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Views of military policemen about health care: a descriptive study

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ABSTRACT

The lack of care on the part of men regarding their own health represents a significant phenomenon, and contributes to the rise of male morbidities. This fact has increased relevance when it is seen among military policemen due to their labor peculiarities. **Aim:** To analyze the views of military policemen regarding their own health care. **Method:** This is an exploratory and descriptive research study, involving a qualitative approach, performed with 21 military policemen on ostensive duty, belonging to a police battalion located in the city of Natal, Brazil. **Results:** The interviewees declared they take care of their own health by exercising, eating healthily, and sleeping well. However, there are reports of back pain, weight gain, insomnia, stress and psychological suffering. **Conclusion:** Military policemen perceive their vulnerability as a result of their duties. However, they acknowledge the difficulty of adopting preventive measures, thus making us believe that there is a need to adopt strategies of health care relevant to this specific group.

Descriptors: Public Health Nursing; Health Care (Public Health); Men's Health; Police.

INTRODUCTION

The lack of health care on the part of men represents a significant phenomenon, as it contributes to the rise of the indicators related to illnesses and death among the male population due to preventable causes. This reality is even more evident among military policemen, due to the peculiarities of their working conditions. The reflexes associate with the stressing experiences resulting from performing their duties, and the unpredictability of occurrences when patrolling the streets, make these workers even more vulnerable to illnesses⁽¹⁾. Based on that, it is possible to consider that health care procedures used by military policemen are supported by their own understandings regarding health issues, which relate to their own ideas related to gender and their profession. This fact generates the following question: how do military policemen understand their own health care?

AIM

To analyze the views of military policemen regarding health care.

METHOD

This is an exploratory and descriptive research, which adopts a qualitative approach. The project was approved by the Committee of Ethics in Research of Rio Grande do Norte Federal University, under protocol #266.872/2013. The data collection occurred in a military police battalion under Natal Police Command, Brazil. In this study, the sample was composed of military policemen, all male, working on ostensive duty, not under medical

leave, and presenting favorable psychological and/or physical conditions when it came to answering the questionnaire. The data collection occurred from June to July 2013, using semi-structured interviews, after the approval of the general commander, and the signing of the Free and Clear Agreement Consent by the interviewees. The testimonies were analyzed using Bardin's content analysis procedure⁽²⁾. After reading the testimonies, three categories were generated after commonalities were identified in the process of coding and categorizing: military policemen's life habits; impact of working conditions on military policemen's lives; and attitudes of military policemen towards their own health issues. The analysis of the results was supported by the theoretical standards described in the Health Belief Model, based on the variables "vulnerability" and "barriers"⁽³⁾. To support the discussion of the results, the literature regarding men's and military policemen's health was used.

RESULTS

This research had the participation of 21 military policemen in ostensive duty (or in other words, officers on street patrol duty). They were aged between 28 and 50 years, with a predominance of individuals between 30 and 39 years of age. The majority of the policemen had worked for more than 12 years in the battalion. Family income varied from 3 to 13 times minimum wage, mainly between 3 and 4.5 times minimum wage. Most respondents had a stable marital status, with one or two children, high school education, and a lack of other income sources due to working part-time. According to the results, military policemen declared that they took care of

their own health by undertaking physical exercises, healthy dieting, and good sleep patterns before coming on duty.

DISCUSSION

The participants in the study presented complications with regard to their health, both physical and emotional, such as back pain, weight gain, sleep deprivation, stress, and psychological suffering. Based on that, they searched for support to solve the consequent aggravations. They recognized the need for safety measures during their duties, as they are aware of the vulnerable position they are inserted into due to their role. The complications shown in this study could develop into more complicated issues and generate possible harm during the performance of these men's duties. However, the deleterious effects of stress in police work can be minimized with actions aimed to teach them about the adequacy of nutrition, periods of relaxation and leisure, psychological follow-up, and incentive programs to engage in physical activities, including during periods of leisure⁽⁴⁾.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that the military policemen in this study conceive of health care as performing physical exercise, being careful about nutrition, and resting. In addition, they recognize that they face vulnerable situations due to their working conditions. However,

they face difficulties in adopting preventive practices against health complications. This fact demonstrates the need to have strategies of health care in the case of military policemen. In this context, nursing staff can work with the men in order to persuade these professionals to adopt health care practices that will promote better health.

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