

A degree for what? Higher education and low rank Minas Gerais' Military Police officers¹

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Abstract

This article analyses how low rank officers at Military Police of Minas Gerais with higher education understand their organization, their career and the relationship with society. The research touches a controversial topic in police studies: the role of higher education. In Brazil this issue is stressed by the existence of two hierarchical levels in the Military Police: soldiers and officers. The study adopted a qualitative methodology based on semistructured interviews. Four categories emerged from the data: 1 – critical capacity; 2 – hierarchical conflicts; 3 – absence of recognition and professional acknowledgement; 4 – leaving the career. Police officers affirm that higher education grants more discretionary capabilities in daily work, but reinforces conflicts with high rank officers. Furthermore, there is professional acknowledgement for holding a higher education degree. Thus, this new contingent of educated police officers that could be part of a more innovative practice has one desire: leaving the institution. As a conclusion the research affirms that a two-hierarchical model drives low rank police officers to leave the career. Additionally, this is an issue in the Brazilian police reform agenda.

Keywords

Military Police – Higher Education – Police Career – Police Reform.

Introduction³

This article intends to examine how low ranking gendarmerie (*Polícia Militar or PM*) in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais with higher education perceive their organization, career, and relations with society. The research looks at an important and controversial topic in the study of police: higher level education. Its impact on police activity is still the subject of discussion and no conclusive findings have obtained (SKOGAN; FRYLD, 2004). The aim of this paper is to analyze this question from the specific context of Brazil.

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This debate occurs both in the academic sphere and the public agenda. Studies of the impact of higher education have mainly been carried out in English speaking countries (PATERSON, 2011). Nor is it a recent debate, though it has gained importance since the 1980s and the need for action aimed at democratic practice and greater integration with society. In theory, better educated police are more prepared to deal with these demands (ROBERG; BONN, 2004).

In addition, this debate has not been limited to developed countries, also occurring in developing countries. Since Brazilian re-democratization in the 1980s the discussion of the role and action of police forces has involved numerous factors, such as violent practices, the inadequacy of organizational models, corruption, poor training, and low educational levels. In relation to the reform of Brazilian police forces, the discussion of the adoption of a requirement for a university degree is now a reality in Brazil. Some police forces now demand higher education from those wishing to join, however, due to the federative nature of the Brazilian state this policy is not uniform in the country.

A large number of young police officers with higher education have been observed in Brazil, irrespective of the requirement for a degree. The Brazilian police forces have a dual entrance for high and low ranks. The hierarchical division in the police forces imposes the existence of two careers, one responsible for command and strategic directions and the other a subordinate one. This division is the source of conflict, the reason for which the entrance of a significant number of low ranking police officers with higher education or who obtained their degree whilst exercising their profession has led to a questioning of this model.

This article analyzes the perception of low ranking members of the Minas Gerais gendarmerie (*Polícia Militar*) with university degrees of their relationships with the institution of origin. It is an exploratory study based on qualitative methodology. The structure of the article is as follows: 1 – Discussion of the impact of higher education on police practices; 2 – The organizational model of Brazilian police forces and the question of higher education; 3 – Research methodology and the results obtained; 4 – Conclusion. Finally, the text presents suggestions for future research in this field in the country and implications for public policies.

Higher education: a literature review

The beginnings of the debate about higher education and police activity can be observed in Wollmer's proposition of the need for higher education for a more efficient and democratic police. These ideas were reinforced in the American context in *The Challenge of Crime in a Democratic Society* (1967) and *Report on the Police* (1973). These documents highlighted the need for higher education for better quality policing. Higher education would, it was argued, permit more tolerant police officers, trained to deal with social differences and the complexities of the contemporary world (CARTE; SAPP, 1990; GOLDSTEIN, 1977, ROBERG; BONN, 2004).

