

BURNOUT SYNDROME IN WORKERS IN PRISON

1.*Sabrina A. W. Benetti, 2Cíntia B. Goi, 3Cátia R. M. Dezordi, 4Marcos Benetti, 5Matias N. Frizzo, 6Marli M. Loro, 7Madalena Rotta, 8Eliane R. R. Benetti and 9Eniva Miladi Fernandes Stumm

¹Instituto Federal Farroupilha, Panambi e Superintendência dos Serviços Penitenciários, Ijuí - Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil

²Mestrado em Educação e Formação de Adultos na Escola Superior de Educação (ESE), Instituto Politécnico do Porto, Porto - Portugal

³Departamento Ciências da Vida, Universidade Regional do Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Ijuí - Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil

⁴Superintendência dos Serviços Penitenciários, Ijuí - Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil

⁵Programa de Pós-Graduação Stricto Sensu em Atenção Integral à Saúde, Universidade Regional do Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Ijuí - Brasil

⁶Departamento Ciências da Vida, Universidade Regional do Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Ijuí - Brasil

⁷Instituto Federal Farroupilha, Panambi - Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil

⁸Hospital Universitário de Santa Maria, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, Santa Maria - Brasil

⁹Programa de Pós-Graduação Stricto Sensu em Atenção Integral à Saúde, Universidade Regional do Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Ijuí - Brasil

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*Corresponding author:

Sabrina A. W. Benetti,

ABSTRACT

The workers in prison operate in an atmosphere permeated by stressful situations which predispose them to a state of alert and to the effects resulting from stress including the *Burnout Syndrome*.

Aim: To evaluate the *Burnout Syndrome* in prison workers and to relate them to the occupational characteristics.

Materials and Method: Transversal study with 254 workers of the prison system, ascribed to the 3rd Regional Prison of the state of the Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. For the data collection, done between April and June of 2017. The internal reliability of the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* scale was attested by the alpha Cronbach of 0,76 for the 22 items.

Results: It was verified that 26,8% of the workers presented a high level of professional incompetence, 23,6% of high emotional wear and 22,4% of high depersonalization. Of these 13 (5, 11%) workers presented a high level of *Burnout* in the three dimensions. There was an inverse correlation between professional inefficiency and emotional exhaustion and the cynicism. And there is a strong positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

Conclusion: Results indicate that work in prison contributes for the sickness of these workers.

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INTRODUCTION

The *burnout* is a psychological syndrome that occurs as a lengthy answer to interpersonal chronic stressors at work (Maslach, 2016). The referred syndrome can be contagious, impact negatively in the life of individuals and entail personal conflicts among workmates including the interruption of the

professional activities of this individual. The authors state that the bigger the maladjustment between a person and the work, the greater the probability of *burnout*; inversely, the bigger the involvement the bigger the probability of engagement. The *Burnout Syndrome* (BS) is considered a professional limiter (Hoppen et al., 2017) for its negative impact in the cognitive performance and in the worker's mood associated to the

