

Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Policework, Training and Education: A Portuguese criminal investigation professionals' perception

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has created several challenges for police forces. Whether or not the police can successfully respond to these challenges depends on several issues. These must be identified to improve the police work's impact on each community and society. Laufs and Wa-seem (2020), in a systematic review on best practices for police response to COVID-19, identify four different contexts related to this issue: 1. Police-community relations; 2. Psychological and mental wellbeing of police officers; 3. Intra-organizational challenges; 4. Inter-organizational collaboration and cooperation. Policing in a pandemic context has changed the type of relations between police officers and the community considering possible variations in crime patterns. Also, officers' proximity with infected persons can be identified as one more daily stressor associated with police work. To mitigate the difficulties, adequate training and education must be set up to improve new competencies that can help police officers cope with anxiety about personal risks and develop new professional strategies to investigate crimes. To improve the knowledge about the changes and challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Portuguese Judiciary Police, the Institute of Judiciary Police and Criminal Sciences has conducted a national-level study. The research was conducted in all the 14 departments of the Judiciary Police using an online questionnaire based on a review of the literature. Several issues were identified considering the criminal investigation professionals' perception about the changes in

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crime patterns, identification of stress factors related to police work and challenges related to training and education strategies to be implemented.

Keywords: *Covid-19 pandemic; police work; police training*

Introduction

Considering the pandemic situation of Covid-19 and the restrictions imposed on the police forces, several are the challenges that this kind of institutions faced during 2020. Concerning the police forces' missions (e.g., public order, law enforcement, criminal investigation) the main challenges came from the community and society. Changes regarding the police-community and inter-organizational collaboration and cooperation relations are the most critical impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic context and, consequently, all the internal adjustments made by the police forces to respond to that. Thus, police officers' psychological and mental well-being and the presence of new stressors and the intra-organizational challenges regarding the police new management and work strategies are the main internal issues related to the pandemic situation (Laufs & Waseem, 2020).

Policing in a pandemic context has changed the type of relations between police officers and the community concerning the variations in crime patterns associated with the lockdown and changes in the relationships between the police and other institutions related to the criminal investigation such as courts, prison system, victims support institutions or hospitals (Laufs & Waseem, 2020).

Social isolation is a common consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and represents a major threat to mental health (Banerjee & Rai, 2020). In police work this issue can also be identified in several police departments. Also, the police officers' proximity with infected persons can be identified as one more daily stressor associated with police work (Brooks & Lopez, 2020).

Police training and education can be considered as essential strategies and tools to mitigate the difficulties and improve new competencies that can help police officers cope with anxiety about personal risks and develop new professional strategies to investigate crimes.

To study the impact of the pandemic context in police work, the Institute of Judiciary Police and Criminal Sciences has developed research to improve the knowledge about the changes and challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic and promote the identification of training needs of the Portuguese Judiciary Police. To accomplish this main goal, several specific aims were defined: 1. Identification of police officers' perception about work con-

ditions; 2. Identification of police officers' perception about changes in crime patterns; 3. Police officers' psychological and mental wellbeing assessment in pandemic context; 4. Identification of needs and challenges related to police training and education.