However, the debate in the literature is not conclusive. Bittner (1990) states that daily life is the principal space for police education. Experience is more important in learning and the creation of police identity than a formal education (BAYLEY; BITTNER, 1997; OBERWEIS; MUSHENO, 2001). The impact of higher education is not obvious, since the evidence about the question is still insufficient for a more incisive recommendation about its adoption (SKOGAN; FRYDL, 2004). The lack of research with sufficient samples was highlighted by Weisburd (2001) as an impediment to a conclusive end to this debate. In the American case it was found that the number of police officers with university education was low. Most police departments are staffed by professionals with a high school diploma, 9% with two years of higher education, a two-year degree, and only 1% with four years of college, according to the data of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (HICKMAN; REAVES, 2006).

On the other hand, in Germany security administration in the urban sphere is the responsibility of people prepared for the multidisciplinary nature of the work (planning, negotiation, and cooperation). The administrators of these projects do a three year college-level course studying the techniques of their areas as the foundations of applied sciences (FREVEL, 2013). In France the model adopted stipulated a four year third level course for police commissioners (Judicial Police) and a two year course for gendarmerie officers (ANTOMATTEI, 2002). In other words, a variety of courses are required.

Various questions can be noted in this debate, such as the relationship between higher education and authoritarianism, the risk of misconduct, work satisfaction, compliance to organizational changes, and interaction with the community, amongst others. In all cases, higher education is seen as an element capable of influencing (or not) this relationship. Nevertheless, the question of higher education should not be understood as an isolated element, but as related to the context of the actions of police forces, marked by the erosion of police monopolies (BAYLEY; SHEARING, 2005; ERICSON; HAGGERTY, 1997), pressure for greater legitimacy in their actions (TYLER; WAKLASK, 2004), calls for collaboration with the community (SKOGAN, 2006) and the challenges inherent to the increase in violent criminality. In this way institutional forms and the socio-political context are relevant element in considering the impact of higher education on police forces.

In relation to the use of coercive practices, Paoline and Terril's study (2007) of police with higher education demonstrated a lower use of physical force than those with only secondary education. However, police with greater experience also presented a lower use of physical and verbal force (PAOLINE; TERRIL, 2007). Telep (2011) analyzed the impact of higher education acquired in the period before entering the force and found a beneficial result in terms of attitudes. Officers who have acquired higher education before joining the force hold attitudes less supportive of abuse of authority. Rydberg and Terril (2010) analyzed the influence of higher education in relation to three variables: arrests, searches, and the use of force in two medium-sized cities. They found that higher education has no influence over the probability of an arrest or search in a police-suspect encounter. However, higher education reduces the probability of force occurring in those encounters.

The impact of higher education on the reduction of misconduct has also been observed in the literature. Lersch and Kunzman (2001) observed a lower level of misconduct processes in police with higher education than with professionals with only a high school degree. Kakar (1998) found that the self-perception of police officers with higher education had a greater ethical and administrative performance. On the other hand, Manis, Archbold and Hassel (2008) studied the relationship between misconduct and level of education in relation to complaints presented by the population and did not observe any significant correlation between these variables.

Another important aspect is the question of police careers. Studies indicate the positive impact of higher education on the reduction of time necessary for progression (POLK; ARMSTRONG, 2001). Whetstone (2000) found that higher education provided an advantage in written exams for a promotion to a rank of sergeant in large Midwestern police force. A university degree has also a positive impact in criminal justice professionals' decisions considering their strategies to obtain promotions to leadership positions (HALL; VENTURA; LAMBERT, 2007). Buckley, McGinnis and Petrunik (1992) have found that a university degree is related to: 1 – advances in the career; 2 – desire to improve performance; 3 – preparation for a second career.

Another recurrent theme in the literature is the question of professional acknowledgement. According to Worden (1990), police officers with higher education become frustrated due to the non-recognition of their work, since they have to work in an environment that can be inhospitable to new ideas. On the other hand, higher education is not responsible for long standing police officers resigning from the force, or those with less than five years' experience (JONES; JONES; PRENZLER, 2005) as observed in the study.