increase of physical and psychological diseases which, in many cases, result in labor withdrawal (Penz *et al.*, 2017). The BS contemplates a three-dimensional model: emotional exhaustion, cynicism and professional inefficiency (Maslach and Leiter, 2016) and before the occurrence of this syndrome, the individual presents difficulties to balance the demands of his work and his personal life. A study with 1.682 officials in prison at Great Britain investigated the relations among the work conditions based on time, on tension and on the conflict between work and life, verified that those who were able to separate difficulties in the work environment from the personal life, showed better emotional balance (Kinman and Clements; Hart, 2016). The prison worker operates in a dangerous, unhealthy and constantly exposed to risks, tense and pressured atmosphere which predisposes to the alert state and these conditions unleash occupational stress and effects resulting from it on the worker's health (Greco *et al.*, 2013). A research in four prisons of China with 1.769 penitentiary agents who worked 12 hours a day with excessive effort and little salary reward, identified that 25,9% of them felt threatened and worn out by work, prone to high levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism (HU *et al.*, 2015). The authors justify that these workers experienced elevated levels of *burnout* if compared to other professions in China due to the peculiar characteristics in prison work and occupational stress. The invisibility of the psychic suffering at work, allied to the difficulty in recognizing themselves in the labor activity as responsible for the worsening of the mental health is still a reality and the psychic complaints of these workers are considered if associated to physical manifestations, alterations, abnormalities or organic lesion (Feitosa *et al.*, 2015). Considering these aspects, we highlight the relevance of studies that investigate the worker's health, specially the theme under discussion. The motivation to accomplish this work emerged from the researcher's experience as a worker of the prison system for 12 years, considering her knowledge about the characteristics of the labor environment and identification of several situations of psychic suffering at work, she felt triggered to unveil this reality. The identification of the relation between the BS and labor characteristics makes this study relevant, as it makes it possible to know the reality of work from this professional category, to amplify evidences about this issue and to contribute with reflections, discussions and public politics implementation directed towards these workers who need to be better cared. In this context, we question: which are the levels of the *Burnout Syndrome* in which the workers operating at the 3rd Penitentiary Region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil are found in?. In order to answer this questioning, we aim in this study to evaluate the levels of BS in prison workers and relate them to occupational characteristics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is a transversal study. Participated from the research workers who attend the inclusion criteria, as follows: to be an active penitentiary worker; to belong to the staff of the Penitentiary Services Superintendence (SUSEPE), abscribed to the 3rd Penitentiary Region and to accept participating as a volunteer of the research. None of the workers was excluded of the study. The target population was of 381 workers of the prison system abscribed to the 3rd Penitentiary Region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, composed by eight districts and ten prison houses. The professional categories were composed of Penitentiary Agents responsible for vigilance, custody and

people's deprived of liberty guard; Administrative Penitentiary Agents that operate in the execution of administrative routine jobs and customer service; Penitentiary Technicians that develop activities of higher level of great complexity like psychologists, social assistants, juridical assistants, nurses and dentists. The period of data collection occurred between the months of April and June of 2017. Among the public servants, 88 were not found in the prison houses, 11 were on prize leave, nine were away because of health reasons, seven were on vacation, five refused to participate, three were away by the State Attorney General, one was transferred for a union and one of them was on pregnancy leave. In this way, 254 workers participated effectively of the study. The data was collected through the use of a protocol composed by a sociodemographical and occupational form and the *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MBI). The characteristics found in this article are: function, years of work and mode of fulfillment of the working hours in prison (shift hours) and if the servant works in any other parallel activity to the prison. In relation to the MBI, this inventory was carried out in the United States by Cristina Maslach e Susan Jackson (1978) translated and validated in Brazil by Lautert (1995). It evaluates the scores of *burnout* in relation to the personal feelings and professional attitudes in his work and in relation to others. The choice of the cutting points in the scores of the MBI scale was accomplished by the percentile 75, the same used in the MBI validation study in Brazil (Lautert, 1995). In this way, each dimension was categorized in low, moderate and high levels. For the analysis, three dimensions of *burnout* were used: emotional exhaustion, considering the percentile 75, it was found: low moderate level – score from 0 to 17; High level - score from 18 to 34. In the cynicism, considering the percentile 75, it was found: low moderate level – score from 0 to 9; high level - score from 10 to 17. In the professional inefficiency, considering the percentile 25 being that one of a reverse score, it was found: low moderate level – score from 17 to 32; high level - score from 0 to 16. The research data was registred and organized in the *Statistical Package for Social Science* (SPSS) program, version 15.0. A descriptive statistics was used (superior and inferior limit, average, deviant pattern, variation coefficient), interval of reliability of 95%, qui-square and correlation of Pearson. In relation to the internal consistence of the scale *Maslach Burnout Inventory* (MIB), it was obtained an alpha of Cronbach of 0,76 for the 22 items. This study integrates a master dissertation entitled “Stress and *burnout* syndrome in public penitentiary servants”. The ethical aspects that guide the researchs with human beings were respected. After the consent of the Ethics Committee of the Penitentiary School of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the project was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research of UNIJUÍ (parecer n° 1.948.910, CAAE n° 63136916.6.0000.5350). The participants that accepted to join the research signed the Term of Free and Informed Consent, in two copies.

