\$15.342,92 ($SD = R\$4,921.51$).

In the group of subordinate police officers, the majority declared themselves to be male (72.4%; $n = 55$), having a partner (92.1%; $n = 70$), with children (84.2%; $n = 64$) and with an average age of 38.52 years ($SD = 7.35$). Regarding education, the majority had higher education and specialization (53.9%; $n = 41$), followed by high school (42.1%; $n = 32$). The average length of service was 14.89 years ($SD = 8.33$), the average weekly workload was 40.76 hours ($SD = 2.83$), and the average monthly salary was R\$ 7.046,83 ($SD = 3,978.82$).

Instruments

Questionnaire on sociodemographic data (gender, age, marital status, children, education) and employment data (total working time period, time in current job, weekly working hours, monthly

compensation, hierarchical level); for leaders (time acting as leader, number of people under their command) and for subordinates (time under current leadership);

Spanish Burnout Inventory (SBI) (Gil-Monte, 2005; 2011), version adapted for use in Brazil by Gil-Monte et al. (2010). The instrument includes 20 items distributed across four subscales. For the present study, global burnout was used, which is the average of the 15 items from the subscales of Work Delight (reversed), Mental Exhaustion and Indolence. Work Delight (five items, $\alpha = 0.72$, e.g. item: I feel enchanted by my job); Mental Exhaustion (four items, $\alpha = 0.86$, e.g. item: I feel physically tired at work); Indolence (six items, $\alpha = 0.75$, e.g. item: I am ironic with some people). The items were evaluated using a four-point scale, with (0) indicating never and (4) every day;

Emotional labor: Assessed through two subscales adapted for use in the Brazilian context by Taube (2022). 1) Emotional demand – Questionnaire on the Experience and Assessment of Work (QEEW) by van Veldhoven et al. (2002), subscale composed of seven items ($\alpha = 0.71$, e.g. item: Does your work demand emotionally a lot from you?). The items were assessed using a four-point scale, with (1) never and (4) always. 2) Emotional dissonance – Frankfurt Emotion Work Scales (FEWS) by Zapf et al. (1999), consisting of five items ($\alpha = 0.79$, e.g. item: At work, how often are you unable to express your spontaneous feelings (e.g., annoyance)?). The items were assessed using a five-point scale, ranging from (1) never to (5) very often.

Procedures

The instruments were applied by the first author and by a student of Scientific Initiation at the Regional Police Ostensive Command. At the time of data collection, the objective of the study and the Informed Consent Forms (ICF) were explained. Afterwards, the ICF were distributed to the participants to be filled out. Subordinates were instructed to use their direct leadership as a reference for their responses. The leader-subordinate dyads were formed, but neither dyad party had access to the other party's responses, thus avoiding bias in individual responses.

The data collection was carried out in May 2022, at the end of the fifth phase of COVID-19, characterized, according to the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation's MonitoraCovid-19 system, by the rapid worldwide spread of the omicron variant when an accelerated increase in the number of cases was observed, preceded by an increase in test positivity, with an increase in ICU bed occupancy rates and lower mortality rates than in previous waves (Barcellos & Xavier, 2022). Thus, it was possible to carry out data collection in person. The investigation was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (Unisinos), under number CAEE: 46858121.9.0000.5344.

Data analysis was performed using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) (Cook & Kenny, 2005), a useful model when there is an assumption that there is a direct or indirect influence between the variables of the individuals that make up a dyad. In the case of this study, the influence between variables of leaders and subordinates was tested. The data allowed the identification of the dyads, using an APIM with identified dyads, in which it is possible to know the category of each subject in the dyad.

To perform the APIM, path analysis was used with the Maximum Likelihood with Robust (MLR) estimator. This type of model is just-identified, so the degrees of freedom of the model were equal to 0. The analyses were performed in the R environment, using the Lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012).

Results

Table 1 lists the results of the descriptive analysis of the sample dimensions regarding the Burnout Syndrome and Emotional Labor. The scoring scale highest index, which is indicative of

the syndrome, was reached in the Psychic Exhaustion dimension. As for Emotional Labor, it was the dimension of Emotional Dissonance. All dimensions of the investigated constructs presented internal consistency coefficients, according to Cronbach's alpha coefficient that was considered satisfactory ($\alpha > 0.70$).