The positive performance of officers with higher education can also be observed in other work related skills, such as the use of written reports for communication, or the presence of disciplinary problems (MICHALS; HIGGINS, 1991). Higher education also allows greater knowledge of the rules of work and security (KRIMMEL, 1996). It expands the commitment to work, autonomy, and cooperation (TRUXILLO; BENNET; COLLINS, 1998). These practical results can also be observed in the literature.

It is also worth highlighting that the various questions observed in the literature about the impact of higher education are linked to police reform. The organization of democratic policing presents a general framework of values and principles to be safeguarded. What is most difficult is its implementation, since it requires the understanding of practices, cultures, and local politics (MARENIN, 2005). Higher education, in turn, is considered an important instrument of organizational change, as well as being constituted as a change of technical focus in skills for a reflexive model (PATERSON, 2011).

Higher education can lead to changes in these sets, though it is not a panacea. To the contrary, it incorporates elements of a strategy to obtain promotion, or as an alternative to police careers. Taking into account these problems, this article starts with the following research question: how does the dual hierarchical level of the Brazilian gendarmerie affect the perception of low ranking police with higher education of their role in society, their career, and their work environment?

The organization model of Brazilian police and the question of higher education

The organizational format of Brazilian police forces is defined by the federal constitution (Art. 144). In Brazil, street policing and crime investigations are the responsibility of states. The former is the responsibility of the Gendarmerie (*Polícia Militar*) and the latter of the Civil Police (LINO, 2004). The state police deal with the majority of crimes happened in the country. Brazil also has a Federal Police responsible for border protection and for investigating certain kinds of crimes such as international trafficking of drugs or money laundering.

The Brazilian police forces have two careers within these institutions, with two entrances for each segment. In the case of the military system, the gendarmerie, there exist the careers of officers and soldiers, in parallel to the Armed Forces model. Officers are responsible for the definition of strategy and the administration of organization, while soldiers are responsible for daily street patrols. According to the military model a soldier can join the force with 18 years old after the conclusion of High School. In the United States police officer can join the force with 21 years old and three years after the conclusion of high school. Gendarmerie officer training lasts four years, for which they are given a bachelor's degree in military science.

This dual entrance model generates conflicts between the two hierarchical groups in all police forces. Low ranking police complain of the authoritarianism of superiors, especially in the military environment. Wage differences are another problem, since police from a lower hierarchical level are paid less than their superiors. Conflicts are also worsened by pressure for change in Brazilian police forces that have resulted in new recruitment rules. The increase in the level of education is one of these new requirements. Since the last decade various police forces in Brazil have come to demand higher level education to enter, especially for the lower ranks.

This movement towards greater professional qualifications resulted in the demand for higher education for all lower ranks within the Federal Police, as well as the various civil police and gendarmerie forces in Brazil. The gendarmerie of the Federal District was the first to demand a university degree for the career of soldier. The same was observed in the Civil Police of the Federal District for the position of investigator. In 2009 the Civil Police of Amazonas adopted the same criterion.

In 2014 the Gendarmerie of Minas Gerais adopted the criterion of higher education to enter the career of soldier. This police force has a particularity, as it allows low ranking police with a degree on law to take part in internal exams for the officer career. However, there is an age limit of 27 to take this exam. Currently the Minas Gerais' gendarmerie has 3151 officers and 40,254 non-commissioned officers and soldiers. Wage differences between the groups are great. The officer career begins at the rank of lieutenant with initial monthly earnings equivalent of US\$ 2389.39 and ends at the rank of coronel with a salary of US\$6,251.82. Soldiers begin their career with a monthly salary of US\$ 1.276,85 and the maximum position of sergeant with earnings of US\$1767.82. The dual entrance model generates these differences (Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2013).

