



**BETWEEN HUMAN DIGNITY AND STIGMA:
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND
MENTAL HEALTH OF MILITARY POLICE
OFFICERS**

**ENTRE A DIGNIDADE HUMANA E O ESTIGMA:
CULTURA ORGANIZACIONAL E SAÚDE MENTAL
DE POLICIAIS MILITARES**

**ENTRE LA DIGNIDAD HUMANA Y EL ESTIGMA:
CULTURA ORGANIZACIONAL Y SALUD MENTAL
DE LOS POLICÍAS MILITARES**

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the relationship between the organizational culture practiced in militarized police institutions, human dignity, and the mental health of their members. Through an integrative literature review, it is evidenced how hierarchical rigidity and negligence towards emotional needs can result in psychological suffering, creating conditions conducive to mental illness. The research reveals that the disregard for human dignity and the naturalization of suffering in the institutional environment constitute human rights violations. The study suggests the reformulation of organizational policies and institutional practices that prioritize mental health and the valorization of professionals, promoting a more equitable work environment aligned with the fundamental principles of human rights.

Keywords: Human dignity. Organizational culture. Mental health. Human rights. Military police.

RESUMO

O artigo explora a relação entre a cultura organizacional praticada nas instituições policiais militarizadas, a dignidade humana e a saúde mental de seus integrantes. Por meio de uma revisão integrativa de literatura, evidencia-se como a rigidez hierárquica e a negligência às necessidades

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emocionais podem resultar em sofrimento psíquico, criando condições propícias ao adoecimento mental. A pesquisa revela que a desconsideração da dignidade humana e a naturalização do sofrimento no ambiente institucional configuram violações de direitos humanos. O estudo sugere a reformulação de políticas organizacionais e práticas institucionais que priorizem a saúde mental e a valorização dos profissionais, promovendo um ambiente de trabalho mais equitativo e alinhado aos princípios fundamentais dos direitos humanos.

Palavras-chave: Dignidade humana. Cultura organizacional. Saúde mental. Direitos humanos. Polícia militar.

RESUMEN

El artículo explora la relación entre la cultura organizacional practicada en las instituciones policiales militarizadas, la dignidad humana y la salud mental de sus integrantes. A través de una revisión integrativa de la literatura, se evidencia cómo la rigidez jerárquica y la negligencia hacia las necesidades emocionales pueden resultar en sufrimiento psíquico, creando condiciones propicias para el deterioro de la salud mental. La investigación revela que el desconocimiento de la dignidad humana y la naturalización del sufrimiento en el entorno institucional configuran violaciones de los derechos humanos. El estudio sugiere la reformulación de políticas organizacionales y prácticas institucionales que prioricen la salud mental y la valorización de los profesionales, promoviendo un ambiente de trabajo más equitativo y alineado con los principios fundamentales de los derechos humanos.

Palabras clave: Dignidad humana. Cultura organizacional. Salud mental. Derechos humanos. Policía militar.

INTRODUCTION

Human dignity, an essential foundation of human rights, emerges as the central point of reflection in various fields of knowledge, and it is no different in the context of public organizations. This article aims to investigate the relationship between human dignity, organizational culture in military police service, and the mental health of these agents, inserting itself into a debate that, at the same time, reveals the importance of human rights and denounces institutional practices that may violate them. Based on contributions from authors such as Norberto Bobbio (2004), Immanuel Kant (2010), and João Cardoso Rosas (2013), the discussion points to the need for an interdisciplinary dialogue that articulates theory and practice in facing the tensions that permeate dignity and rights in the police environment.

Norberto Bobbio (2004), in "The Age of Rights," presents dignity as a concept that evolves historically, transitioning from an aristocratic privilege to a universal value, supported by liberal revolutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. From this perspective, dignity becomes an intrinsic and inalienable element, but it faces concrete implementation challenges, especially in environments that perpetuate rigid hierarchies and dehumanizing practices, such as some

military police corporations. Kant (2010), in turn, reinforces this idea by proposing that human dignity resides in the capacity for autonomy and the valorization of the individual as an end in themselves, establishing an ethical basis for respect for subjectivities, often neglected in hierarchical organizations.

In the field of organizations, Edgar Schein (2009) describes organizational culture as a dynamic mechanism, shaped by shared values and practices, which can both promote inclusion and reinforce structural inequalities. In the case of military police, this culture is organized around values such as bravery, self-sufficiency, and conformity, often to the detriment of the subjectivity and dignity of its members. Michel Foucault (1999), when discussing the concepts of discipline and control, describes how these institutions shape individuals, transforming them into "docile bodies," subordinate to organizational demands and deprived of their autonomy.