RESULTS

The sociodemographical profile of the 254 servants of the prison system is composed of: 133 (52,4%) of the male sex, 94 (37%) with an age below 40 years old, 126 (49,6%) from 40 to 50 years old and 34 (13,4%) over 50 years old, with a limit inferior to the age of 23 years old, above 59 years old and the average age of 41,62 ±7,20 years old. It was verified that 184 (72,4%) were married or had a partner, 41 (16,1%) were single. In relation to the school background of the participants, 1 (0,4%) had taken elementary school, 2 (0,8%) had

Chart I. Professional Inefficiency, dimension of the MBI according to the characteristics of the workers' job that operate in the 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS

Professional Efficiency		High level	low/moderate level	Total	Qui-square
		N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	p-value
Function	Penitentiary Ag..	57(22,4)	141(55,5)	198(78,0)	0,100
	PenitentiaryAdm.	7(2,8)	15(5,9)	22(8,7)	
	Higher Technician Penitentiary	4(1,6)	30(11,8)	34(13,4)	
Years of work	0 --- 10 years	38(15,0)	109(42,9)	147(57,9)	0,581
	10 --- 20 years	19(7,5)	56(22,0)	75(29,5)	
	20 years or more	11(4,3)	21(8,3)	32(12,6)	
Fulfills working hours	On duty	55(21,7)	117(46,1)	172(67,7)	0,007
	Working hours	13(5,1)	69(27,2)	82(32,3)	
Performs another function *	Yes	13(5,1)	31(12,3)	44(17,4)	0,661
	No	55 (21,7)	154(60,9)	209(82,6)	
		68(26,8)	186(73,2)	254(100)	

* An interviewee did not answer Ag = Agent; qui-square test with a level of significance less than 0,05 ($p < 0,05$)
Source: Data research, 2017

Chart II. Emotional Exhaustion, dimension of MBI according to the characteristics of the workers who work in the 3rd Penitentiary Region of the RS

Emotional Exhaustion		High level	Low/moderate level	Total	Qui-square
		N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	p-value
Function	Penitentiary Ag.	39(15,4)	159(62,6)	198(78,0)	0,019
	Adm. Penitentiary Ag.	9(3,5)	13(5,1)	22(8,7)	
	Higher Technician Penitentiary	12(4,7)	22(8,7)	34(13,4)	
Years of work	0 --- 10 years	33(13,0)	114(44,9)	147(57,9)	0,788
	20 years or more	18(7,1)	57(22,4)	75(29,5)	
	On duty	9(3,5)	23(9,1)	32(12,6)	
Fulfills working hours	Working hours	33(13,0)	139(54,7)	172(67,7)	0,016
		27(10,6)	55(21,7)	82(32,3)	
Performs other function*	Yes	15(5,9)	29(11,5)	44(17,4)	0,075
	No	45(17,8)	164(64,8)	209(82,6)	
		60(23,6)	194(76,4)	254(100)	