However, there are no wide-ranging studies in the country about the motivations for the search for higher education. Studies carried out in Brazil have looked at the training process and the question of authoritarianism (PAES-MACHADO, 2006), the quality of teaching in police academies (SANTOS JR.; MARTINS; OLIVEIRA DA SILVA, 2012; BASÍLIO, 2007), predominance of the professional model in the police training process (PONCIONI, 2005), reinforcing the training of gendarmerie officers to the detriment of the lower ranks and the loss of quality in the service rendered to the population (CARUSO; PATRÍCIO; PINTO, 2010), the assessment of the training process of gendarmerie responsible for anti-drug programs (TASCA; ENSSLIN; ENSSLIN, 2012), and the comparative analysis of training systems and codes of conduct (TRINDADE; PORTO, 2011).

As a basic feature of Brazilian model, it does not allow police officers working on the street to reach the highest career levels. Thus, higher education is seen as an escape route. Police who seek better qualifications through their own means do not have the opportunity to exercise these skills in the current Brazilian model of police.

Research methodology

This research consisted of an exploratory study of low ranking gendarmerie who hold four-year degree. It examines how the Brazilian dual career structure affected their perception of their social roles, careers, and work environments. The exploratory study was based on qualitative methodology. Gendarmerie working in Juiz de Fora, in Minas Gerais, participated in the study. This is a mid-sized city with 516,000 inhabitants. It has low rates of violence and criminality in comparison with other similar sized cities in Brazil.

The methodology adopted was based on semi-structured interviews in order to allow a understanding of questions related to police experience in their institutions and at the same time in relation to their daily interactions with the public. The research intended to allow participants to speak by themselves. It was a decision not to work with generalizations and open questions typical of surveys. This paper is intended to be an initial step in the construction of a research agenda in Brazil aimed at understanding the impact of higher education within the Brazilian police and how its institutional model is prepared to incorporate it.

Contact with the police officers occurred in a Post-Graduate Course in Public Security and Citizenship held in a public university. Based on enrollment lists, officers and soldiers who hold four-year degree were identified and contacted. Snowball methodology was adopted and the police initially contacted in the course indicated other colleagues with a four-year degree to take part in the research. The police taking part in the course agreed to participate in the research under the condition of anonymity. Based on a previously prepared script, the police were interviewed individually at the most convenient location for them and in complete privacy. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. They were held on the university campus, in police stations, and at the residence of some police officers. The interviews lasted between 25 to 45 minutes each.

Based on the explanation of the nature of the research, and the guarantee of anonymity, cooperation between interviewees and the interviewer occurred in a positive

manner. The fact that the interviewees had been nominated by a fellow police officer facilitated contact and the building of trust in the research process. However, it was not easy to find a police officer to match the criteria of research (low rank and a four-year degree). Another difficulty was the scheduling of interviews due to working times. In total 13 police officers were interviewed, both male and female, with a four-year degree in various areas of knowledge. The interviews were carried out between March and November 2013. After analyzing the interviews the author considered that more interviews would not bring other relevant information to the research. After this the material collected was analyzed. The names of those interviewed have been changed to guarantee anonymity.

In the analysis the following categories emerged: 1 – critical capacity; 2 – hierarchical conflicts; 3 – absence of recognition and professional acknowledgement; 4 – leaving the career. These themes are interlinked in the role of higher education in police practice, in the organizational model of Brazilian police, particularly the case of the Minas Gerais Gendarmerie being studied here, and the perspective of their own careers. In the interviews recurrent visions about the role of the police in contemporary Brazil were observed, as well as points of agreement and disagreement among the interviewees.

The first category, critical capacity, refers to the role of higher education as instrument to qualify the police work in a democratic society. A consensual point among them, higher education is seen as a fundamental element in improving the actions of the police in daily contact with the population. According to Carlos, higher education allows a better judgment of the situations experienced in daily life and of social differences:

I think that... principally in understanding social differences. I think that in dialogue with people who use crack, with whom there is no possibility of talking, I think that you deal with this type of person, or even with a judge, you have deal with them. When you have a higher education you end up having respect and manage to deal with this indifference from which police officers suffer. So, I think that, in first place, dealing with the differences in society, you have to know how to deal with the public with purchasing power and the miserable public. Second, you have a voice to be respected in society.