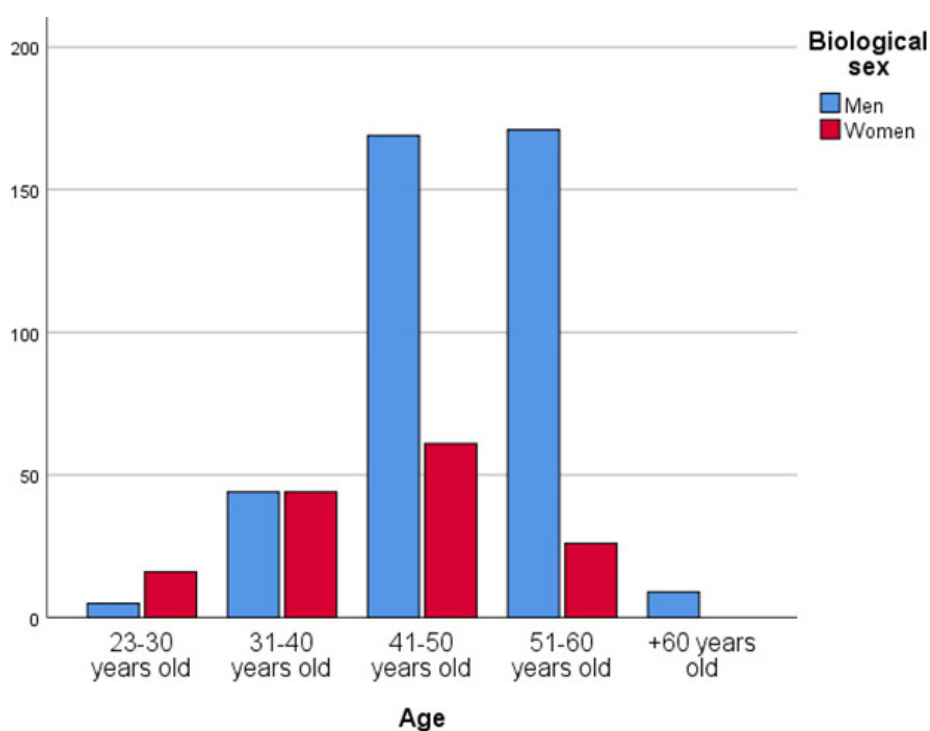
Methodology

Participants

The participants work at the Portuguese Judiciary Police (PJ), a higher criminal police force to assist the judicial and prosecuting authorities in criminal investigations. PJ is responsible for the criminal investigation of serious and violent crimes such as homicides, sexual crimes, terrorism, kidnapping, robbery with firearms, human trafficking, corruption, money laundering, international drug trafficking, slavery, and arson.

Regarding the pursued methodology it was developed comprehensive research that was conducted in the PJ accomplishing the following research sample: 547 criminal investigators have participated in the study, being 72,8% Men and 26,9% Women. The distribution between men and women in this sample is similar to the distribution in the PJ. 42% of police officers integrate the group with 41-50 years old, 36% the group with 51-60 years old and 16% the group between 31-40 years old (Graphic 1).

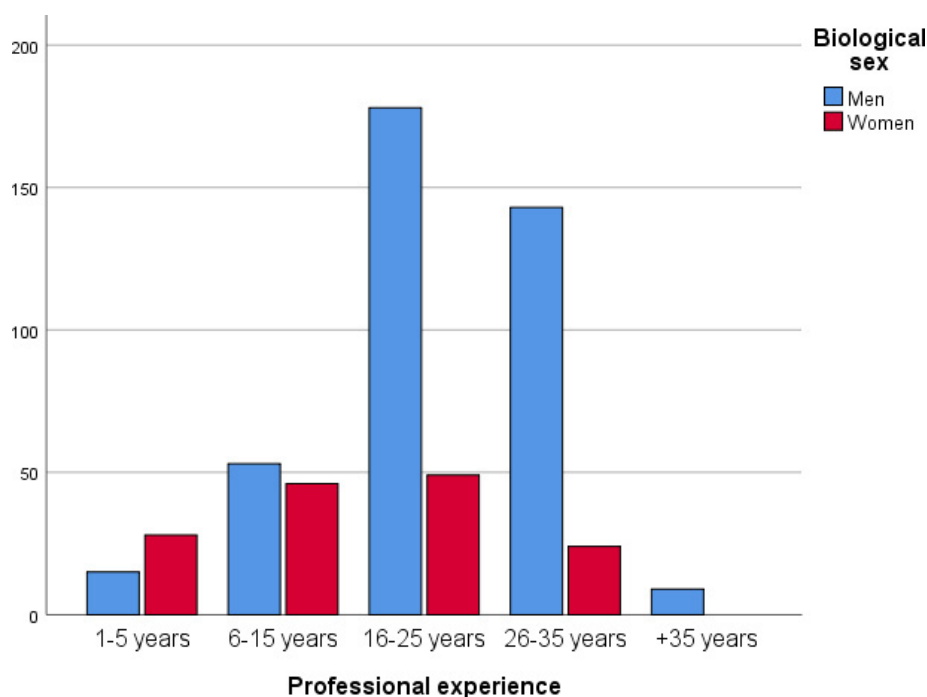
Graphic 1. Distribution of age considering the police officers biological sex variable



Considering the type of department, it is possible to identify that 40% work at a Directorate, 32% at a Central Unit and 24% at a Department of Criminal Investigation.

