

COMMENTARY

Human values differentially motivate police actions

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Racially motivated police actions, like the those discussed in Dhanani et al. (2022), are questioned across many countries, including Brazil. Darker skinned Brazilians are often targeted more than lighter skinned Brazilians (Anunciação et al., 2020). Official data (Agência Brasil, 2022) suggest that in May 2022, 68% of people approached on foot by the police and 71% on public transportation identified themselves as Black or Brown (or "Mixed" race). In addition, 17% of those have been stopped more than 10 times in their lifespan and 15% have been stopped 6 to 10 times. Among those whose homes were searched by the police, 79% were Black or Brown, as were 74% of those who had a relative or friend killed by the police. According to the Brazilian census (PNAD, 2019), Blacks and Browns together account for 56.2% of the Brazilian population, whereas 42.7% of Brazilians identify themselves as White, and 1.1% as Native or Asian.

One way to mitigate racially motivated police violence is to increase police officers' education and training, particularly reinforcing social values to guide actions. Education provides metaknowledge on how people interact with their environment (including situation and circumstance), whereas training provides an opportunity for workers to practice desired work attitudes and behaviors. This response first establishes an alternative perspective on the notion of race. Second, we present a history of police in Brazil and how police in Brazil are educated and prepared to handle their law enforcement work. We then address implications of work role stressors on police officers' psychological well-being and intention to leave the organization. Finally, we emphasize the importance of reinforcing social values that can deter adverse police actions, particularly aggression and violence, not only in Brazil but in other countries too.

Phenotypic view of race

The notion of race, as a solid social-scientific concept with a so-called "legitimate" biological basis, is argued to have been created in the USA and strongly influenced by scholars such as Max Weber and Robert Park (Hita, 2017). However, in reality, discrimination based on melanin is not new, even though the premise of race differs across countries. In Brazil, the concept of race is viewed in terms of phenotype, instead of genotype, which would minimize the relevance of one's heritage and ancestry. In Brazil, race has been traditionally understood as a spurious concept, without scientific foundation, and an intrusion of biology on social rationalization for purposes of national oppression (BonFim, 1903). Such a view is still somewhat predominant in Brazil as suggested by Fernandes (2008) who, instead of thinking about race as an expression of immanent characteristics of human biology that conditions social behavior, asks "What is it about the belief of the idea of race that influences societal functioning?" Race would be just one of the possible forms that constitute an ethnic group, that is, one that is defined from markers of color (Hasenbalg,

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1979). Therefore, the perception of variation in phenotypic characteristics is not only seen as a natural fact, but it is also understood as social reality (Torres & Hanashiro, 2017). Researchers (e.g., Hita, 2017; Torres et al., 2020a) have further claimed that, in Brazil, it is not possible to deny discriminatory practices and prejudice that classify and devalue "the other" by phenotype, different economic conditions, having different social or cultural status, and differences in origin (national or historical). Blatant discriminatory behaviors associated with race (in its phenotypic conception, e.g., color, facial features) exist in Brazil.

Police work in Brazil

With the arrival of the Portuguese crown to Brazil, the Military Division of the Royal Police Guard was first established on May 13, 1809, under the Portuguese king. When Brazil became a republic in 1889 (PMDF, 2020), the former transitioned into the various Brazilian states' police. The preservation of public order is provided in the Brazilian Constitution as a single attribution of the police (Brasil, 1988). Chapter III, Article 144, item V, § 5, of the Constitution of Brazil establishes that: "Public security, the duty of the State, the right and responsibility of all, is exercised for the preservation of public order and the safety of people and property, through the following institutions: I - Federal Police; II - Federal Highway Police; III - Federal Railway Police; IV - Civil Police; " and "V - Military Police [...]. § 5 - the Military Police are responsible for the ostensible police and the preservation of public order" (Brasil, 1988). The comparative group of the Brazilian Military Police in the USA is the state police, and in France, it is the gendarmerie. In the USA, state police have statewide authority to conduct law enforcement activities and criminal investigations. In general, US state police officers (aka. state troopers) perform functions that do not fall within the jurisdiction of the county sheriff, such as overseeing the security of the population and of the US capitol complex, conducting criminal investigations, training new officers, among other tasks.