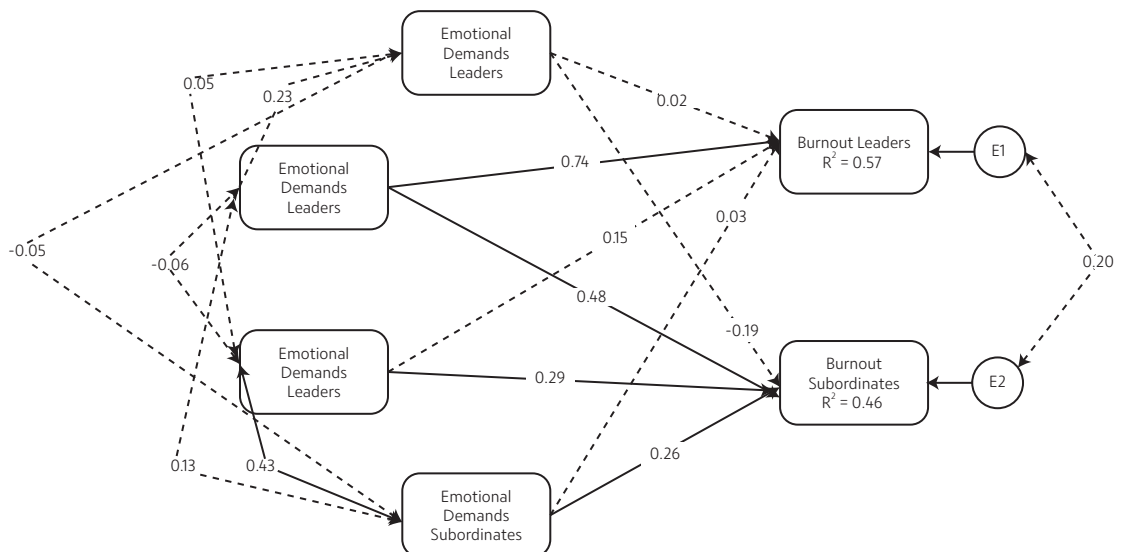
Table 1
Mean, standard deviation and alphas obtained in the present sample

Variables	M	SD	α
Burnout Syndrome			
Illusion through work	1.00	0.74	0.87
Psychic exhaustion	2.10	0.97	0.87
Indolence	1.28	0.79	0.83
Emotional labor			
Emotional demands	3.04	0.40	0.77
Emotional dissonance	3.29	0.58	0.78

The APIM was used to investigate the impact of individual differences of leaders on subordinates and vice versa, in relation to the variables of emotional demand, emotional dissonance and burnout. The burnout index of leaders was significantly and positively predicted only by the emotional dissonance of leaders ($\beta = 3.96$ [95% CI 2.93; 4.98], $p < 0.001$). The other variables did not present significant relationships with the burnout index of leaders as follows: emotional demands of leaders ($\beta = 0.15$ [95% CI -1.68; 1.99], $p = 0.871$), emotional dissonance of subordinates ($\beta = 0.54$ [95% CI -0.19; 1.28], $p = 0.148$) and emotional demands of subordinates ($\beta = 0.16$ [95% CI -0.88; 1.20], $p = 0.765$).

In contrast, subordinate burnout was significantly and positively predicted by leaders' emotional dissonance ($\beta = 2.91$ [95% CI 1.60; 4.22], $p < 0.001$), subordinates' emotional dissonance ($\beta = 1.20$ [95% CI 0.25; 2.14], $p = 0.013$), and subordinates' emotional demands ($\beta = 1.47$ [95% CI 0.15; 2.80], $p = 0.030$). Leaders' emotional demands were not a significant predictor of subordinate burnout ($\beta = -2.09$ [95% CI -4.43; 0.25], $p = 0.080$). The tested model and its results are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Leader-subordinate interdependence measurement model according to the hypotheses.



Note: The values shown in the figure refer to standardized beta coefficients. The dotted arrows represent non-significant predictions ($p > 0.05$). The analysis used 50 of the 76 dyads that make up the sample of this study.

Together, the model variables were able to explain 57% of the variance in the level of the leaders' burn out and 46% of the level of subordinates' burn out. This result indicates a high effect size according to Emerson (2023). parameters, which indicates that the results are likely to be found in the target population.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to verify whether emotional labor (emotional demands, emotional dissonance) at the level of the leader-subordinate dyad affects jointly the manifestation of Burnout Syndrome in military police officers. The results revealed that the greater the emotional dissonance experienced by the leader, the higher the rates of Burnout Syndrome. This result is confirmed by the literature (Lennie et al., 2020; Schaible & Six, 2016). According to a study by Lennie et al. (2020), the rules of emotional expression in police officers are an unofficial performance measure, being seen as an indicator of poor performance and incapacity, reflecting the long-standing male police culture.

