

## Violence against children in Brazilian scenery

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**Abstract** *Violence is a social and public health phenomenon, with greater exacerbation when it affects children, causing an impact on child development and a catastrophic impact on the behavior of an adult life. The purpose of this article is to characterize by the scientific evidence child abuse on the Brazilian scene. There was used the integrative literature review and, as a source of research, the databases Lilacs and Scielo from August 2013. Among the six identified publications showed negligence as the main type of violence, five discoursed that Male gender is the most affected gender and ten stated that the perpetrator is always a family member. Also in this heart, it becomes clear that the parents are the greatest perpetrators of violence against children, especially the mother as the most frequent aggressors. The results demonstrate the need to identify early all types of violence, especially the neglect, recognizing that there is no significant distinction of violence between the genders and sharing the family environment as the most conducive environment for the growth of violent events.*

**Key Words** *Domestic violence, Child bad-treatment, Protect children and adolescents, Violence, Child*

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## Introduction

Violence can be considered as the use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, against another person, or against a group or community, that either results in/or has any chance of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, developmental disability or deprivation<sup>1</sup>.

More than any other type of violence committed against children is not justified because the peculiar conditions of development of these citizens put them in extreme dependence of parents, family members, caregivers, public authorities and society. In 2011, the System for Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN), recorded 39.281 visits in the range of <1 to 19 years old, which represent 40% of the total of 98.115 attendances computed by the system that year<sup>2</sup>. The increase in the number of cases of child abuse according to the World and Brazilian epidemiological data show increasingly, it is necessary to demand control actions, through preventive measures for the social sectors involved, as well as health workers, community councils and others.

The problem arrogate political relevance and visibility of the society, especially from the 1990s, with the implementation of the Children and Adolescents, through Law 8069, which aims to “ensure children and adolescents, promoting health and disease prevention, making it mandatory identification and denunciation of violence”<sup>3</sup>. As a result, the state now has legal instruments of protection in situations of violence in childhood and adolescence, making mandatory notification even in cases of suspicion.

The World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>4</sup> classifies violence against children in four types: physical, sexual, emotional or psychological harm and neglect, which can result in physical, psychological damage; damage to the growth, development and maturation of children.

The violence, childish, translates into a strong stressor compared to normal growth and development process and should be considered in its entirety, for its full recognition, in order to implement effective measures for its resolution. Thus, this study aims to characterizing, through scientific evidences, the child abuse on the national scene.

## Methodology

Seeking to answer the main question: What are the characteristics to child abuse on the national scene? Held a Integrative Review (RI), which brings significant benefits to the strengthening of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)<sup>5</sup>.

Selection of items occurred from the definition of the inclusion criteria used for the satisfaction of the sample, these criteria: articles which referred to the issue addressed and/or thematic counterparts in full publications in Portuguese and time frame between 2008 and 2012. As exclusion criteria it was decided not to use incomplete texts, articles in foreign language and items that were not available in full online.

The next task was to carry out the search of the sample sources indexed in the database Scielo (Scientific Electronic Library Online) and Lilacs (Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences), using the following descriptors: child abuse children, child advocacy and adolescent violence and domestic violence during the August 2013 period, according to the requirement of the steps as shown in Figure 1.

Data were analyzed and organized by data collection instrument validated by Ursi<sup>6</sup> and later tabulated in the following variables: author/year design/ level of evidence and results.

The results and discussions were presented in order of the questions that make up the data collection instrument. To assist in selecting the best possible evidence, we propose a hierarchy of evidence, according to the study design, which is one of the items to be discussed at this stage<sup>7</sup>.

This study was registered in the Coordination of Research and Graduate of UNINOVAFAPÍ University Center.

## Results and discussion

From the tracking process performed initially there was identified 1.571 articles, all potentially eligible by quickly reading the title, objective(s) and year of publication. Of these, only 12 articles were analyzed in full from close reading. For a better understanding of the nature of each paper, it proposes a distribution that aims sheds worked by each analyzed manuscript. This distribution can be seen in Chart 1.