In 2009, Brazil passed a law that all new police recruits are required to have completed an undergraduate college degree. This legal modification brought both positive and negative repercussions. On the one hand, the selected professionals entered with a broad educational background to understand people and their environment while developing guided work experience. It also helped cope with work stress. On the other hand, after a realistic job preview, many police officers voiced their intention to leave the institution while in their training course. The nature of police work and the age of entry itself, which increased with the increased level of education required, are relevant factors in this context (Costa et al., 2012). It has enormous implications on maturity and broad intellect regarding human behavior. Members of Brasilia's police force engage in police officer training over a period of 3 years, after which a cadet is declared an aspiring officer, the first officer post in the career of the Military Police of the Federal District (PMDF, 2020).

Work role stressors on police officers' psychological well-being

Literature shows that physical and psychological strains are a major impetus for police withdrawal behaviors (turnover and absences; Dantas et al., 2010; Oliveira & Bardagi, 2009). Turnover of the PMDF is nearly 5%, and it is attributed heavily to job-related stressors (Ferreira-Alves & Torres, 2021). In fact, due to the high stakes job, police officers' life expectancy is about 11 years less than the average (73.1 years) Brazilian civilian (Torres et al., 2022b).

Torres et al. (2022c) recently published a study that focused on stress and meaningfulness in life (MIL) among 320 members of the Brazilian police force. They argue that assuming the relevance of the police force for the development of the state's activities and the fundamental role that the police play in guaranteeing and preserving public security and order, scientific research within the police sphere is essential for developing evidence-based practical solutions and actions that further

contribute to improvements in the provision of police services. Their study showed that MIL prevented adverse outcomes due to role stressors (only or due to stressors appraised as challenges or hindrances). Given that police work is a necessarily high stakes profession in which officers constantly wrestle with doing the best they can in difficult situations, the current findings suggest that helping police officers increase their cognitive state of feeling overall MIL could help reduce anxiety and turnover intention. They further assert that training police officers to frame conditions and experiences from a lens of purpose in life might also increase prosocial behaviors and improve police officers' overall health.

Values as predictors of police actions

Torres and Glazer (in press), drawing on Schwartz et al.'s (2012) premise that individuals' personal values, guided by national culture, are important constructs for the prediction of perception, attitudes, and behaviors, argue that those behaviors include how they engage in crime prevention, as well as how they deal with violent and aggressive behaviors. Sagiv and Roccas (2021) further conjecture that organizational values shape individual values. Recognizing that individuals' values serve as justifications for their actions, Torres and Glazer ask what and why some values would result in creative and resilient behaviors when faced with difficult high stakes situations, whereas other values that people endorse would predict aggressive and violent actions? Current social psychology studies link values to aggressive and violent behaviors (Benish-Weisman, 2019; Benish-Weisman & McDonald, 2015; Knafo, 2003; Menesini et al., 2013; Torres et al., 2022b). The scholars surmise that self-transcendence values that include care for nature and others negatively relate with aggression and violence, whereas self-enhancement values, focused on individuals' care for power, risk taking, and achievement, positively relate with aggression and violence. Moreover, those who prioritize openness to change values, reflected in seeking adventure, stimulation, and pleasure in life, compared to those who prioritize conservation values, reflected in maintaining harmony, security, tradition, and status quo, would more likely engage in aggressive behaviors (vs. personal restraint; Knafo et al., 2008; Torres et al., 2022b). Homing in on value types, Vecchione et al. (2016) found that power values positively, and universalism values negatively, relate with aggression.

Extending the conclusions to police officers, Torres et al. (2022b) found that police officers were more likely to engage in violent actions when they prioritized self-focused values, such as openness to change values (i.e., self-direction of thought and stimulation values) and were less likely to engage in violent actions when they prioritized the social values of self-transcendence values (i.e., universalism and benevolence values) and conservation values (i.e., tradition, security, and conformity values). However, there was no relationship between self-enhancement (i.e., power, achievement, and hedonism) values and violence. It appears that openness to change values not only reflect an individuals' search for excitement but also serve as justification for violent behaviors against others. In a way, the police officer might be pursuing challenges and fulfilling a desire for adventure by justifying aggressive actions over restraint in the face of a high stake's situation. Still, Torres and Glazer (in press) caution that national culture could play a role in the extent to which these individual values relate with violence and aggression. For example, honor cultures might stimulate conservation values and use preservation of those values as justification to engage in normative practices, such as aggression toward others so as to mitigate the experience of shame (Smith et al., 2020) and conserve honor (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). In Brazil, police had higher scores on power and stimulation values and lower scores on universalism values than the general population (Torres et al., 2022b). In the USA, police officers ranked equality (a component of universalism value) quite low (Zhao et al., 1998).