incomplete high school, 98 (38,6%) had taken complete high school, 96 (37,8%) had graduation level, 50 (19,7%) had specialization level, 6 (2,4%) had master degree and 1 (0,4%) had doctorate degree. In the characterization of the workers in relation to the district where they lived, it was verified that 167 (65,7%) of them lived in the city where they were abscribed. When they were questioned about what motivated them to be public servants, 50% of them answered due to the benefits of the public service, 50% due to stability, 17,3% due to salary, 15% as a choice and 6% answered that it was due to lack of other opportunity. About the classification of the professionals in relation to the function they assumed in prison, 198 (78%) were Penitentiary Agents, 22 (8,7%) Administrative Penitentiary Agents and 34 (13,4%) Penitentiary Higher Technicians. The time of work in the respective functions showed that 147 (57,9%) worked for less than 10 years, 61 (24%) for 10 to 15 incomplete years and 46 (18,1%) 15 years or more. In relation to de fulfillment of the working hours 172 (67, 7%) occurred in work shifts and 209 (82,3%) operated exclusively for SUSEPE. Concerning the numbers of uninterrupted sleep hours on the previous night, the average was $5,56 \pm 2,24$, with a coefficient of variation of 40,29%, what reveals variability in the uninterrupted sleep hours. The 254 workers of the prison system were mostly in a low or moderate level of *burnout* and the others in approximate percentages, in high level of professional inefficiency, emotional exhaustion and cynicism (Figure a). Chart I presents the dimension "Professional Inefficiency" associated to the function variables, years of work, fulfillment of the working hours and work in paralel activity.

Chart I: In Chart II, the dimension emotional exhaustion of MBI is explicited according to the characteristics of the participants work.

Chart II

In Chart III the cynicism dimension of MBI is described according to the characteristics of the work of the participants of the research.

Chart III

The Chart IV presents the results of the use of the descriptive statistics and an interval of reliability of the MIB dimensions, according to the characteristics of the work of the participants. On this we verify that in cynicism with average of $4,44 \pm 2,57$, occurred great variability between the punctuation of each one of the participants. That can be stated by considering the Variation of Coefficient (VC) that was of 57,77%. At the high level of Cynicism, the variability was less and the VC of 16,58%.

Chart IV

Still in relation to the data of the Chart IV, in the dimension of the professional inefficiency (reverse score) it is verified that the variability between the scores of the participants obtained averages $12,96 \pm 2,73$ (high level) and $23,70 \pm 4,55$ (low/moderate level), with VC less than 30,31%, which demonstrates less variability among the answers. In the emotional exhaustion, it is verified great variability in the low/moderate scores, with average of $8,00 \pm 4,48$; on the other hand, in relation to the high level of the reffered dimension, it is verified variability of scores in relation to the average with CV of 20,74%. Beyond these data, the same chart presents the Inferior Limits (Li) and Superior Limits (Ls) of the classification in each one of the categories, according to instructions of the MBI.

Chart III – Cynicism, MBI's dimension according to characteristics of the work of workers that operate in the 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS.

	Cynicism	High level	Low/moderate level	Total	Qui-square p-value
		N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	
Function	Penitentiary Ag.	46(18,1)	152(59,8)	198(78,0)	0,267
	Adm. Penitentiary Ag.	2(0,8)	20(7,9)	22(8,7)	
	Higher Technician Penitentiary	9(3,5)	25(9,8)	34(13,4)	
Years of work	0 --- 10 years	34(13,4)	113(44,5)	147(57,9)	0,952
	10 --- 20 years	16(6,3)	59(23,2)	75(29,5)	
	20 years or more	7(2,8)	25(9,8)	32(12,6)	
Fulfills working hours	On duty	40(15,7)	132(52,0)	172(67,7)	0,652
	Working hours	17(6,7)	65(25,6)	82(32,3)	
Operates other function*	Yes	15(5,9)	29(11,5)	44(17,4)	0,043
	No	42(16,6)	167(66,0)	209(82,6)	
		57(22,4)	197(77,6)	254(100)	

* One interviewee didn't answer; Ag = Agent; qui-square test with a level of significance less than 0,05 ($p < 0,05$)

Source: Data research, 2017

Chart IV. Descriptive Statistics and Interval of reliability dimensions of MBI according to the levels of the BS of the workers that operate in the 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS

