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Violence against children/adolescents in western Santa Catarina

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Abstract. This study aimed to characterize the violence done against children and adolescents in a town in western Santa Catarina. Exploratory-descriptive and quantitative study, developed in a town in western Santa Catarina, from November 2011 to November 2012, by collecting data on the cases of violence filed at the Court of the District of this town, totaling 1,774 cases. Of the total analysis, 5% refers to violence against children and adolescents; sex crimes against female, 25%; offering/selling alcoholic beverages stood out in the age group from 11 to 15 years; aggressors stood out male individuals from 15 to 19 years, low level of education and with no kinship with the victim; the victim's residence was prevalent place of crime; and, as for the outcome, most crimes were filed. Violence often goes unnoticed in the eyes of society, thereby leaving the victims unprotected. Within this expectation, we can highlight that any type of violence causes damages in the healthy development of children and adolescents, thereby undermining periods of life that require more care.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Aggression; Child; Teenager.

Introduction

Violence is a phenomenon that develops and spreads in social and interpersonal relationships, thereby entailing a power relationship that is not part of human nature, but has a cultural character and permeates all social classes, in such a way that the existence of a stronger dominating a weaker is conceived and accepted as natural (BRASIL, 2002).

Much of the violence remains concealed for many reasons. Fear is among these reasons, since many children are afraid to report incidents of violence against them. In many cases, parents, figures traditionally related to the affection and protection of their children, remain silent if violence is committed by their spouse or other family member. Fear is closely related to the stigma associated with reports of violence, particularly where family honor is valued more than the child's welfare and safety (AZEVEDO, 2003).

By using national data, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that almost 53,000 children died worldwide as a result of homicides. In Brazil, the violence exerted by parents or legal guardians of children is considered a public health problem of such expressiveness that the National

Policy for the Reduction of Morbidity and Mortality by Accidents and Violence of the Ministry of Health determined that the occurrences of this phenomenon should be addressed and notified, thereby emphasizing the concerns of those who carry out activities in which they face their effects and consequences on a daily basis (NJAINÉ; ASSIS; CONSTANTINO, 2013).

Based on the described considerations, this study was guided by the following question: What are the characteristics of violence against children and adolescents reported in a town in western Santa Catarina? The objective outlined to answer this question was: to characterize the violence practiced against children and adolescents recorded in the Criminal Court of a town located in western Santa Catarina in the year 2011.

The violence against children and adolescents has become a public health problem, where the act of knowing its characteristics can provide support for victims to receive dignified care. Concomitantly, this recognition can help people living with victims to be and act in solidarity, with a view to facilitating the identification of these victims. Another benefit is the potential to ensure the rights and needs of children and adolescents with the cooperation of society,

thereby being able to make the service more qualified and adequate.

Method

This exploratory-descriptive study was performed in a town in western Santa Catarina from November 2011 to November 2012. We collected data on cases of violence against children and adolescents from the cases that were filed at the Court of the District of this town, which were separated by year, filed in cardboard boxes, with no other separation criteria, which required the individual analysis of each one to carry out a first selection of those involving children and adolescents in the year 2011. Altogether, we analyzed 1,774 (one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four) criminal cases.

Subsequently, the criminal cases involving children and adolescents were again analyzed individually to identify those in which they were victims. For this purpose, we used the following inclusion criteria in the study: all cases with victims aged between 0 (zero) and 18 (eighteen) years.

At the end, we selected 101 (one hundred and one) cases with victims in the inclusion age group. In one of these cases, the victim was between 18 (eighteen) and 21 (twenty-one) years old, but it was considered an adolescent because it had Down Syndrome, a case that meets the exceptions expressed by law. At the end, by excluding traffic crimes and atypical facts (with no legal provision in the penal code, because they were not considered crimes as they were not punishable), we analyzed 92 (ninety-two) cases, totaling 106 (one hundred and six) victims and 114 (one hundred and fourteen) aggressors. The data were counted per victim, since, in some cases, there were more than one and the act performed against them was not always similar. In addition, in some cases, the same child/ adolescent was the victim of more than one crime (for example: threat and rape); and, in the same way, in some cases, the same child/adolescent was the victim of more than one aggressor (for example: mistreatment). Data were collected by the researchers with prior authorization from the local court and consubstantiated CEP/UnC opinion number 39281.

After the selection, data were entered in an Excel spreadsheet to be later organized and displayed in graphs and tables. These data were discussed based on the pertinent literature. We complied with all ethical precautions applicable to research involving human beings, in order to ensure the confidentiality of information and the anonymity of victims and aggressors.

Ethical principles

This research was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University of Contestado and was approved within the ethical principles and the current legislation.