However, as João Cardoso Rosas (2013) observes, human dignity is also a historical and collective construction, demanding continuous recognition and the overcoming of practices that disregard it. This aspect connects to the mental health of workers, a central theme in the reflections of Christophe Dejours (2017), who identifies psychological suffering as a direct consequence of dehumanizing work organizations. In the context of military police, the impact of organizational culture on mental health manifests itself in high rates of stress, anxiety, and burnout, exacerbated by a culture of silencing that inhibits the search for help (Silva, 2023).

This article seeks to articulate these dimensions, analyzing how the organizational culture of military police can compromise the human dignity and mental health of their professionals, constituting a human rights violation. Based on a literature review, which encompasses the concepts of dignity, human rights, and organizational culture, an interdisciplinary dialogue is proposed capable of contributing to the understanding and overcoming of these dynamics. If the organizational culture practiced in a military police institution can influence the mental health of its agents, in what way can this influence lead to possible violations of their human rights?

1 SOME FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN DIGNITY AND ITS TRANSFORMATION

Human dignity is one of the central pillars of human rights, consolidating itself as an essential foundation for the construction of just and egalitarian societies (Messetti; Dallari, 2018). Norberto Bobbio, in "The Age of Rights," highlights that dignity moves from a hierarchical concept, restricted to elites, to a universalist perspective, where all human beings share an intrinsic value (Bobbio, 2004). According to the author, this transformation was catalyzed by the liberal revolutions

of the 18th century and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, establishing dignity as the basis for civil, political, and social rights.

Immanuel Kant, in "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," reinforces the idea that dignity is inherent to all individuals, being a result of their capacity to act autonomously and in accordance with universal rational principles (Kant, 2010). Kant proposes that every human being must be treated as an end in themselves, never merely as a means, grounding the idea of respect for autonomy and freedom.

In his work, "Dignity, Rights, and Democracy," João Cardoso Rosas highlights that human dignity also reveals itself as a historical construction, evolving in parallel with democratic struggles for equality. The author offers us a comprehensive and interdisciplinary reflection on the historical evolution, theoretical foundations, and practical challenges of human rights, when he divides his concepts into three major parts, connecting human rights, democracy, and peace, and considering them essential and interdependent elements of a historical movement towards dignity and peaceful coexistence (Rosas, 2013).

The perspectives presented so far reflect the dynamic character of dignity, being constantly redefined by contemporary social and political demands, however, there are tensions between the universality of dignity and social practices that perpetuate stigma and exclusion, themes we intend to address in this article, by suggesting a relationship between the intersection of human dignity, organizational culture practiced within military police institutions, mental health, and human rights. These tensions are particularly visible within military police organizations, where hierarchical and masculinist culture can compromise the equality and mental health of its members.

2 DISCUSSING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN MILITARY POLICE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMAN DIGNITY

According to Schein (2009), Chiavenato (2022), and Pires, Macêdo (2006), organizational culture can be understood as a system of values, beliefs, and collective practices that directly influence how individuals act and interact within an organization. It is important to highlight that this culture is not immutable; on the contrary, it is a dynamic process that allows organizations to respond to changes in the external environment, especially when this adaptive capacity is fundamental to maintaining internal integrity and harmony. This characteristic is particularly relevant in the case of public institutions and authorities, where cohesion and stability are essential (Pyzyuk, 2023).

The organizational culture of military police plays a determining role in the physical and mental constitution of its members, establishing power relations, subordination, and compliance with

orders that demand a level of responsibility superior to that found in civilian systems. This dynamic is sustained by elements such as accentuated hierarchy, institutional distrust, rigorous discipline, control over private life, excessive formalism, sense of mission, and valorization of conformity — traits that are intrinsic to military culture and permeate the functioning of these institutions (Chadud, 2017; Goffman, 2016; Lima, 2019; Santos, 2010).

In military police, the organizational ethos tends to ignore the subjective dimension and emotional demands of its members, cultivating an environment that rejects the expression of vulnerability and discourages the search for support in moments of psychological suffering (Buhrig, 2023). This may be a product of rigorous hierarchy, strict discipline, and the valorization of behaviors based on bravery, self-sufficiency, and strength, characteristics that are often exalted as essential attributes for maintaining order, duty, and the identity belonging of its members (Buhrig, 2023; Illias; Riach; Demou, 2024; Lima, 2019; Simmons-Beauchamps; Sharpe, 2022), however, this structure also disregards fundamental aspects of human dignity (Lima, 2019). This reality contrasts directly with the principles of dignity discussed by Kant (2010), which emphasize autonomy and respect for the human condition.