Thus, police officers deliberately set a distance from people at work as a form of self-protection. According to Doherty et al. (1995), when workers need to deal with intense emotional expressions, such as fear, anxiety, sadness, anger or empathy, for a prolonged period of time, they begin to distance themselves from their own emotions or withdraw from the situation. This behavior, over time, can lead to the development of the Burnout Syndrome.

In the case of leaders, one can think of the military organization's culture based on, discipline, and team spirit, which are more intense as the police officer rises in the ranks; consequently, their authority and responsibility also increase (D. N. Santos et al., 2020). In this type of culture, emotional suppression is stronger and members tend to invest more effort in restricting emotional expression (Chiang et al., 2020). According to Oliveira and Santos (2010), there are barriers in interpersonal relationships between police officers, especially those who exercise leadership roles and those who are led, since there is no room for much reflection in the corporation; this makes overcoming the difficulties that involve emotions a complex process.

The way of expressing emotions bears repercussions on subordinates, since it has been identified that the Burnout Syndrome is higher in subordinates who perceive the emotional dissonance of their leader. In this sense, the cross-relationship of emotional dissonance in the dyadic relationship is evident, a condition also identified by Kenworthy et al. (2014). According to Moin et al. (2021), leaders and subordinates reciprocally build their relationships and the way emotions are managed and, when the leader's emotions are not managed effectively, the reciprocally developed relationship between subordinates and leaders may be harmed. We may consider that this relationship becomes a stressor that can explain the Burnout Syndrome.

Also in subordinates, emotional demands and emotional dissonance increase the rates of the Burnout Syndrome. This result confirms those obtained in other studies (Bakker & Heuven, 2006; Taube, 2022). It can be thought that this situation occurs due to the fact that these police officers are more present in serving the population, which requires greater sensitivity and empathy, diligence and attention (Atias et al., 2022). This result is enhanced to the extent that the emotional demands of leaders were not a significant predictor of the Burnout Syndrome in subordinates.

Four strengths can be cited in this study. The first is the use of dyadic analysis covering leader and subordinate, which is still a gap to be filled (Kim et al., 2020), since studies that give priority to leaders and leadership styles predominate (Yang & Chen, 2021). The second refers to the sample consisting of identified dyadic data, thus enabling cross-analysis. The third is the high magnitude of

the effect, which indicates that the results are probably also found in the target population. Finally, it is worth highlighting that this is the first national study carried out with dyads, emotional labor, and its impact on the Burnout Syndrome in military police officers.

The study has limitations that should be considered when reviewing its outcome. The first limitation refers to the type of convenience sample, which makes it impossible to generalize its results. The second concerns the type of sample consisting of military police officers from a city in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The third is the use of self-report measures that may generate some type of bias due to the constructs investigated, in this case emotions at work.

Based on the above, we suggest the performance of further studies that include variables such as emotional regulation strategies, levels of expression of emotions (superficial and deep emotions), and emotional intelligence in order to increase the explanatory power of the Burnout Syndrome and the joint impact on the leader-subordinate dyad. As far as practice is concerned, we suggest interventions aimed at raising awareness of the military institution's personnel about the important role of labor emotions for workers' mental health, quality of life at the workplace, and quality of care for the public.

The importance of developing emotional regulation strategies and healthy strategies for coping with occupational stressors in general and, specifically, affective-relational stressors is highlighted. Interventions focused on emotional intelligence are relevant initiatives as a measure to assist in the interpretation and expression of emotions at work, with a focus on the expression of authentic emotions between leaders and subordinates.

It is important to demystify the military police officer as a hero/heroine, as a model of courage, who resists all stressors present in the internal and external context of the police officer's work. This culture makes it difficult to seek qualified help and prevents the prevention and treatment of the Burnout Syndrome, which can lead to more serious psychopathological conditions, such as depression, and abandonment of the profession.

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Contributors

Conceptualization: M. E. TAUBE. Data curation and Formal analysis: M. E. TAUBE. Methodology: M. E. TAUBE and M. S. CARLOTTO. Project administration: M. E. TAUBE. Writing – original draft: M. E. TAUBE. Writing – review & editing: M. E. TAUBE and M. S. CARLOTTO.