Results and discussion

Table 1 shows, in the town under study, a record of violence against all age groups, from the first months of life to the end of adolescence, taking as a reference the 18 years recommended by the Brazilian Children’s and Adolescents’ Statute (ECA, as per its Portuguese acronym). We noted a higher concentration of victims in the age group from 11 to 15 years (53%), followed by the group from 16 to 18 years and by the group from 6 to 10 years. Together, these three age groups concentrate 90.74% of the total number of victims. This table also reveals the superiority of female victims in all age groups (74.81%).

Table 1: Distribution of the victims of violence in a town in western Santa Catarina according to age and gender

Age group (years)	Gender			
	Female	Male	Total	%
<1	1	1	2	1.9
1-5	3	1	4	3.8
6-10	11	5	16	15.1
11-15	36	16	52	49.1
16-18	15	14	29	27.3
>18	1	0	1	0.9
Unanswered	2	0	2	1.9
Total	69	37	106	100.0

Source: Research data (2012)

In Table 2, the following cases were grouped under the denomination “physical violence”: mistreatment, bodily injury, theft and domestic violence. Abandonment/non-support of the incompetent (disabled) person, abuse of authority, threat, defamation, injury and subjection of the child or adolescent to shame or embarrassment were considered psychological violence, while misdemeanor against the child and adolescent, theft, not described, offering/selling alcoholic beverages, abduction of the disabled person and sale of the child or adolescent were grouped as “other crimes”.

Table 2: Recorded cases of violence against children and adolescents in a town in western Santa Catarina according to the category of crime in relation to gender

Category	Gender			
	Female	Male	Total	%
Sexual Crimes	28	0	28	26.4
Physical Violence	18	23	41	38.7
Violence	09	06	15	14.1
Psychological	14	08	22	20.8
Other Crimes	69	37	106	100
Total				

Source: Research data (2012)

As for the type of relationship between victims and aggressors, Table 3 reveals that, in most cases (55.26%), there was no relationship between them, since the crime was committed by unknown people. Nevertheless, among those known, the majority maintained a close and dependent relationship (financial and/or affective) with the victim, such as

the case of stepfather, father, mother and spouse/husband who accounted for 26.32% of the aggressors. Of the 49 cases in which the aggressors were known, 44 were committed by people who coexisted with the victim, such as the case of stepfather, father, mother, uncle, spouse/ husband, brother, grandmother, mother's boyfriend, adoptive grandfather and brother-in-law. This setting reinforces the centrality of the home and the family environment in the cases of violence against children and adolescents.

Table 3: Reported cases of violence against children and adolescents in a town in western Santa Catarina according to the relationship between aggressor and victim

Relationship between aggressor and victim	n	%
None	63	55,26
Stepfather	11	9,65
Father	9	7,9
Mother	7	6,14
Uncle	5	4,4
Former boyfriend	3	2,63
Spouse/husband	3	2,63
Brother	2	1,75
Unanswered	2	1,75
Neighbor	2	1,75
Others*	7	6,14
TOTAL	114	100

*Grandmother, supervisor, mother's boyfriend, teacher, foster grandfather, brother-in-law

Source: Research data (2012)

In the 28 sexual crimes, 18 had known aggressors and, among them, stepfathers (eleven cases), uncles (five cases) and brothers (two cases) stood out. The father was the aggressor in one case.

Childhood is a delicate and important stage of life, which requires social support and affection, care that will influence the child's survival and quality of life, as well as its future and ideas about itself and the world. We can state that violence against children in Brazil presents itself individually and collectively, interpersonally or mediated by social structures, capable of producing exclusion, social segregation, thereby entailing consequences for their development (BRASIL, 2005; BRASIL, 2018).

Violence has become a serious obstacle to the full development of Brazilian adolescents and it is precisely in this group that the manifestations of violence have the greatest impact. This shortens life expectancy, thereby reducing the productive potential of the population and represents costs, both direct and indirect, for families, the health system, besides undermining any project regarding quality of life (BRASIL, 2018).

According to Waiselfisz (2012), in the year 2011, 39,281 cases of violence in the group from <1 to 19 years of age were recorded in the National System for Notifiable Diseases (SINAN, as per its Portuguese acronym), which represents 40% of the total of 98,115 services computed by the system in 2011.

In the year 2011, 39,281 cases of violence were recorded in the group from <1 to 19 years of age in the National System for Notifiable Diseases (SINAN, as per its Portuguese acronym), which represents 40% of the total of 98,115 services computed by the system in the same year. In these records, we analyzed several situations that characterize the violence directed at children and adolescents in relation to the number of services of each age group in the country with the population of this age group, which indicates the rate of services (in 100 thousand children and adolescents) of each age group. At the national level, the group with the highest rate of services is the one with less than 1 year of age, with 118.9 services per 100 thousand children of this age group. The group from 15 to 19 years of age ranks second, with 84.6 services for every 100 thousand adolescents (WAISELFISZ, 2012; SOMMER et al., 2017).