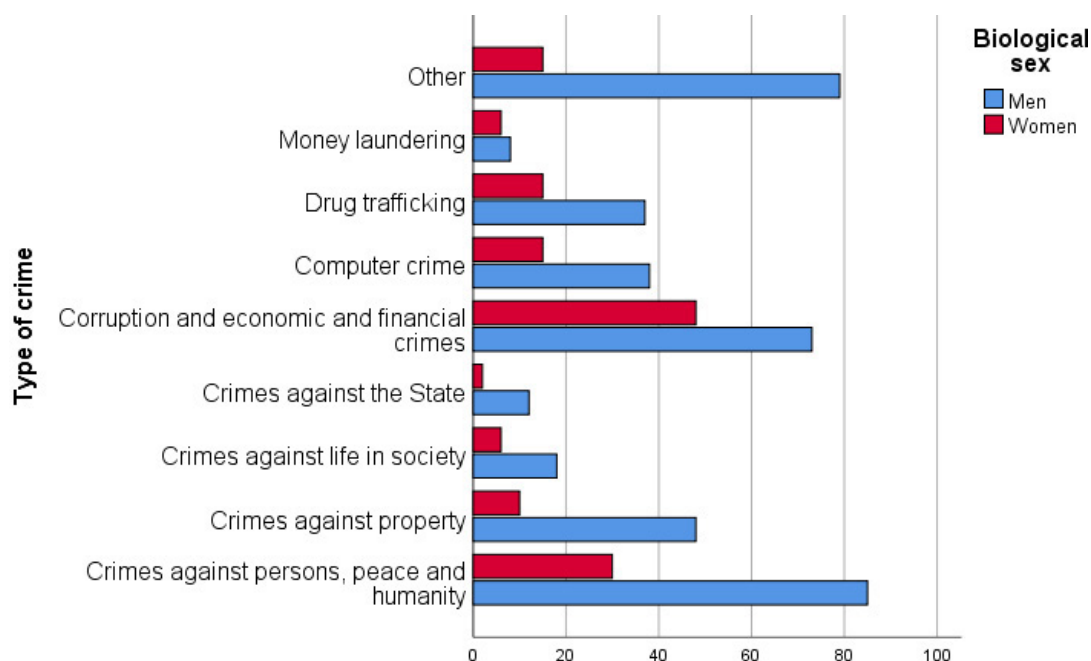
Analyzing the variable professional experience, 42% integrate the group of 16-25 years of police work experience, 31% integrate the group with 26-31 years of professional experience and 18% the group with 6-15 years of professional experience (Graphic 2).

Graphic 2. Distribution of years of professional experience considering the police officers biological sex variable



The variable type of crime investigated indicates that 22% of the police officers work in crimes of corruption and economic and financial crimes; 21% crimes against persons, peace, and humanity and 11% crimes against property (Graphic 3).

Graphic 3. Distribution of type of crime investigated considering the police officers biological sex variable



Instruments

An online questionnaire was organised in three different parts. The first part was developed according to a systematic review of the literature with keywords as Covid-19 pandemic and police work to assess the criminal investigation professionals' perception about changes in crime patterns and work conditions in the pandemic situation regarding the Covid-19. The second part presents the primary goal of assessing police officers' psychological and mental well-being and the new stressors regarding the police new management and work strategies related to the pandemic situation. The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL; Stamm, 2010) was used in this study to measure compassion fatigue, or the physical, mental, and emotional state experienced by police officers during the last months.

A third part has the main goal of identifying the perception of challenges related to training and education in order to define new guidelines and strategies to improve the police training and educational process.