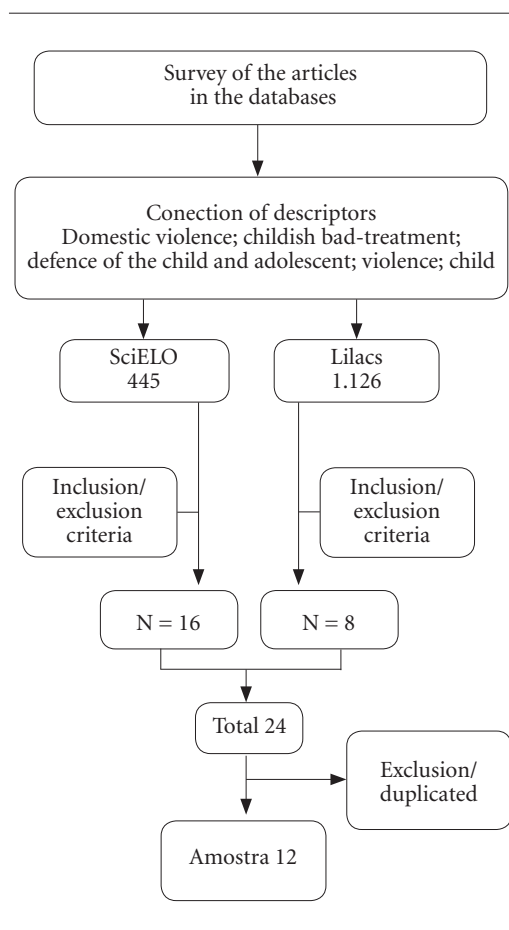


Figure 1. Database searched and articles selected.

It was observed that the place of higher demand for the studies when it comes to abuse against children was the Reporting Systems (33,3%), followed by hospitals (25%). As for the year, there was a predominance of studies published in 2012 (33,3%), followed by the year 2009 (25%).

The type of research more publication was the quantitative type, including descriptive and exploratory nature. Of all articles, only one was kind of an experience report, reducing the confidence level of this study.

Considering the visibility and wealth of the analyzed articles sought to expose the level of evidence of each sample selected in order to give credence to the study. The distribution can be seen in Chart 2.

When evaluating the core idea of each article, there was a predominance of three categories, which are: predominant type of violence against children; Profile genre hit by violence; and the type of offender, described in Chart 3. Regarding the type of violence, it observed the predominance of negligence (50%), followed by physical violence (33,3%), psychological violence (8,3%) and sexual violence (8,3%).

As regards to gender, it is possible to observe the preponderance of males (41,7%) compared to females (25%), noting that some studies have established percentage for each gender, taking into account a type of violence alone. Regarding the type of offender, it was possible to identify the prevalence of aggression perpetrated by a member of the family group (75%). Two studies (16,7%), did not describe the aggressor and only one study (8,3% of cases) said the source of the offender as non-family, described this study as others - and any individual who hold indirect relationship with the victims without any degree of kinship.

The bias given to the discussion of violence against children in this study will be presented emphatically, scaled on the following perspective: violence the greatest impact on children, sexual gender in which there was a higher prevalence in the analyzed articles and where of violent action, or seek to quantify the degree of relationship / kinship aggressor.

### Predominant types of violence against children

Negligence is a violence difficult to define because it involves cultural, social and economic aspects of each family or social group, it is what it claims Zambon et al.<sup>8</sup>. Neglect represents the most frequent form of abuse against children<sup>8-12</sup>.

According Faleiros et al.<sup>9</sup> is noteworthy that maternal deprivation is a major stressor that directly affects child development show that negligence victims of individuals or any other type of violence in the first decade of life have, in most cases, deviations conduct in which are mainly based on transgression of social rules.

Another point also important in this arsenal, concerns the age group of abused children which was observed in the Apostólico et al.<sup>12</sup> study, dominance aggression in children under five years, and this number may be greater the younger the child, complete Assis et al.<sup>11</sup>.

**Chart 1.** Distribution of the studies according to the title of articles, authors, publication year, home study and public journal (2008-2012).

N	Title	Authors	Year	Home Study	Journal
13	Outcome of cases of violence against children and adolescents in the judiciary*	Martins; Mello Jorge	2009	Court of Infancy	Acta Paulista of Nursing
9	Violence against children in the city of Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, Brazil: the prevalence of mistreatment based on information from the education sector	Faleiros et al.	2009	Educational Sector	Public Health Journal
14	Violence against children: revealing the profile of care in emergency departments, Brazil, 2006 and 2007	Mascarenhas et al.	2010	Hospital	Public Health Journal
15	Detection of bad-treatment against children: missed opportunities in emergency services in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Moura et al.	2008	Hospital	Public Health Journal
16	Bad-treatment against children and adolescents in São Paulo, 2009	Gawryszewski et al.	2012	Notification on Systems*	Journal of the Brazilian Medical Association
10	Violence against children and adolescents - proposed classification of severity levels	Pfeiffer et al.	2011	Notification on Systems*	Paulista Journal of Pediatrics
17	Denounced violence: incidents of bad-treatment against children and adolescents recorded in a police unit	Garbin et al.	2011	Police Unit	Brazilian Journal of Nursing
11	Reports of domestic violence, sexual and other violence against children in Brazil	Assis et al.	2012	Notification on Systems*	Science & Collective Health
18	Bad-treatment to Children and Adolescents: A Study in São Bento do Una, PE, Brazil	Granville-Garcia et al.	2008	Guardian Council	Brazilian Research in Pediatric Dentistry
19	Bad-treatment: study from the perspective of child and adolescent protection police in Salvador, Bahia	Carvalho et al.	2009	Police Unit	Science & Collective Health
12	Characteristics of violence against children in a Brazilian capital	Apostólico et al.	2012	Notification on Systems*	Latin American Journal of Nursing
8	Domestic violence against children and adolescents: a challenge	Zambon et al.	2012	Hospital	Journal of the Brazilian Medical Association

Direct source.