We also found that, in all age groups, the number of services because of violence prevails in the female gender, which tends to worsen with the growth of children and the onset of adolescence. These results are in agreement with the findings of the present study, where the female gender also stood out among the victims (WAISELFISZ, 2012; SOMMER et al., 2017).

The results show a wide variety of crimes done, with a higher incidence of "offering/selling alcoholic beverages" and "rape of the vulnerable person", while "indecent assault", "bodily injury" and "domestic violence" rank third among the most frequent crimes. Together, crimes of a sexual nature (sexual abuse, indecent assault, libidinous act, rape of the vulnerable person, rape, sexual harassment, child pornography and attempted rape) account for 27, which represents 25% of the total number of reports. In them, 100% of the victims were female.

It also details the types of violence to which victims assisted by the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS, as per its Portuguese acronym) were subjected, where physical violence predominates, especially in the age group from 15 to 19 years. Sexual violence ranked second mainly in the age group from 5 to 14 years. Psychological or moral violence emerged in third place, while neglect or abandonment predominated in the children with the age of 4. The author also highlights that, in Brazil, 10,425 children and adolescents who were victims of sexual violence were assisted in 2011, where the vast majority were female (83.3%). With few fluctuations among age groups, the female indexes reached their maximum expression between 15 and 19 years old: 93.8%. Altogether, there were 16.4 services for every 100 thousand children and adolescents. The highest incidence of services was recorded in the group from 10 to 14 years, with a rate of 23.8 notifications for every 100 thousand adolescents (WAISELFISZ, 2012).

The incidence of physical violence against women decreases with the increase in the age of the victims assisted. The proportion gradually decreases until the age of 10, when the proportions by gender

of the victim are practically equivalent, with a slight difference for men. Similarly, the incidence of violence decreases drastically with the increase in their age. The author highlights that the rate of 95.3 services per 100 thousand children is 10 times higher than those recorded in the age group from 15 and 19 years: 9.4 services per 100 thousand adolescents. This victimization also acts in the group from 1 to 4 years of age, but with less intensity than in the previous group (WAISELFISZ, 2012).

In the present study, it is possible to find similarities with what the author states and, in this sense, we should highlight that crimes of a sexual nature, especially rape, rape of the vulnerable person and attempted rape were recorded in victims aged between 6 and 15 years (WAISELFISZ, 2012; COELHO, 2018).

With regard to the age group in relation to the gender of the aggressor, this study highlights the male gender among the aggressors. Of the total number of aggressors (114), 3 (three) did not have their gender informed, 12 (twelve) were female and 99 (ninety-nine) male. We can note that the age group from 15 to 19 years concentrated a total of 27 aggressors. We should underline that, in some cases, there was more than one aggressor. That is why the number of aggressors is higher than that of criminal cases. Similarly, there were cases in which more than one child/adolescent was the victim of the same aggressor.

Similar data were found in a study developed in the metropolitan region of Fortaleza/CE, where the majority of the aggressors were male, showing a high total male/female ratio. According to the author, men appeared more often as aggressors than women in all age groups, mainly in extremes, less than 20 years and from 40 to 49 years, where the male aggressor was about eleven times more frequent than the female (CARVALHO, 2010; SOMMER et al., 2017).

In the present study, male aggressors interrupted their studies still in elementary school (11 of them completed elementary school and 44 did not complete this level of education). Of the total, seven completed high school, seven attended this level of education and ten aggressors did not complete it. For Carvalho (2010), the pertinent literature reveals a shortage of studies characterizing the profile of the aggressors, thereby making it difficult to compare the results in greater depth.

With regard to the place where the violence was done, the victim's residence (42.45%) and public roads (37.7%) stand out, although a wide variety of places have been indicated. In this regard, it is evident that, in all age groups, violence happens predominantly in the victims' residence, which decreases in the group from 10 to 19 years of age, but, even so, almost 2/3 of the cases happen in the residence. From 15 years of age, cases of violence on public roads start to increase (WAISELFISZ, 2012; SOMMER et al., 2017).

In other studies conducted, the most frequent aggressor was the father, followed by the stepfather.

This finding shows the opposite of what was found in the present study, where the stepfather and father ranked the second and third positions among the aggressors, respectively. The parents were also highlighted as the main responsible for the reported violence, thereby reinforcing this fact as striking in the first year of life and that decreases with the growth of the child. According to the author, this role of parents starts to be replaced from 5 years old by friends known; and from 10 years old by partners or former partners and by unknown people (CARVALHO, 2010; WAISELFISZ, 2012; SOMMER et al., 2017).