Procedures

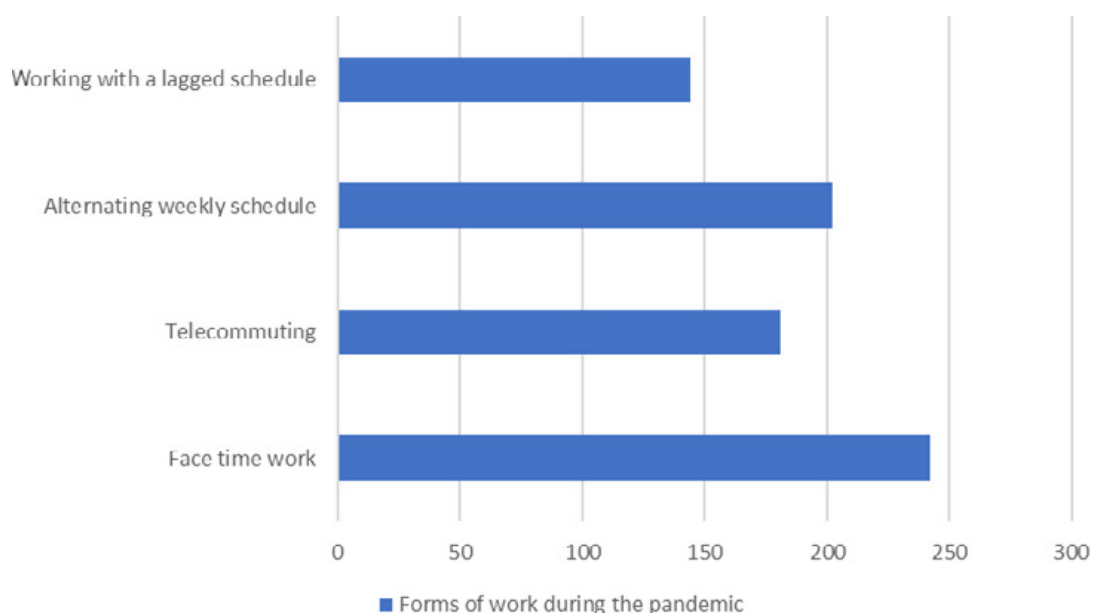
The research was conducted in all of the 14 departments of the Judiciary Police, using an online questionnaire and addressed to criminal investigators from the Portuguese Judiciary Police, placed in different units nationwide. The research team considered all the confidentiality and ethical issues regarding the collection and analysis of data.

Results

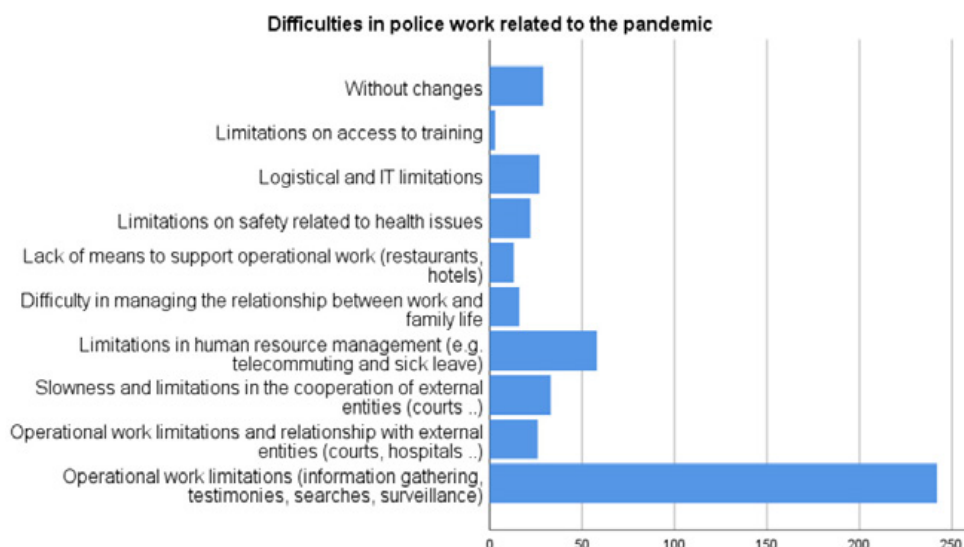
Criminal investigation professionals' perception about work conditions

The analysis of the police officers' perception about changes in work conditions in the pandemic situation regarding the Covid-19 indicates the presence of several new *forms of work organization* to respond to the pandemic context. In Graphic 4 it is possible to identify the most representative solutions concerning the work organization's pandemic challenges: alternating weekly schedules (36,9%), telecommuting (33%) and working with a lagged schedule (26%) are the most representative results presented by the police officers research sample. However, the face timework still represents 44% of the forms of work organization identified by the police officers in order to accomplish their professional goals, even in the pandemic context.