Dimensions	Level	N	Li	Ls	Average	Standard Deviation	CV %	IC de 95%	
								Li	Ls
Cynicism	High	57	10	17	12,12	2,01	16,58	11,59	12,66
	Low/moderate	197	0	9	4,44	2,57	57,77	4,08	4,80
	Total	254	0	17	6,17	4,04	65,49	5,67	6,66
Professional Efficiency*	High	68	0	16	12,96	2,73	21,10	12,29	13,62
	Low/moderate	186	17	32	23,70	4,55	19,20	23,04	24,36
	Total	254	0	32	20,82	6,31	30,31	20,04	21,60
Emotional Exhaustion	High	60	18	34	22,82	4,73	20,74	21,59	24,04
	Low/moderate	194	0	17	8,00	4,48	56,06	7,36	8,64
	Total	254	0	34	11,50	7,77	67,54	10,54	12,46

*Reverse Score; Li = Inferior limit; Ls = Superior limit; IC = Reliability interval

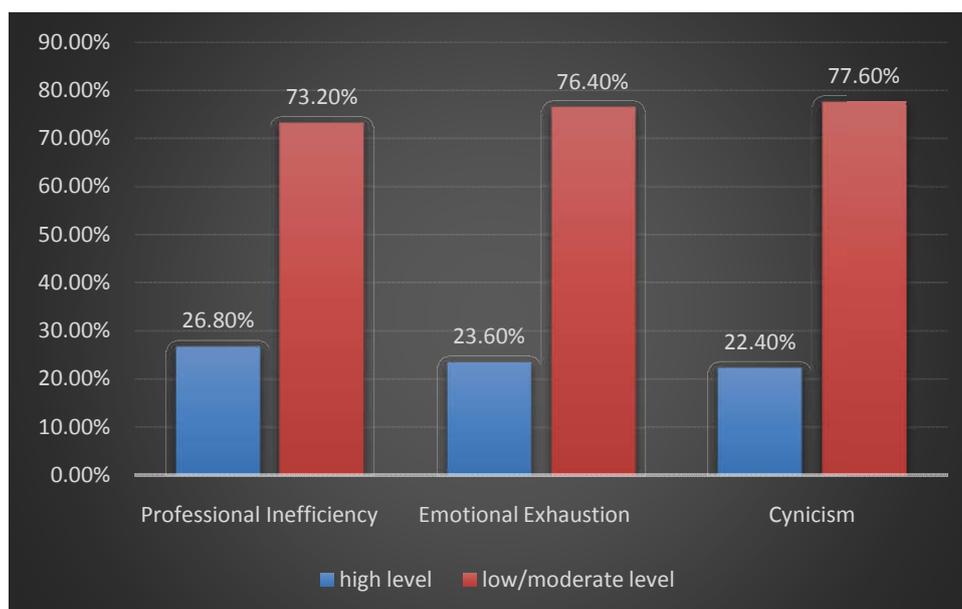
Source: Research data, 2017

Chart V. Correlation between the dimensions of MBI according to work characteristics from workers that operate in the 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS. April to June/2017

		Emotional exhaustion	Cynicism
Professional Inefficiency	r	-0,282(**)	-0,221(**)
	p-value	0,000	0,000
Emotional Exhaustion	r	1	0,656(**)
	p-value		0,000

**Significant Correlation $p < 0.01$; r = Pearson's correlation

Source: Research data, 2017



Source: Research data, 2017

Figure a. Dimensions of MBI in penitentiary workers. 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS. April to June/2017

In chart V, the correlations between the dimensions of *burnout* are presented. It is verified an inverse correlation between professional inefficiency, emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Besides that, it is verified a strong positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

Chart V: Concluding the data presentation, it was verified that of the 254 participants, 13 (5,11%) workers found themselves in a high level of *burnout* in the three dimensions. It was verified that 35 (13,77%) presented a high level of *burnout* in two dimensions and a low/moderate level in one dimension; 76 (29,92%) with high level in one dimension and low/moderate level in two dimensions. Therefore, 130 (51,18%) with low/moderate level of *burnout* in three dimensions.

