



Factors Associated with Suicide among Police Officers in Brazil: An Integrative Literature Review Study

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify factors associated with suicide among police officers in Brazil. This is an integrative literature review that was based on the following guiding question: "What are the factors associated with suicide among police officers in Brazil?". Searches were performed in November 2023 in the scientific databases Virtual Health Library (VHL) (<https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/>) and PubMed (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>), from the search key: ((POLICE) AND (SUICIDE)) and (BRAZIL). The descriptors used were extracted from the Mesh/National Library of Medicine platform. Original articles published in the last 10 years that presented characteristics, profile and risk factors associated with suicide were included. Literature review studies, dissertations, theses, letters to the editor and articles in duplicate were excluded. The studies were published between 2007 and 2022. The sample consisted of quantitative descriptive studies (n=3), retrospective cohort (n=1) and ecological time series (n=1). The surveys had samples mostly composed of military police men; only one study investigated federal highway police. The factors associated with suicide and suicidal ideation among police officers in Brazil were financial complications, psychopathological comorbidities, male sex, young age and incipient career graduation.

Keywords: Police; Suicide; Depression; Anxiety; Suicidal Behaviour; Stress

Abbreviations: VHL: Virtual Health Library; PTSD: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

Introduction

Police activity represents a stressful occupation with a significant negative impact on the mental and physical health of the professional and can generate high rates of depression, anxiety, exhaustion and lead to suicide [1]. Rescuers such as police, firefighters and paramedics have in their occupational routines occupational events capable of providing greater

risks to mental health such as suicidal thoughts and behaviors. In contrast, factors such as companionship and pre-recruitment screening can serve as protective agents against the appearance of disorders or maintenance of psychiatric conditions in this population [2].

Among the feelings of risk, hopelessness represents a manifestation of psychological vulnerability that has an important relationship with the reduction of personal fulfillment of the police officer. This condition generates a negative potential for the mental health of police officers,

which, in addition to depression and emotional exhaustion, is associated with a higher risk of suicide [3].

Thus, it is necessary to identify and understand the factors that are related to suicidal ideation among security professionals, due to their exposure to stressors that can intensify an important psychological imbalance [4]. Given the above, this integrative literature review aimed to identify the factors associated with suicide among police officers in Brazil.

Material and Methods

This is an integrative review conducted through the systematic search for scientific studies, critical evaluation and synthesis of available evidence on the investigated topic. The methodological tool adopted in the execution of the investigation was PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The study was conducted considering six methodological steps [5]: a) definition of the guiding question; b) systematic search of evidence; c) categorization of studies; d) evaluation of selected studies; e) interpretation of evidence; f) synthesis and presentation of the results.

The following guiding question was defined: "What are the factors associated with suicide among Brazilian police officers?". Searches were performed in November 2023 in the scientific databases Virtual Health Library (VHL) (<https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/>) and PubMed (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>), from the search key: ((POLICE) AND (SUICIDE)) AND (BRAZIL). The descriptors used were extracted from the Mesh/National Library of Medicine platform.

Original articles published in the last 10 years that presented characteristics, profile and risk factors associated with suicide were included. Literature review studies, dissertations, theses, letters to the editor and articles in duplicate were excluded.

The search resulted in 67 studies published in the last 10 years, from the use of descriptors in both databases (35 in VHL and 32 in PUBMED). Then, the title, abstract and keywords were read to identify the objective of the studies and selection criteria; at this stage, 19 studies were selected. These were analyzed in full and 14 articles were excluded. Thus, five investigations made up the final sample of this review (Figure 1). A data collection form was used for critical analysis of the studies, consisting of the following information: title; authors; year; place of study execution; sample; objective; design and main results.

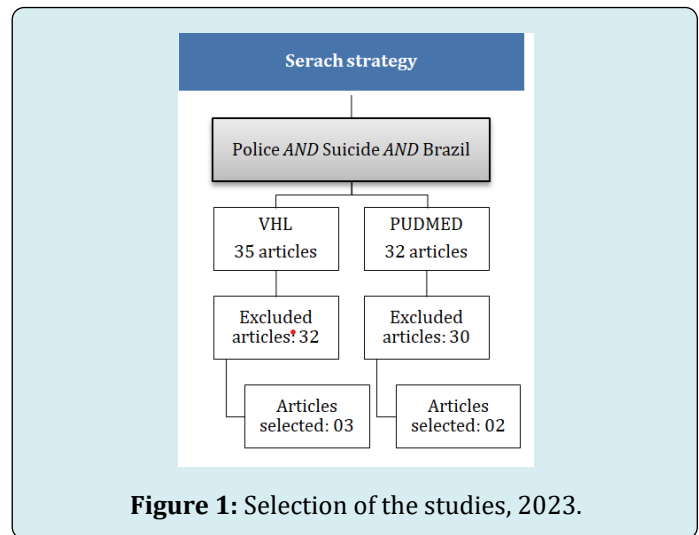


Figure 1: Selection of the studies, 2023.