Critical capacity is highlighted by Pedro, who has a degree in history, since it allows the understanding of Brazilian social demands and the dilemmas related to the recent democratization of the country:

Studying history I learned that because society was experiencing this democratization process, this need for human rights was always present, always questioning police activity, I managed to understand what I had not understood, I thought it was only of use to hinder police operations. You manage to understand social conflicts better. Social problems which the police end up embracing.

The increase in decision making capacity is accompanied by the respect of other colleagues and superiors conferred by higher education. Joaquim's interview reinforces this:

Irrespective of whether or not you are in the police, it is always better to improve professional qualifications. I did law and I am an operator of law. Sometimes I work on a murder, and what will I write? How will I write it? Will you enter someone's house? Can you or can you not enter? Well this allows the search for improvements to act externally. To act internally you can to be more respected. The knowledge lifts you in front of your superiors and colleagues.

Maria, a woman Gendarmerie soldier, also highlighted the increased critical capacity that comes with higher education. This brings benefits to the institution, but it also can worsen conflicts, as a more educated police officer is less susceptible to accepting illegal orders:

I think that much will tend to change, because the troops tend to be more critical, they will not accept any type of order. The greater the education, the more that it can create conflicts in daily experiences. This problem did not exist in the past. It was something more forced in the order and the hierarchy, and education levels were low. As this increases there tends to be some type of conflict, but I think this is good.

Higher education is seen by all interviewees as something which expands the critical capacity of police. It is a source of respect in society and their uniformed comrades, whether officers or soldiers. However, the potential for conflict within a militarized institution in the molds of the Armed Forces is highlighted. To the extent that these police studied and obtained a capacity for discussion, they have instruments to question an incorrect or illegal order. In the model of militarism traditionally conceived in Brazil and transferred to the gendarmerie, obedience is supposed to be unquestioned. With the advent of the new constitution in 1988 even traditional barrack practices were submitted to democratic regulation.

The critical capacity acquired from higher education also permits a greater quality of action in daily police work, since it overcomes deficiencies in their training. The emphasis on military procedures, with prove to be of limited utility in actual practice, is unsatisfactory. This point is emphasized by Mario, a former police officer, now a law graduate and working as a lawyer:

Much that you learn there, you will never use. Exaggerated military training. Things that you will need in the course, you do not get. The amount of material for police training ends up limited, it is not as satisfactory as it could be. We need to practice and to know various types of law which are necessary on the street. Sometimes people ask you something about consumer law and you have to make the report and you do not know, badly, badly, you learn the penal code.

A law degree provides a considerable symbolic advancement, since it allows access to a legal career. These posts are the most desired in Brazilian public administration, due to their high salaries and social prestige. Thus, the Judiciary has the best pay and benefits. This is why unions from both Gendarmerie and Civil Police seek to have a similar career as in the Judicial Power. For that reason the *delegados* stand for equalization with judicial

power because they hold a law degree. There is also a similar movement on Gendarmeries throughout Brazil to ask for a law degree for its officers, because they could claim to match the Judiciary.

Some states in Brazil require today a law degree to join the up-level career at the Gendarmeries such as Rio Grande do Sul (RUDNICK, 2008) and Minas Gerais. Despite the fact that police officers need to know the law and to understand its commands, their job is not the same. The police work deals with a broader array of situations that are not limited to the narrow limits of judicial process. This movement hinders, for example, the creation of a specific public security course to form police officers. The corporatist drive does not discuss the necessity of a specific formation that deals with subjects such as sociology, psychology, management, police models, criminology, quantitative methods and law.

