HEALTH OF PENITENTIARY AGENTS IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT
SAÚDE DOS AGENTES PENITENCIÁRIOS NO CONTEXTO BRASILEIRO
SALUD DE LOS AGENTES PENITENCIARIOS EN EL CONTEXTO BRASILEÑO

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ABSTRACT
Objective: to analyze the scientific production in the nursing area regarding the health situation of penitentiary agents in the Brazilian context. Method: this is an integrative review of the literature that included complete articles available in the LILACS, MEDLINE and BDEnF databases, using the Portuguese descriptors “Riscos”(Risks), “Saúde do trabalhador” (Worker’s health) and “Penitenciária” (Penitentiary), published between January 2006 and December 2016. Results: eight articles published between 2011 and 2016 comprised the final sample. From the content analysis, four categories emerged: 1. Sociodemographic Data; 2. Physical Examination; 3. Disease Vulnerability; and 4. Habits of Life. Conclusion: research on the health of prison staff is still scarce, demonstrating the need for further studies. Descriptors: Risk; Worker’s Health; Penitentiary.

RESUMO

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INTRODUCTION

The thinking from the capitalist culture, which is directed towards the accumulation of capital and power for the ruling class, ends up determining that the working class submits to the degrading working conditions, since the capital possesses, as trump, to record the satisfaction of the necessities to the market and therefore subordinate workers to the mechanisms of exclusion and competitiveness inherent in the labor market relationships of the world of work. This general condition of capitalism is also reproduced in the particular context of the prison workers. For example, there are the poor infrastructure conditions of the prison system that affect all those in this hostile environment, including not only the detainees as well as the professionals and the penitentiary agents, causing damage to their health.

The penitentiary agent is the professional responsible for monitoring and supervising the prisoners in the prison unit, providing services in the security sector. They are professionals who are continuously exposed to situations of risk, as well as intimidation, aggression, threats, homicides, and rebellions in which they are at risk of being held hostage because they have direct contact with the victims and are seen by those responsible for keeping them in jail, among others. Traumatic events, such as attacks, have psychopathological consequences, such as posttraumatic and the reconstruction of problematic thoughts that cause factors and maintenance of mental disorders.

The activities of penitentiary agents coupled with poor working conditions and the disregard of society with this group influence their physical and psychic health. Besides situations of exposure to risks that harm the physical integrity and mental health of the penitentiary agent, the work environment also hides dangers related to infection by communicable diseases, since the proliferation of epidemics and the contagion of diseases are favored by the environment of the place which is characterized by overcrowded, precarious and unhealthy cells.

Given that prison staff maintains direct contact with prisoners, they are susceptible to contamination by various diseases, with tuberculosis, hepatitis and HIV/AIDS as the most common. Still regarding mental health, it is known that the emotional exhaustion of these workers can be associated with the morbid conditions, such as the metabolic syndrome since a higher frequency of this state has already been detected among individuals submitted to great psychological demand in the professional practice. The deleterious health-related nature of work in penitentiaries also influences the sleep quality of their workers, since there is a relationship between stress, sleep disturbances, decrease in resilience, decrease of work capacity and occurrence of incidents.

The health situation presented is a reflection of the working conditions of the agents whose activities are as escorts; discipline and security of prisoners; review and inspection of the entry and exit of people and vehicles in prisons; check and journal and daily conference of the prison population, under a repetitive routine, unhealthy and overloaded, sometimes even doing roles that are not theirs, such as judging the need for health care at the request of the prisoner demonstrating the face of omission of the State by assigning to the agent the responsibility to establish the appropriate behavior at each moment.

The agent is still in the midst of a duality of hierarchy, forming a paradox in which, on the one hand, he obeys the orders of his superiors and, on the other hand, he imposes them on the grieving. It is important to note that, besides the psychological pressure of the environment seen as threatening, to the detriment of the violence by the prisoners, the agents also suffer pressure from their superiors. One study revealed that relationships with the administration were the main cause for the development of stress in prison agents in a particular prison unit.

Demands for jobs imposed by superiors imply less freedom of decision and less control over work, making professionals tenser and raising their level of stress. All these factors only contribute to the illness of this group. Therefore, “the activities carried out by the prison staff are both physically and emotionally exhausting, so studies investigating aspects related to the health of these professionals are necessary.” Thus, this research aims at the vulnerability of these professionals to their illness and their lack of care.

OBJECTIVE

- To analyze the scientific productions in the nursing area regarding the health situation of penitentiary agents in the Brazilian context.

METHOD

This study consists of an integrative review organized in six stages: establishment of the research question; search in literature;
categorization of studies; categorization of articles included in the review; the interpretation of the results and the presentation of the review. The question guiding this research was: what scientific production exists about the health situation of penitentiary agents in the Brazilian context?