DISCUSSION

Two hundred and fifty-four workers of the prison system of the 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS participated. In relation to the sociodemographical characterization, the data that studied the population presents approximate percentages of both sexes which diverge from the study of Silva *et al.* (2016),

with 87 penitentiary workers of a prison house from the South of Brazil, in which most of them (79,3%) were from the male sex. In relation to age and marital status, the results meet the referred investigation, 37,9% in an age group bigger or equal to 40 years old and 71,3% were married/stable relationship. In relation to the functional characteristics of the participants, the fact that the greatest percentage is of Penitentiary Agents, with less than 10 years of work in class B, on duty workers, who operate exclusively in SUSEPE and live in the district where they work is similar to the results of Silva *et al.* (2016), as 79,3% were Penitentiary Agents. The percentage of the variables time of work and living place diverge, as 36,8% had been working in the institution for more than eight years and most of them (72%) didn't live in the city where they worked. The authors state that these characteristics are inherent to the labor activity of the Agent and bring about the need of constant emotional control of these workers. Nowadays, in a world level the *burnout* is researched in different populations. The referred BS is taken as an occupational risk in several professions, specially human services, education and health care. In this sense, the relationships can be rewarding and involving, but also stressful (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). The workers of the prison system of the 3rd Penitentiary Region of RS presented elevated percentages of the three dimensions of BS in a high level. These results meet the objectives of an investigation with 106 workers of prison in Plovdiv, Bulgaria (Harizanova e Tarnovska, 2013). In this investigation, the authors included in the research all the servants that kept direct contact with prisoners and realized that most of them (74,53%) were suffering from *burnout*. A research with 95 nurses in seven Portuguese prisons evaluated levels of *burnout* and its relation to sociodemographical and professional characteristics (Mendes *et al.*, 2014). The authors stated that 31,57% of the nurses presented emotional exhaustion and in the same percentage, cynicisms. They also highlight that 6,32% of them presented professional inefficiency. These results demonstrate that nurses who work in prisons have higher levels of *burnout* than nurses in general, fact that shows a high emotional load resulting from work. The penitentiary servants deal with rejected and potentially violent populations, what can contribute for the triggering of the *burnout* (Hu *et al.*, 2015).

These workers keep direct contact with prisoners and are responsible for the maintenance of the confinement and are continually exposed to intimidation, aggression, rebellion possibility, fact that leads to exposure to psychosocial risks (Jaskowiak and Fontana, 2015). The demands of this kind of work are strict in the psychological sphere as well as in the physiological and cognitive ones (Harizanova and Tarnovska, 2013). The specificities of the labor activity of the prison workers lead to the need of emotional control (Silva *et al.*, 2016). The three dimensions of the BS emerge in the individual as a consequence of the working conditions in which they operate (Bringas-Molleda *et al.*, 2015). The authors point out that the social relations constitute themselves in one of the basic foundations of this profession. Meanwhile, we highlight the worker's difficulty in keeping healthy in the penitentiary environment. The BS integrates three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism and professional inefficiency (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). The authors point out that the first one is the Emotional Exhaustion described by the wear, lack of energy, depletion, debilitation and fatigue; the second one is cynicism originally called depersonalization which characterizes itself by negative or inadequate attitudes in relation to the clients, irritability, loss of idealism and withdrawal; yet the third dimension, the professional inefficiency is originally called professional incompetence or reduced personal satisfaction and described as reduced productivity or capacity, low moral and incapacity of dealing with work. Concerning the first dimension of the BS, that is, the Professional Inefficiency, the fact that 26,8% of the participants present a high level shows that this population is vulnerable to the sickness resulting from work.