Connecting values to actions via well-being: Implications for research and practice

At this point, there is still a dearth of research connecting values, psychological well-being, and police aggression and violence. Values tend to be stable cognitive representations of individuals' motives (Schwartz et al., 2012). They are shaped by one's environment (Schwartz, 1992) and both indirectly and directly affect behaviors, though more often the relationship between values and behaviors are indirect. Research suggests that values directly relate to psychological well-being (Cohen & Shamai, 2010) and that psychological well-being relates with behaviors, including turnover (Yun et al., 2015) and aggression (Kaur, 2018; Pekurinen et al., 2017). For example, individually oriented values (openness to change values and self-enhancement values) negatively correlated with job burnout and positive health behaviors, whereas socially oriented values (i.e., self-transcendence values) positively correlated with engagement and positive health behaviors (Basinska & Dåderman, 2019; Tal & Yinon, 2002). Moreover, these values significantly correlated with violence: positively with individually oriented values and negatively with socially oriented values (Basinska & Dåderman, 2019). Kang et al. (2016) also found that endorsing self-transcendence values can reduce specific responses in the brain in the context of potentially threatening situations, such that attenuated neural reactivity to threatening situations may be a novel way that prioritizing self-transcendence values could lead to positive health behaviors. Specific studies should be designed to test the relationship between self-transcendence values and violent situations.

Based on the above, we surmise that personal values that police maintain would relate to aggressive behaviors via their psychological well-being, which is formed, in part, by the high stakes situation they are in. We further suggest, in line with others (Piwowarski et al., 2015; Ruibytė & Adamonienė, 2012), that to change aggressive and violent behaviors among police officers, it is imperative that police officers are aware of their own values. This awareness begins with recognizing that most police organizations value hierarchy (as evident in their structure), tradition, and conformity (Nascimento, 2014). Sagiv and Roccas (2021) point out that organizational values may shape the individual values endorsed by people in a specific occupation. Therefore, expectations for changes in individuals' values would have to be complemented with changes in organizational values,

High stakes situations in which police operate will not change and the constant need to wrestle between one's values and preservation of their own lives with the lives of others will also not change. And, although generally stable, values may be modifiable to elicit desirable behaviors and attitudes (e.g., Maio, 2017). The required conditions to modify values are based on three organizing principles: accessibility, interpretation, and control (Sagiv & Roccas, 2021). These principles may serve as foundations for training programs designed to modify antecedents of violent attitudes and behaviors that are unwanted when the aim is to maintain safe environments. Through perspective-taking and self-awareness training, and practices that reinforce the experience of MIL, it is possible to enable police officers to understand and to acknowledge their own values, and to reframe their interpretations of events or situations, thereby reducing dissonance that they often face during high stakes police activities. Reducing dissonance between individual values and organizational values has positive implications on performance (Arieli et al., 2020). Future research ought to examine the relationship between MIL and values, particularly self-transcendence versus self-enhancement values, and study the efficacy of training interventions.

Moreover, to prevent adverse outcomes associated with values, Coelho et al. (2016) recommend increasing police officers' sense of control over their own lives, increasing their sense of purpose in life and in work, as well as fulfillment and satisfaction of life, and increasing their feeling of connectedness with their peers and society—all of which are intrinsically related to MIL. Such factors were also found to increase physical, psychological, and social health among police officers (Antloga, 2009). Thus, to prepare police to cope with stressful scenarios and mitigate unhealthy behaviors (Kang et al., 2016), particularly violent ones, training that focuses on modifying values

(Maio, 2017) and perspective-taking may be warranted. Specifically, training that reinforces self-transcendence values, which also relate to MIL, and discourages self-enhancement values, could help reduce the deleterious consequences of the values–aggression relationship among police officers.

Overall, to prevent adverse police actions and to increase awareness of implicit biases, police officers may benefit from training focused on increasing MIL, awareness of one's own values, practicing self-transcendence values, and minimizing self-enhancement values (Torres & Glazer, in press). These training programs would fit well with existing training designed to evaluate elements of situational crime prevention, such as observation of places, attitudes toward suspicious behavior, and reaction techniques, which in turn help to reduce violence within the police (Acquadro Maran et al., 2015).

Conflict of interest. We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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