According to a study that aimed to describe the profile of reported cases of violence in the city of Recife, State of Pernambuco, Brazil, which included all cases of domestic and sexual violence, as well as other violence, recorded in the National System for Notifiable Diseases (SINAN, as per its Portuguese acronym) from Recife-PE, in the year 2012. In this study, physical violence was the most notified (49.5%), with the main aggressor being a family member, except in cases of sexual violence, where the main aggressor was an unknown person; moreover, women, children and brown-skinned individuals were highlighted as the main victims (SILVA et al., 2013).

Concerning the outcome of the cases of violence, we noted that 32 (30.18%) of the 106 cases analyzed in the present study were not represented, which culminated in the filing of the cases. Of the remaining 74 cases in which a police investigation was started to determine the responsibility for the violent acts, five were referred to a verbal agreement before the court, eight were extinguished from the investigation, five were not punishable, one had no author identified, one was closed due to the defendant's death, one prescribed and three others had no informed outcome. The remaining 50 (fifty) cases were judged and convicted according to the crime done, corresponding to 47.2% of the total.

In a research on violence against children and adolescents conducted in the city of Londrina/PR, it was found that, in five years, 45.6% of the cases referred to the Judiciary Branch were concluded or closed. Among these completed or closed cases, 40.0% was closed through the filing of the case, 3.9% through the filing of the investigation and 1.7% through the conviction of the defendant. The authors underline that cases of sexual violence often fail to be referred to the Judiciary Branch due to the lack of evidence or because there are no witnesses to the act done, which means that there is no evidence of the authorship and materiality of the crime. This situation differs from that found in the present study, whose analysis revealed that the majority of the cases (69.81%) had an investigation opened and that, of these, 67.6% were judged and convicted (MARTINS, JORGE, 2009).

We believe that some cases are being filed for the fact that the violent act done does not leave physical marks, thereby making it difficult to

determine the crime and coercing the victim. Accordingly, only the most serious cases are referred to the Judiciary Branch, where the life condition of the child/adolescent is threatened and/or where there is bodily injury. Similarly, many sexual crimes are not reported, such as, for example, those done at home.

Conclusion

By completing the data analysis, we can state that the majority of the victims are female, mainly between the age groups from 11 to 15 years and from 16 to 18 years. It is also evident that, in these age groups, the crimes of Threat, Rape of Vulnerables, Domestic Violence, Offering/Selling Alcoholic Beverages were the most frequent.

Regarding the aggressor, there was a predominance of men in all age groups. The level of education ranged from illiterate to complete higher education, which shows that violence against children and adolescents affects all socioeconomic classes and is done by individuals with different levels of education. As for the marital situation of the aggressor, singles and/or coexisting with stable partners stood out, with age groups from 15 to 19 years and from 20 to 24 years.

We also found that, in most cases, there was no family relationship between the victim and the aggressor. Nevertheless, in cases where there was some kinship and/or close relationship, the stepfather and the father stood out, being followed by the mother. In the town under study, we noticed that violence against children and adolescents is predominantly done in the victim's residence, followed by public roads. This situation indicates that family members who are culturally assigned to take the responsibility of caring for and protecting children do not always fulfill this role. In addition, this fact deconstructs the image of love, safety and protection normally linked to home and father-child, mother-child and stepfather-stepchild relationships, thereby exposing the amount of pain and distress that this space and these relationships can promote. In this regard, it is also important to highlight that the one presented here refers to the reported cases, which reminds us of the situations that remain unreported, precisely because the violence against children and adolescents done at their homes is still considered a private matter that concerns only the family itself.

As for the outcome, the vast majority of the victims and their respective guardians did not represent themselves against the aggressor, which led to the filing of the cases, thereby making it difficult to determine the facts. This reality may be related to the disbelief in Justice and the delay in procedural acts, which leads to the withdrawal without first having a solution of the situation, mainly in cases of domestic violence.

Any type of violence damages the healthy development of children and adolescents, thereby undermining periods of life that require care and understanding, perhaps more intense than at other

times. We should also emphasize that both the action and the omission of the facts can cause physical, psychological and social damages to the victim.

In Brazil, the Children's and Adolescents' Statute is a legal instrument of protection in situations of violence and makes notification mandatory, even if the violence is nothing more than a suspicion.

Lastly, the results of this study highlight the need to develop other studies in this field addressing other aspects of the violence against children and adolescents. Moreover, we suggest the development of trainings and campaigns for health teams, community groups, schools and other institutions that assist children and adolescents, with a view to identifying situations of violence by giving them the appropriate referral.

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