From a sociological perspective, Norbert Elias and John Scotson, in "The Established and the Outsiders," highlight how dominant groups establish norms that reinforce their position, while marginalizing those who do not fit these standards (Elias; Scotson, 2000). In military police, this dynamic is evident in how organizational culture imposes a homogeneous pattern of behavior, suffocating the diversity of experiences and imposing a conduct model that prioritizes resistance to vulnerability.

It is opportune to invoke Michel Foucault's concept of "docile bodies," which describes how institutions discipline and shape individuals to serve organizational needs, often at the expense of individual autonomy and well-being (Foucault, 1999). In the case of military police, this excessive discipline can generate adverse effects, such as the silencing of emotional issues and the perpetuation of stigmas associated with fragility.

Rosas (2013) argues that dignity is a constantly evolving historical construction, but it faces resistance in contexts where hierarchical, patriarchal, and disciplinary values predominate. This confrontation is particularly visible in military police corporations, where the focus on discipline and conformity can lead to the dehumanization of individuals, compromising their mental health and dignity, through the docilization of bodies, discussed in Foucauldian theory (1999).

Revisiting the foundations of human dignity is essential to challenge this organizational culture. As discussed in the previous section, dignity implies the recognition of the intrinsic value of

each individual, in addition to their capacity for autonomy. Promoting a culture that recognizes vulnerability and offers support for emotional needs is a fundamental step towards aligning organizational practices with human rights principles.

3 MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Mental health is an essential component for the realization of human dignity (Del'Olmo; Cervi, 2017). Christophe Dejours, in "Psychodynamics of Work," discusses how working conditions can generate psychological suffering, highlighting that work organization plays a central role in structuring workers' mental well-being (Dejours, 2017). In the context of military police, demands for conformity, control over bodies, and the imposition of hierarchical roles exacerbate stress factors, leading to high rates of anxiety, depression, and burnout (Chadud, 2017; Goffman, 2016; Lima, 2019; Santos, 2010; Silva 2023).

The literature also points out that the culture of silencing is one of the main obstacles to promoting mental health in military corporations (Souza, 2021; Minayo; Adorno, 2013). Military police officers often avoid seeking help for fear of reprisals or being seen as weak (Brazilian Forum on Public Security, 2024).

Work organization has a direct influence on individuals' mental health, with working conditions marked by excessive control, lack of recognition, and hierarchical impositions potentially triggering psychological suffering (Dejours, 2017). In the context of human dignity, as Rosas (2013) teaches us, it is possible to identify a tension between the guarantee of dignity as a universal value and organizational practices that dehumanize workers. When corporations ignore the subjectivity and emotional needs of their members, they disrespect not only individual dignity but also the human rights that, according to Bobbio (2004), are only consolidated in practice when linked to the effective guarantee of material and social conditions that ensure equality and freedom.

Bobbio (2004) also emphasizes that human rights, despite being widely proclaimed, face concrete implementation challenges, especially in environments that disregard the dignity and well-being of individuals. Dejours (2017), when analyzing the impacts of work on mental health, reinforces that unhealthy and dehumanizing work environments not only compromise psychological balance but also erode workers' ability to fully exercise their rights. This direct relationship between working conditions and human dignity connects to Rosas's (2013) argument, which emphasizes that dignity is not only an intrinsic attribute but also a collective responsibility that demands continuous recognition. Thus, the promotion of mental health in work environments, especially in hierarchical corporations

such as military police, becomes an indispensable requirement for realizing democratic ideals and universal human rights.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article highlighted the intersections between the foundations of human dignity, organizational culture, and mental health in the context of military police. Based on theoretical reflections, mainly found in Bobbio (2004), Kant (2010), Rosas (2013), Schein (2009), and Dejours (2017), it became evident that human dignity is often compromised by organizational practices that reinforce inequalities and stigmas. However, the transformative potential of dignity as a foundation for promoting human rights and building more inclusive organizational cultures was also recognized.

The reformulation of organizational policies is essential to guarantee a work environment that respects the dignity of all individuals, promoting equality, mental health, and institutional efficiency. By addressing the tensions between organizational culture and dignity, this study proposes to broaden the academic and practical debate on the challenges that emerge when human dignity is relativized, in the context of organizational culture practiced by militarized police institutions.

If the moral progress of humanity depends on the integration between human rights, democracy, and peace, and if it is in overcoming inequalities and promoting universal rights that the potential for a more just future lies, problematizing organizational culture in militarized institutions, in search of better working conditions and mental health for these professionals, is urgent, because these actions also constitute fundamental tools in the fight against violations of the rights of these professionals.

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