For the refinement of the work, the articles published in national scientific journals, which addressed the health issue of penitentiary agents, available in Portuguese, were included. The exclusion criteria were: dissertations, theses, articles not available in full text and that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The search was performed in the following databases: Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE); Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS); and the Virtual Library of Nursing Database (BDENF). For the location of the publications, the following descriptors and combinations were used: Health and Risks and Penitentiary and Work in the Prison. The articles were surveyed until November 2016. The search was carried out with a time cut of six years, including research published from 2010 to 2016.

The articles were classified as level of evidence: level 1 - systematic reviews or meta-analysis of relevant clinical trials; level 2 - evidence derived from at least one well-delineated randomized controlled trial; level 3 - well-delineated controlled clinical trials without randomization; level 4 - well-delineated cohort and case-control studies; level 5 - systematic review of descriptive and qualitative studies; level 6 - evidence derived from a single descriptive or qualitative study and level 7 - opinion of authorities or report of expert committees. The results found in the selected articles were synthesized, creating four thematic categories: Sociodemographic Data; Physical exam; Vulnerability to Diseases; and Life Habits.

**RESULTS**

The final sample of this review consisted of eight scientific articles. The topics addressed and of interest were extracted, grouping them into categories, for studies published in the years, 2010 to 2016 were searched, but the selected research was inserted in the period from 2011 to 2016. Articles that fit the inclusion criteria were characterized as represented in Table 01, considering the...
identification number, authors, date of the publication, title, journal, description of the contents of the articles regarding the objective, type of study, methodology, conclusion, and level of evidence.

All studies selected were those available in the LILACS database, two of them were also available in MedLine. During the analysis and interpretation of the results, it was observed that the year of greatest publication was 2011 with three publications, followed by 2013 with two publications. The years 2012, 2015 and 2016 have one article published each. It is important to emphasize that no previous studies to 2011 were found, which demonstrates the recent approach and the scarcity of Brazilian studies with this theme.

Regarding the methodological characteristics, five of the eight studies are of a quantitative approach, one study of qualitative approach, one is qualitative and the other is an integrative review. Regarding the type of research, there was a prevalence of descriptive and transversal research, with three studies each. The instruments used by three of these studies were individual questionnaires along with blood sample collection. Among these three studies, two still underwent a physical examination, especially anthropometric measurements, and blood pressure (BP) measurement, besides to sputum collection in one of them. Scales were used in three studies, open interview in one and database search (VHL and Web of Science Scopus) also in one study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study code</th>
<th>Author, year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Level of evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>NOGUEIRA et al., 2011</td>
<td>Tuberculosis Infection Latent in Professionals Contacts and No Contacts of Inmates of two Penitentiaries of the state of São Paulo</td>
<td>LILACS</td>
<td>To know the prevalence of Mycobacterium tuberculosis infection among professional contacts and non-contact of inmates of two prisons in the state of São Paulo.</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>This study suggests that professionals who have direct contact with inmates are at increased risk of becoming infected with M. tuberculosis and becoming ill from tuberculosis.</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>COSTA et al., 2011</td>
<td>Possible Relationship between Occupational Stress and Metabolic syndrome</td>
<td>LILACS</td>
<td>To investigate the possible relationship between occupational stress and metabolic syndrome.</td>
<td>Cross-sectional quantitative study</td>
<td>It was observed a higher frequency of metabolic disorders and MS among individuals submitted to greater psychological demand in the practice of the profession, suggesting a possible relationship between this clinical entity and occupational stress.</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>FERREIRA et al., 2012</td>
<td>Relation of Prevalence of Physical Activity with Psychological Variables and Components of Syndrome Metabolism in Correctional Belo Horizonte/MG</td>
<td>LILACS</td>
<td>To relate the prevalence of regular physical exercise with the metabolic syndrome, with trace and state anxiety, and with minor psychiatric disorders in ASP, Belo Horizonte, MG.</td>
<td>Descriptive quantitative study</td>
<td>There were greater changes in the metabolic profile of male prisoners who did not exercise in the three prison units studied, since systolic blood pressure, body mass index, waist circumference, and fasting glycemia were found with significantly different values (for p &lt;0.05) compared to non-practitioners of physical activity.</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>REICHERT et al., 2012</td>
<td>Physical Activity and Other Health-Related Aspects of Penitentiary Agents of Londrina/PR</td>
<td>LILACS</td>
<td>To verify the prevalence of five health indicators in correctional agents in the city of Londrina/PR and to explore the association between health indicators.</td>
<td>Cross-sectional quantitative study</td>
<td>Prison staff in the city of Londrina has a high prevalence of health problems.</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>BONEZ et al., 2013</td>
<td>Mental Health of Penitentiary Agents</td>
<td>LILACS</td>
<td>To describe the variables that interfere with the mental health status. This study was carried out with a qualitative method.</td>
<td>Descriptive study with a qualitative</td>
<td>Prisoners have relatively good mental health status.</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>GRECO et al., 2013&lt;sup&gt;16&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Stress in the Work of Agents of the Socio-educational Attendance Centers of Rio Grande do Sul</td>
<td>LILACS, MedLine, BDENF</td>
<td>To verify the association between work stress, sociodemographic, labor characteristics, habits and health conditions of socio-educational agents in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.</td>
<td>Cross-sectional quantitative study</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>JASKOWIAK et al., 2015&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Work in the Prison: reflections on the health of the penitentiary agent</td>
<td>LILACS</td>
<td>To know the working conditions of penitentiary agents and the reflexes of the exercise of the work activity in their health.</td>
<td>Descriptive, qualitative research</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E8</td>
<td>BEZERRA et al., 2016&lt;sup&gt;17&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Psychological suffering and stress in the work of prison staff: a review of the literature</td>
<td>LILACS, MedLine</td>
<td>To carry out a survey of the production of psychological distress and stress on the work of penitentiary agents in national and international periodicals between the years 2000 and 2014.</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
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Figure 2. Characterization of included publications. Arapiraca (AL), Brazil, 2016.
Lima EMM de, Soares IP, Santos ACM dos et al.