Hierarchical conflict is the second category observed in the research. Although historically present in the Brazilian police forces, higher education gives it a greater impact. The individual position obtained allows the questioning of the practices adopted, hierarchical distinctions, differences in wages, and principally the two careers in the Brazilian police forces. Higher education accentuates the pre-existing conflict:

In the past people deferred more without discussing. The greater the proximity and the education between soldiers and officers, the more difficult this relationship will be. A question of hierarchy, not something personal as in the past, which they believed to be better. I think that in this sense having a little friction is something positive. I think that if this hierarchical structure of today is maintained, in the future it will be like a company, each one in their positions and with a managerial function, operational; but reducing a little the distance in the relationship (Maria).

The above citation demonstrates the empowerment higher education gives to low ranking police and highlights the limits of the current institutional structure. Even without the perspective of substantial changes in this structure, the need for a more flexible organization in the Gendarmerie is required. Low ranking police officers with higher education face a rather unfavorable context. The existence of two careers does not make sense, principally when there is an increase in the basic education level. As well as not being very productive, the current model limits the quality of work provided to the population:

Actually, I think that the person has to enter as a policeman. Not as a soldier or officer, if there were an internal competition it would be better. For the population it would make no difference. Anyone already inside could do the course and grow within. It should not be like that (Mario).

Another police officer also explicitly stated that there was a need for single means of entrance to the Gendarmerie. This would not eliminate the hierarchy or the existence of officership, but would expand the access to positions of leadership in the institution. The gendarmerie of Minas Gerais adopted an internal competition for access to the officers career. However, an age limit of 27 and a law degree were stipulated as requirements for this. This narrow means of entrance is not adequate.

In the great mass of soldiers the intention is that it be like this, because it is the only way that they will get there, but with the officers I do not know, but my idea is that it will not. From what it appears, if they allow a single entrance the demand will not contemplate the officers. Not everyone will be able to get there and the time it will take to restructure will not be enough for everything. But I think it will be a viable option, or at least if the competition was predominantly internal. After a time you can try to be an officer, due to this fact. I need to understand the command on the street. You have to live to be able to know (João).

The existence of two distinct careers is criticized by another interviewee. In his opinion two distinct organizations are created. The burden falls upon those who are patrolling the streets. The nature of police work does not justify this division. Moreover, the Brazilian model privileges administrative work over operational, since the hierarchically superior positions do not have direct contact with police work on the field.

Dual entrance occurs in the whole country. I think it is not fair, because it creates two organizations, there is a very great inequality between soldier and lieutenant. The function is the same, irrespective of who is in command. A soldier will never become a lieutenant if he does not have a law degree. Unless there is an internal exam for soldiers to become officers, which they call CHO. It happens that one is the administration of the police and the other is operational, but they administer one thing that they do not experience (Pedro).

Although the officers command the troops, their presence on the daily front of public security is not observed. The experience of real police work is with soldiers, corporals, and sergeants. The officer has not the experience of a trooper. The rearguard position allows easy criticism, as is done by judges.

I think that you entering as an officer and even having a certain experience, you do not see what goes on, in the day to day, you are not in the frontline to have contact. You are in the rearguard, for anyone who is sitting at a table it is very easy to be critical, isn't it, it is being a judge. When he is going to make a judgment, he is seeing, but at the time of the conflict, there is a second you must decide what you are going to do. Afterwards no, afterwards it passes and everyone sits, seeing the video it is very easy to criticize (Antonio).

On the other hand, criticism of the model is not unanimous. For some interviewees, such as Paulo, military organization is adequate. The requirements are distinct for each career. The officer has greater responsibility and the requirement for a law degree to enter the career is a reality.

Today I think it (dual entrance) is correct, because the requirements are different. In the past, both a trooper and an officer had secondary education, and the two entered it, just at different levels. So today it has improved, yes [...]. When you demand a course of law the officer has to be there for five years studying law. So you can imagine the officer who perhaps has not studied. So today it is a differential.