The biggest percentage is of Penitentiary Agents who operate in the prison system for less than 10 years as on call workers and, exclusively, in one of the house prisons. Harizanova e Tarnovska (2013) equally found a similar result to the research now analysed, in which the professional inefficiency presented elevated percentage in recently nominated workers, who operate for less than one year and for those are for more than 5 years in prison. Hu *et al.* (2015) state that the prison servants with low satisfaction and organizational commitment at work are more absent than those who are more satisfied and committed. Another research with 240 French penitentiary agents verified levels of signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), *burnout* and stress (Boudoukha *et al.*, 2013). The authors point out that workers who present low esteem can be less efficient and have little personal satisfaction. As a consequence, the penitentiary servants are more sensitive in presenting *burnout* and PTSD, gradually potentialized after the experience of traumatic events. The second dimension of the BS— Emotional Exhaustion presented a high level in 23,6% of the participants of this research. Most of them were also Penitentiary Agents operating for less than 10 years who fulfilled a schedule as on call workers and exclusively at SUSEPE. Boudoukha *et al.* (2013) verified that the penitentiary workers were prone to the PTSD and presented high levels of emotional exhaustion, stress, cynicism, intrusion, evasion, hiper-reactivity and BS. The authors state that the emotional wear results specially from the intense relationship between professionals and prisoners throughout the worked years, can interfere and harm the state of well-being, trigger stress and evolve to emotional exhaustion. In relation to the third and last dimension, that is, Cynicism, 22,4% presented a high level and greater indexes referred to the Penitentiary Agents that operate for less than 10 years, on

call workers and exclusively working at SUSEPE. Hu *et al.* (2015) state that the lack of balance among effort, reward and threat at work were associated to emotional exhaustion and the cynicism. This result shows that penitentiary agents highly committed to work presented 5,5 times more emotional exhaustion and 3,05 times more cynicism than the others. The study of Bringas-Molleda *et al.* (2015) with 222 penitentiary workers of Spain aimed at determining the influence that the factors of the BS have on these professional's health. For that, they compared an Educational Therapeutics Unit (ETU) as an alternative model of prison to another traditional model of the prison system. The authors verified that the personal satisfaction was greater in individuals of the traditional model, more specifically the dimensions of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. The authors conclude that the BS has as one of its consequence the deterioration of health and the elements that integrate it like predictors of diseases. In what concerns the level of *burnout*, 22,8% of workers were found in elevated level of *burnout* in three dimensions; 10,05% of them presented a high level of *burnout* in two dimensions, Cynicism and Professional Inefficiency; 3% in Professional Inefficiency and Emotional Exhaustion, 40,4% in Emotional Exhaustion and Cynicism. The workers that found themselves in a high level of *burnout* in only one of the dimensions made 26,3% in Cynicism, 21,8% in Professional Inefficiency and 9,1% in Emotional Exhaustion. It was also verified that 66% of them found themselves in a low/moderate level of *burnout* in all dimensions of the syndrome. Fernández-Sánchez *et al.* (2017) in a study with 64 health professionals in the University Hospital of Spain that work in units of palliative care, even though being another population of workers, got very close to this research, as 26,09% of the participants reported high punctuations in two or three dimensions of the MIB and 28,98% had high punctuations in just one dimension. The results of this research allied to the statements of the authors prove that the prison worker is prone to occupational stress and the damages resulting from it. One of the main damages is the BS that can make their professional performance unfeasible with damages to the physical and psychic health and with negative repercussions in the assistance to people deprived of liberty, their relatives, in the institution image and in society as a whole.

Conclusion

The present research permitted to evaluate the BS in 254 workers of the prison system. It was verified high indexes of *burnout* among the professionals participants of the research with the use of MIB, 26,8% with a high level of professional incompetence, 23,6% with high emotional wear and 22,4% with high depersonalization. Among all workers 5,11% were found in a high level of *burnout* in the three dimensions. There was an inverse correlation between professional inefficiency, emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Besides that, we verify a strong positive correlation between emotional exhaustion and cynicism. These indexes show that the work in prison contributes to the illness of this professional category. It is considered that the managers, workers and health professionals are responsible for educational actions of promotion and prevention of the worsening of physical and psychic health resulting from the occupational stress in excess and, in this way, to prevent the occurrence of the referred syndrome. It is expected that the results of this investigation can be important in order to trigger researchers to enlarge investigations about the theme, including other methodological approaches that can

allow them to make inferences and, in this way, enlarge scientific evidences. In the same way, they can be used by managers, prison workers and society as a whole, in the sense to contribute for reflections, discussions and creations of public politics headed towards this significant portion of the population who deserves to be better assisted.

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