Study 06 was carried out with socio-educative agents, who are agents that perform functions related to adolescents in compliance with socio-educational measures in the Socio-educational Assistance Centers (CASE). The other studies were carried out with penitentiary agents. Article 01 was held in Guarulhos (SP). Study 02 was developed in Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais (MG), 03 was held in Belo Horizonte, 04 in Londrina (PR), 05 in western Santa Catarina, 06 and 07 in Rio Grande do Sul, 06 in the state capital, in the metropolitan region and in the interior of the state, and 07 in the northwest of the state. Study 08 used the Virtual Health Library (VHL) as a database. Through the information presented, it is possible to observe that the objectives set by the researchers have been reached. However, in all studies, there were limitations/difficulties related to the coverage of all workers due to the night shift, vacation, and sick leave, or safety.

DISCUSSION

◆ Sociodemographic Data

The mean age of the agents in most studies varied between 32 and 39 years old, showing the convergence in this aspect. The exception occurred in study 05 and 07, in which there were workers with age around 50 years old, being in study 05 the age group of more than 50 years old more prevalent. Only studies 01, 05 and 06 investigated regarding the marital status, both presented a prevalence of married, which can influence the permanence in the work since there is the weight to provide a family. None of the articles have there been the concern of relating marital status as a protective or aggravating factor for emotional stability/instability. With the exception of study 06, which concluded that the majority of socioeducator agents were females, studies showed male prevalence, evidently by the majority of the studies being carried out in male prisons.

The average length of service was 7 months to 10 years, but despite this variation, a prevalence of 5.8 to 5.9 years, relatively low time, occurred. What is expected in cases where there is a low service time is that the damages are not yet so evident, since the longer the work time, the longer the exposure time, incurring cumulative damages. Only articles 05, 06 and 07 showed the work shift, in both the duty regime was 24 hours, except study 06 with work shift being exercised predominantly in the day shift. Study 08 only addressed the satisfaction regarding the work shift that the agents demonstrated to be satisfied, adjectivizing it as flexible. In article 06, it is mentioned as one of the contributing factors for the development of stress.

◆ Physical exam

Abdominal circumference was used only in studies 02 and 03 to evaluate the abdominal obesity characteristic of the metabolic syndrome. Study 02 found abdominal obesity in 26.5% of the sample, besides a greater extent in the agents when compared to the administration staff, although within the parameters, indicating the relation of the profession with the susceptibility of presenting abdominal obesity and, consequently, the metabolic syndrome. In study 03, measurements of abdominal circumference were not evident above normal, but when comparing agents that perform physical activities with those who do not perform them, with higher values. In this case, physical activity was shown to be a positive factor of a lower waist circumference.

Articles 02, 03 and 04 evaluated body mass index (BMI), and study 04 calculated BMI by self-report of body weight and height, so the information was given may not be reliable. Studies 02 and 03 performed the calculation through the measures of height and body weight measured on a scale with a stadiometer. In study 02, the BMI of the group of agents showed higher values in relation to the administration workers, although the difference was not as significant. In study 03, it was not different, bringing even more important data, since both the agents that performed physical activity and those who did not have BMI above normal with a classification for overweight.

Study 04 found that 46.6% of their sample was overweight and 6.8% had obesity. The body mass indexes presented in the studies may be reflections of the psychological pressures that lead to bad habits, such as alcohol consumption, inadequate diet (anxiety) and smoking. Articles 02 and 03 were the only ones to present blood pressure (BP) results. In the first one, 30.8% of the individuals presented Systemic Arterial Hypertension (SAH). In the second, 27.6% of the individuals had BP above 130x85 mmHg, currently classified as prehypertension, according to the VII Brazilian Arterial Hypertension Guideline. The type of exercise performed may explain the increase in BP, since the ever-alert state, the accelerated rhythm, and the psychological pressure can act in a damaging way in the cardiovascular system.