A similar opinion about the organizational model adopted is expressed by Aparecida, a female police officer. According to her, when a candidate opts for one of the careers he or she is fully aware of the hierarchical divisions. If anyone wishes to be an officer, the path is to get a law degree.

Doing an exam the person knows this, he is doing a course to be a PM soldier or an officer. I see nothing complicated in this, I do not know if there exists any discussion about there being a single police force in the future, so he does the contest knowing this. If he is interested in becoming an officer he will do the law course and take an exam.

The third category observed during the research is the absence of recognition and professional esteem. The search for higher education is not a policy backed by all Brazilian police forces. On the contrary, this is an individual project for the officers who decide to pursue a four-year degree. There many reasons to take this step, but the main one is career ascension. They expect to be assigned to better tasks inside the organization and specially the administrative ones. However, the gains obtained from higher education are reduced.

The principal element observed in interviews is the fact that the education obtained cannot be taken advantage of by the institution. Police graduates are not designated for activities related to their education. Criticism falls on lesser questions such as the definition of shifts of work. Moreover, obtaining an advanced degree does not result in any sort of pay increase.

I think that the acknowledgement has to exist. A real acknowledgement, the possibility of making the scale adequate. I even feel that the police are trying, even the high command this changes this a little. But it is very immature, it does not reach us (Pedro).

The pay aspect, as outlined above, is highlighted by interviewees. A human resources policy which could present a financial reward for police to advance their education is lacking.

Within the organization there is no acknowledgement for having an advanced degree, not in terms of pay, benefits, nor career advancement. I think this is lacking. Anyone who does this, does it because they want to and like to, or because they have outside aspirations. There is no incentive for the police for anything. I believe that it is exactly because of this devaluation that there is no benefit, I do not agree with the career plan. If I enter as a trooper, the maximum I can do is reach sergeant, or a second lieutenant in the reserve (Maria).

The non-existence of acknowledgement for obtaining an advanced degree is also recognized by Antonio:

If I have or don't have a degree it is the same thing, you work in the same way. There is no difference. It is not because I have a degree that I will have some advantage. There is none, the only advantage I have is this 0.3 for my promotion (...) In any other sector the person who has a degree has a certain advantage, but in the police they do not. Even those who have a law degree.

He could do the exam to improve (if he becomes an officer), but if he does it and does not pass, nor will he have any advantage.

Another problem is the reaction against low ranking police officers with higher education. In addition to not obtaining any type of advantage, they are treated with suspicion. Police officers with degrees are the subject of criticism. In this point a contradiction is observed. Although the interviewees recognize the symbolic gain from the degree, the structure of Gendarmerie is not prepared to incorporate them. The words of Mario, a former police officer, are symptomatic.

No, my work is not acknowledged, to the contrary. The gendarmerie... I do not know how to explain from where this comes, this rancor. It seems that the person who studies or who has a degree is discriminated, apart from the jokes. The four-year degree people do are not acknowledge. One of the things which things which most impacted on my career was when I did a degree, it was the lack of incentives, time, and lack of acknowledgement. You do not have a differential recognition, nor are you sent to a different area, even if the area is needy, that you are better than any other police officer.

The limited benefits of obtaining a higher degree are also highlighted by another interviewee. The fact of having obtained a degree does not qualify him to assume administrative positions or any type of benefit. Higher education is also seen as a path to escape from work on the streets. In general, complaints about the absence of acknowledgement are accompanied by the difficulty in occupying administrative positions.

No (acknowledgement), because in other states, the fact of having a degree gives you some bonus or differentiation. In the gendarmerie having a degree makes no difference, unless it is used in the benefit of the police and not myself. If I want to work in a secretariat or in some place which involves administrative procedures, since theoretically for some it is better to have internal work than external, it will facilitate me. However, in the question of valorization, none. There is no benefit (João).