Results

The studies were published between 2007 and 2022. The sample consisted of quantitative descriptive studies (n=3), retrospective cohort (n=1) and ecological time series (n=1). The surveys had samples mostly composed of military police men [6-9]; only one study investigated federal highway police officers [10]. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the selected studies.

Author and year	Objective	Design	Scenario and sample	Main results
Maia DB, et al. [6]	To determine the current prevalence of post-traumatic stress symptoms in Brazilian police officers and compare groups with and without symptoms in terms of associated morbidity	Cross-sectional, descriptive, quantitative study	The participants were 157 male police officers from the elite police unit of the state of Goiás, Brazil	Overall post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) prevalence rates were 8.9%. Compared to the "no PTSD" group, officers with "full PTSD" were five times more likely to be divorced (21.6%), felt their physical health was worse (64.3%), had more doctor visits in the last 12 months and most frequently reported suicidal ideation throughout their lives (35.7%)

Alves VM, et al. [7]	To identify symptoms of anxiety and depression, chronotype and the presence of suicidal ideation in nurses and military police officers from Arapiraca/Alagoas, Brazil	Quantitative descriptive study	Interviews were carried out at the Urgency and Emergency Hospital and at the Military Police Battalion, in Arapiraca, with the participation of 53 nurses and 111 military police officers	Of the police officers interviewed, 55% had minimal anxiety levels, 22% mild, 12% moderate and 9% severe; 27% of them were at high risk for depression and 5% reported suicidal ideation at the time of the interview. They cited stress, anxiety and/or depression and financial problems as the main reasons for suicidal ideation.
Gomes DAR, et al. [8]	To evaluate the incidence and sociodemographic profile of suicide in a military subpopulation in Southern Brazil	Retrospective cohort study	Study carried out with data extracted from files of the Military Police of Rio Grande do Sul	Younger age associated with lower military rank represented independent predictors of suicide in this population
Pereira GK, et al. [9]	To investigate social-occupational characteristics in cases of suicides of military police officers in Santa Catarina, Brazil, which occurred between 2012 and 2016	Cross-sectional, descriptive, retrospective and quantitative study	The data were extracted from the Santa Catarina Integrated Human Resources Management System, related to the suicide of 14 military police officers that occurred between 2012 and 2016	All police officers were men, with some percentage of their wage allocated to paying loans or financial debts, the majority with around 22.5% of their wage committed for this purpose. The majority of the sample was married, with children and educated up to high school; 50% of the sample was aged between 40 and 47, graduated in their career as enlisted personnel
Marins EF, et al. [10]	To analyze the trend in mortality from all causes in Brazilian federal highway police officers from 2001 to 2020	Ecological time series study	Study based on official mortality data from the Brazilian Federal Highway Police registration system and death certificates from the federal registration system.	Among 346 deaths, 189 were from unnatural causes (11 were from undefined causes). Traffic accidents (n=96; 28.7%), cardiovascular diseases (n=58; 17.3%), interpersonal violence (n=51; 15.2%) and suicides (n=35; 10.5%) were the main causes of death. The majority of unnatural deaths occurred among police officers who were between the ages of 19 and 35 (87.3%) and had worked for 15 years (70.2%)

Table 1: Characteristics of the selected studies, 2023.

Discussion

The relationship between suicidal behavior and the police profession may be associated with problems that go beyond their occupational activities, such as financial limitations [7,9], sex [6] and age [8,10]. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) appears to be an important condition associated with suicide. In a sample of 157 police officers, 8.9% had full PTSD and 16% had partial PTSD, and the officers with full PTSD, compared to those without PTSD, were five times more likely to divorce and present, more often, suicidal ideation, a condition that can eventually lead

to self-extermination [6].

The commitment of professional wage income by loans and debts was a factor that was related to the history of suicide and suicidal ideation [9]. The fear of not complying with financial obligations can cause a psychological imbalance and generate pathological conditions such as anxiety, stress and depression, factors associated with suicidal ideation [7].

Characteristics such as younger age, male sex and low career graduation were associated with suicide among police officers [8,10]. This result may be associated with

psychological overload in early career, a condition of greater difficulty to deal with stress. In contrast, married men with children also presented suicidal ideation, which may suggest an insufficient income for family support or compliance with financial obligations [9].

There was a shortage of studies conducted in Brazil and other police institutions such as Civil and Federal. This limits the comparability of the identified evidence. However, the results become relevant as police institutions identify, preventively; the factors associated with suicidal ideation and can create strategies that help professionals deal with the obstacles inherent in police practice.

Conclusion

The factors associated with suicide and suicidal ideation among police officers in Brazil were financial complications, psychopathological comorbidities, male sex, young age and incipient career graduation. New studies should be developed on the theme addressed, including also other police institutions, offering samples and more comprehensive epidemiological scenarios.

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