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**Vulnerability to Diseases**

The diseases investigated in the studies found were related to tuberculosis (TB), the metabolic syndrome, and mental or emotional diseases. “Metabolic Syndrome (MS) is a complex disorder represented by a set of cardiovascular risk factors usually related to central fat deposition and insulin resistance”\(^8\) which, according to what is stated in the I Brazilian Guideline on Diagnosis and Treatment of the Metabolic Syndrome is represented by the combination of at least three of the following components: elevated triglycerides, elevated blood pressure, above normal fasting plasma glucose, decreased HDL cholesterol, and abdominal obesity by abdominal circumference.

Metabolic Syndrome was the target of studies 02 and 03, confirming the metabolic alteration of the agents in both. The fasting glycemia remained within the parameters in study 02, in contrast, HDL cholesterol presented reduced levels in 71.4% of the agents and the triglyceride increased in 32.6%. In study 03, glycemia showed a small change among the agents that did not practice physical activity. These data, together with data on BP and abdominal obesity, presented in the previous topic, suggest that penitentiary agents are predisposed to MS disorder. In article 02, there was a higher frequency of metabolic disorders and MS among individuals submitted to greater psychological demand in the profession, with a diagnosis of MS performed in 26.2% of penitentiary agents, whereas in the control group (represented by the administration) 5.7% had this diagnosis.

Study 03 found greater changes in the metabolic profile of male prisoners who did not exercise, with significant differences for fasting blood glucose and BP, which were higher among non-physical activity agents. It is important to emphasize that MS associated with the cardiovascular disease increases general mortality by 1.5 times and mortality from cardiovascular disease 2.5 times.\(^19\) The vulnerability to communicable diseases was only addressed in study 01, even though it refers only to tuberculosis, which was not diagnosed in any of the penitentiary agents. However, 62.4% of the agents had a positive tuberculin test. On the other hand, 38.9% of the control group that did not have direct contact with the inmates was reactors to the tuberculin test, demonstrating through this comparison the greater vulnerability of the agents to tuberculosis.

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**Life Habits**

Smoking was evaluated in five of the eight studies. In all these cases, most were non-smokers. Alcoholism was a habit present in most of the agents of studies 03 and 04, covering 63% and 71.2% of the population, respectively. Study 06 diverged from this result. In this, 89.3% of those studied had no suspicion for alcoholism. It is important to point out that the consumption of alcoholic beverages has been associated with increased likelihood of alcoholism and of other diseases. Additionally, alcoholism is related to emotional and psychological disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and suicide. Drinking may also be related to the concentration of other substances such as tobacco and other drugs, which further increases the probability of these associations.
beverages may be related to the way of coping with the various conflicting situations in their work activities, which is a way of coping that is incompatible with health. 16

Studies 03, 04 and 06 were those that studied the presence of physical activity as a habit in the life of the agents. Study 03, when correlating physical activity with psychological variables and components of the metabolic syndrome, found that greater metabolic changes occurred with agents that did not practice physical exercise, comprising 49% of the sample. In study 04, it was verified that only 37.03% of the sample had regular physical activity and that the lack of alcohol consumption and the presence of minor psychiatric disorders are associated with each other.

In study 06, those who did not practice physical activity represented 67.2%. This same study showed that the agents that performed physical activity had a better mental self-control than the others, with a lower risk of becoming ill. In both study 03 and in the 06, it is possible to observe that physical activity was shown as a factor of protection to the health of the professionals. Considering their importance in the minimization of diseases and health protection, it is important to highlight the need to include it in the agents’ work routines. Also, their inclusion favors the maintenance/development of physical vigor, which is important for the daily functioning of these professionals. 16

CONCLUSION

The subjects covered by the studies allowed for a reflexive analysis regarding the relationship between health and work of prison staff, showing the negative results of the work condition for their health. From the information collected, harmful alterations are observed that go from physical to psychic components, being the agents subject to the diseases. The studies evidenced that the penitentiary agents presented important alterations regarding anthropometric patterns demonstrating a strong predisposition for the development of diseases such as the Metabolic Syndrome.

The presence of Metabolic Syndrome, the results of the tuberculin tests and the presence of anxiety and stress elucidate the poor health condition of the penitentiary agents in the analyzed studies. Studies on the subject are scarce and other aspects must be addressed, as well as food, medication use, need for medical help, among others, so it is possible to have a broader and more precise view of the health situation of these professionals. In view of the above, the health of prison staff is undoubtedly a subject that needs to be addressed in the various fields of scientific, social and political knowledge.

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