

The health of professionals involved with public security

Public Security is a topic that has been scantily addressed within the scope of Brazilian public health, although the rates of crime and violence in general are alarming and increasingly demand knowledge management, including knowledge of these workers about health, striving to find the best match possible between their working conditions and their quality of life. However, this theme has traditionally been studied far more by the social sciences, whose primary focus is the reconstruction of the history of police institutions, their links to the ruling elites and the inadequacy of their actions to serve the citizens' needs.

Police officers as individuals and as workers have hitherto received little attention from an academic standpoint, and there is a particularly large knowledge gap in the area of †occupational health. In this special issue we have the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the world of Public Security with a focus on living and health conditions of this category of workers, emphasizing its high vulnerability to risk, stress and mental suffering. By dedicating a specific edition of this journal to a theme of this nature, we have adopted a broader concept of health and address the more frequent problems faced by these professionals.

Consequently, we sought to outline the extent of their physical and mental health problems, including the risk of being subject to accidents and violence in the course of their activities. We also studied the stress caused by the performance of their duties, more often than not lacking adequate conditions for their fulfillment, and the “escape valves” by which they seek to reduce the high levels of stress they experience in their day-to-day activities. We also examined the subjective aspects of these public officials in order to investigate their perceptions and self-image of themselves, their activities, their family lives and how their work activities affect their view of the world. Most of the analyses presented here are the result of unpublished empirical research and to a lesser extent of in-depth analytical and comparative research. The studies encompass both civil and military police officers and provide theoretical, strategic and practical contributions on as yet rarely studied themes, such as the professional enhancement of police officers.

The papers in this special edition also provide a broad gamut of viewpoints, as on the one hand they originate from different areas of knowledge (sociology, anthropology, psychology, educational psychology, statistics and epidemiology) and include contributions from the police officers themselves. On the other hand, they feature the outcome of research by professionals from various Brazilian institutions, such as the Federal Universities of Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, the State Universities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation.

This special issue is also a unique opportunity to bring together the production of some members of the National Institute of Science and Technology/INCT Violence, Democracy and Civic Security, which is supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development/CNPq, in a single publication.

We trust that you, dear reader, will appreciate the information that the studies presented here contain, and above all we hope that the reflections and proposals made in the articles may inspire improvements in the management of the problems identified and public security policies in general. We should not forget that institutions, including those dedicated to Public Security, are comprised of people whose rights need to be acknowledged, including the right to health enshrined in the Brazilian Constitution.

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Guest Editor