This affirmation highlights a persistent problem in the Brazilian police - not restricted to the gendarmerie of Minas Gerais - excessive bureaucratization. Many police in various forces are allocated in administrative tasks instead of working directly on the streets. Higher education has two faces. On the one hand, it is an important element to expand the critical capacity of police working with society. It is expected that police officers with greater education will exercise their discretionary power with greater propriety. On the other hand, the gains obtained from greater instruction are seen as an instrument for tasks off the streets, such as administrative work. These problems of an organizational nature are similar to those observed by Scott, Evans and Verma (2009) in the Indian context. Research demonstrated the low impact of higher education on Indian police in terms of police officers' perception of their role in daily practice. Due to the structural problems of the Indian police only more accentuated of organizational restructuring processes can permit higher education to have an impact on commonly adopted practices.

Finally, the fourth and final category observed based on the analysis of the interviews is leaving the career. This is a recurrent theme in interviewees discourse. Higher education opens new horizons and the possibility for greater gains.

Well, now with this situation of third level courses, the governor gave a (pay) increase but my idea is to leave in about five years [...] I joined with this. And the large majority of my colleagues as well, because the large majority enter with just second level education, knowing that they could look for something. Not that this is bad, but every human being wants to look for something better and if they manage, they can leave for something else. (João).

I am a lawyer, with a degree in law. I never had the dream of being a PM. I was in doubt between studying law and economics, and so I studied two semesters of economics. I suspended it until I was thrown out, because of my own fault. And since I was in the gendarmerie I was transferred to Rio Novo, nearby, and there for someone who had done the one year PM course going to a small city is paradise, very quiet, and so I realized that I was getting left behind. Studying for a degree was my way of leaving the Gendarmerie (Mario).

If you join a company which has a good career plan, this prevents you from stagnating. You end up wanting to stay in the company, which does not happen with many people in the police" (Maria).

The search for another career is recognized by the majority of the interviewees as an inexorable fact. However, this understanding is not unanimous. Two interviewees highlighted that they intended to do the exam to enter the officer career, for which reason they had obtained a law degree.

In this case now, there is this CFO exam, which did not exist nine years ago. It requires a law degree. Although it is harder, my perspective is to pass and to become an officer (Joaquim).

My perspective is to continue in the Gendarmerie. I can do a post-graduate course or masters in the area, I do not know if there is a doctorate in the area, I imagine that there is not, it is difficult to find one in public security. However, it is to continue and grow there (in the Gendarmerie) as an officer and to reach the highest rank (Paulo).

The search for higher education on the part of low ranking police officers reflects a tendency observed in the Brazilian police forces. Despite this, the hierarchical division existing in these institutions encourages those seeking better qualifications by their own means to leave. Permanence is for those who seek to become officers.

Conclusions

This research aimed at understanding the impact of higher education in the perceptions of low rank police officers in the Military Police of Minas Gerais. The

exploratory methodology allowed understanding of the officer's relationship with society, the expectancies related to the career and institution. It happens in a context of great stress on the Brazilian police forces to reform its practices.

The interviews show that higher education is recognized as an important instrument to augment the officers' critical capacity. It allows a better understanding of society's demands and improves the officers' judgments capabilities. Moreover, there is a symbolic gain from higher education observed inside and outside the police institution.

However, the actual hierarchical model of two careers is problematic. The low rank officer with higher education tends to be more critical and conflicts arise in the military institution. It generates frustration for the police officer. The absence of professional acknowledgment results in the search for new professional activities. The general perception is the lack of gains from a better professional qualification. This is why the great majority of interviewees want to quit the institution.

Police reform is still a polemic issue in Brazil with a little presence in the country's agenda. The recent policies in Brazil aimed to police reform touched more lateral than structural issues. This is still a problem. The higher education is relevant in this context. Those educated officers have one desire: to leave the institution. It indicates the need to address structural issues in the police reform agenda. Otherwise, those police officers prepared to embrace a more responsive and democratic paradigm of policing could contribute to an effective change.

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