Graphic 4. Forms of work organization during the pandemic

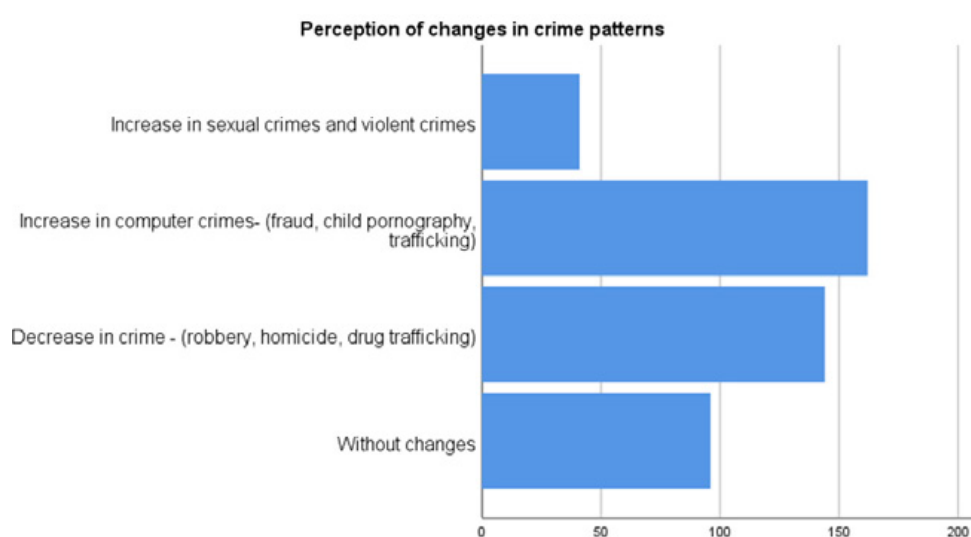


The analysis of the police officers' perception about the *main difficulties during the pandemic* identified some limitations shared by *police officers investigating different types of crime* ($\chi^2=113,08$; $p = .001$) and in *all types of police departments* ($\chi^2=98,34$; $p = .001$). The most important are the limitations related to operational work (information gathering, testimonies, searches and surveillance) (51%), limitations in human resources management related to work organization (12,6%) and slowness and limitations in the cooperation with external entities (e.g., courts) (7%) (Graphic 5).

Graphic 5. Difficulties in police work related with the pandemic

Criminal investigation professionals' perception about the criminal patterns' changes

The perception about the *changes in crime patterns* is shared by police officers investigating different types of crime ($\chi^2=109,55$; $p = .001$) and in all types of police departments ($\chi^2=21,33$; $p = .011$). The essential changes identified are the increase in computer crimes in several areas (fraud, child pornography and trafficking) (36,6%), a decrease in violent crimes as robbery, homicide, and drug trafficking (32,5%). A group of 21,7% of the police officers do not indicate any changes in the crime patterns investigated by their department (Graphic 6).

Graphic 6. Police work perceptions of changes in crime patterns during the pandemic

Police officers psychological and mental wellbeing assessment in pandemic context

The Incidence of Compassion Fatigue (CF) is assessed by analyzing the level of Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress. The analysis of Table 1 shows a low/ moderate level of burnout and a low level of secondary traumatic stress presented by the police officers' sample. In a positive way, the police officers sample presents a moderate level of compassion satisfaction (level of pleasure-driven from being able to do the work well). No statistically significant differences were identified between men and women regarding the incidence of compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction.

Table 1. Police officers' level of Incidence of Compassion Fatigue and compassion satisfaction

	Compassion Satisfaction	Burnout	Secondary Traumatic Stress
M	39,28	22,82	20,93
DP	5,86149	6,09925	5,64201
Level	Moderate	Low/moderate	Low
N	495	496	489

The analysis of the impact of the type of crime investigated by the police officers indicates that the professionals working with crimes against the state, computer crimes, money laundering, corruption, economic and financial crimes present a moderate level of burnout (Table 2) when compared with the other police officers working in departments as crimes against people, peace and humanity ($M=21,405$; $SD=4,881$) or crimes against like in society ($M=22,782$; $SD=6,522$).

Table 2. Police officers' level of Incidence of burnout considering the type of crime investigated

Types of crime	Burnout			
	M	DP	F	p
Crimes against the State	24,61	6,198	2,322	0,019
Corruption and economic and financial crimes	24,18	6,302		
Computer crime	24,24	6,918		
Money laundering	24,33	6,242		

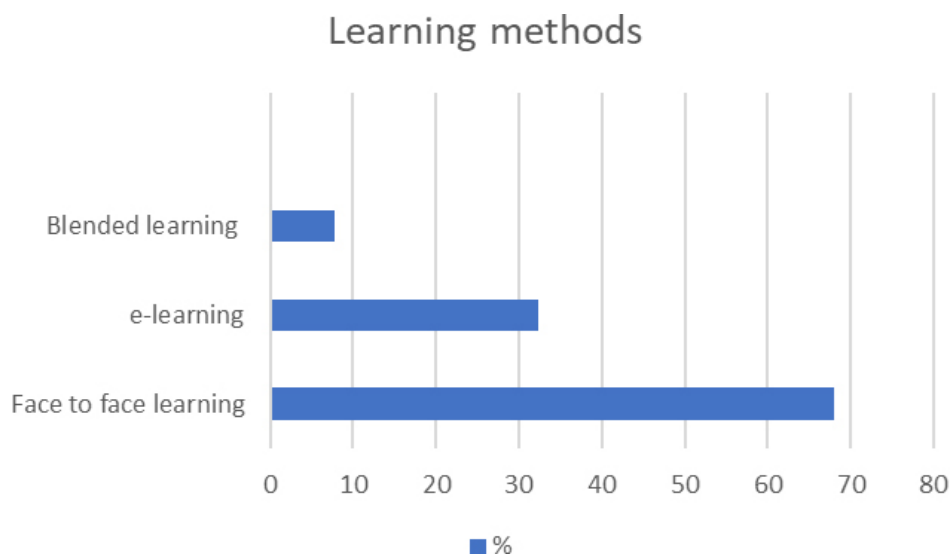
Identification of needs and challenges related to police training and education

The Graphic 7 shows some *training needs* identified and shared by the police officers sample considering the different working departments and types of crimes investigated. Subjects as information analysis and processing, international cooperation, computer crimes, and police techniques are the essential topics identified by the sample to improve police officers' competencies.

Graphic 7. Police officers identification of needs and challenges related to police training and education



Regarding the *learning methods* (Graphic 8) that the police officers identify as more adequate for the police training and education, it has been identified the *face-to-face training method* as the most important for the acquisition and training of police competencies (69%). The e-learning training method is identified by 35% of the police officers' sample and is considered as more adequate for the conceptual and/or first level of police training.

Graphic 8. Police officers' identification of learning methods to police training and education

Conclusions

The participation in the CEPOL 2021 Conference represented for the Institute for Judiciary Police and Criminal Sciences a first step regarding the monitorization of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Judiciary Police organization.

The main conclusions of this study are relevant as regards responses to the pandemic in police work. In this context, we underline the following issues:

- The most important impact refers to the required adjustment of working conditions. Police officers' operational activity was constraint due to lack of interaction with the community and citizens in general which affected information gathering activities like testimonies, searches, intelligence and surveillance;
- An also highly relevant impact consisted of the difficulties in human resources management due to the absence of sick workers and family support needs regarding COVID -19 pandemic and workers in quarantine. Due mainly to new internal scheduled timetables, many activities suffered a retardation effect on the work progress.
- The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the cooperation with different stakeholders like courts, prison system organisations and forensic medicine considering the mandatory lockdown.
- Police officers identified several changes in criminal patterns considering the different types of crime. There is the perception of increase in computer crimes in different areas as fraud, child pornography and trafficking; Regarding violent crimes as robbery,

homicide, and drug trafficking the police officers reported a decrease of this kind of criminal phenomena.

- Another perspective of the study concerns the police officers' psychological and mental wellbeing assessment in pandemic context, considering the burnout and stress indicators of the study sample. It was identified a low level of Compassion Fatigue which represents low/ moderate level of burnout and a low level of secondary traumatic stress. Regarding the analysis of the level of pleasure-driven from being able to do the work well, a positive indicator of professional adaption, the police officers' sample presents a moderate level of compassion satisfaction. No statistically significant differences were identified between men and women regarding the incidence of compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction.
- Moderate level of burnout in some groups of police officers working in specific criminality was identified: the professionals working with crimes against the state, computer crimes, money laundering, corruption, economic and financial crimes present a moderate level of burnout. The other police officers' groups present a low level of burnout indicators.
- Concerning the police officer's identification of needs and challenges related to police training and education in Covid-19 pandemic the research results present subjects as information analysis and processing, international cooperation, computer crimes, and police techniques as the essential topics identified by the police officers' sample. The police officers' perception about the training methods more adequate for the police training and education in the Covid-19 pandemic situation is the use of face-to-face learning methods. The use of e-learning training methods is identified as more adequate for the conceptual and first level of police training.

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