\* Systems responsible for notifying episodes of violence (bad-treatment) against children, such as: VIVA (Surveillance Injury System) and Network Protection for Children.

**Chart 2.** Distribution of studies according to the results, design and level of evidence (2008-2012).

<b>N</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Delineation</b>	<b>Level of evidence</b>
13	There was a predominance of child labor and begging (54,5%), followed by sexual violence (51,2%) and neglect (46,3%).	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
9	Highest incidence was the neglect and psychological harms, which usually gives less importance.	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
14	Prevalence of physical aggression (67,4%), followed by neglect (32%), psychological harm (9,5%) and sexual violence (3,5%). The attackers were their own family (36,3%).	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
15	The prevalence of psychological violence, neglect and physical violence were 94,8%, 60,3% and 47,2%, respectively.	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
16	There was featured female (61,4%). Physical violence represented 43.3% of cases in boys and sexual 41,7% in girls. The main perpetrators of the attacks were parents (43,8% of total) and acquaintances (29,4%).	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
10	Between 2003 and 2004 respectively it observed the neglect of 35,2 and 26%, physical violence; 17,5 and 8,8%, sexual and 6,6 and 3,5%, psychologically isolated. No significant difference between gender.	Experience report	VI
17	Prevalence of physical bad-treatment, and the residence in the place with the highest incidence of attacks being the mother the main aggressor.	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
11	It was observed that few municipalities notify violence to SINAN-Net in 2010 in the country.	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
18	The type of more registered bad-treatment was neglect.	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
19	There was a predominance of physical abuse (64,7%) and positive correlation between female and sexual abuse and male physical harm.	Quantitative descriptive	IV
12	Of the total, prevailed neglect (33,9%) and sexual abuse (31,9%) and 55,9% in girls and 50% within five years.	Descriptive quantitative approach	IV
8	Domestic violence was the most frequent, neglect and physical violence the most reported forms.	Exploratory descriptive	IV

Direct source.

**Chart 3.** Quantitative distribution regarding Type, Gender and Offender Violence against Children.

N	Type of Violence	Gender	Type of the Aggressor
13	Sexual	Does not describe	A family member
9	Neglect	Male	Does not describe
14	Physical	Male	A family member
15	Psychological	Male	A family member
16	Physical	Female	A family member
10	Neglect	No significant distinction	A family member
17	Physical	Male	A family member
11	Neglect	Male	A family member
18	Neglect	Does not describe	Does not describe
19	Physical	Female	Other
12	Neglect	No significant distinction	A family member
8	Neglect	Female	A family member

Direct source.

So it is understandable that the younger the age, the greater the vulnerability and the risk of violence, because the dependence on the performance of basic survival activities is given entirely by the caregiver, requiring inherent abilities to care for what can become a stressor who demand care.

It is worth emphasizing, according Granville-Garcia et al.<sup>18</sup>, that neglect has high prevalence in various locations and has been described in the literature as worrisome, since this type of abuse, although not inspire the same degree of anger the other is about 40% of the recorded fatalities.

This makes it possible to suggest the great social impact of other types of violence against children, such as physical and sexual violence, which affects the express way in society and can be seen with great fanfare, since there are several by political public directed to these cases.

In contrast the ideology of dominance of neglect as the most common type of bad-treatment in children, other authors in the literature indicate physical harm as the most common category

of bad-treatment<sup>14,16,17,19</sup> and in some cases stand out the beating/physical strength, concludes Mascarenhas et al.<sup>14</sup>.

Physical violence as a form of education, from the perspective of the caregiver / aggressor, presents explanations about the act of hitting or beating motivated by social difficulties, difficulties in daily family relations and child care, emotional imbalance and guilt of child for the problems.

According Gawryszewski et al.<sup>16</sup>, because it is a widely discussed problem in society in general, physical abuse tend to occupy the first place among the forms of violence in studies conducted in the emergency units facing these cases, probably be more serious and require health care, a fact that depending on the circumstances cannot be omitted.

Taking as relevant local looking to record the occurrence of violence, police stations stand out as the first place to be searched, while health services are forgotten, that because the victims or who the leads, do not consider the health sector as competent to deal with such problem.

In another design, according the studies analyzed in relation to the type of violence, is viewed from scarce in the literature psychological aggression as the predominant type of bad-treatment of children, being virtually ignored in hospitals, was what said Moura et al.<sup>15</sup>.

The cultural and social scene where there is psychological violence must be regarded as relevant as its recognition depends substantially on the context in which it is inserted. Often, the detection of the source of the event can be hampered by the omission of the cases, since the psychological violence leaves no marks so expressive initially.

Finally, in regard to the prevalence of violence it was possible, distantly, find studies showing sexual violence as the most common type, but points out that children are not prepared physical, cognitive, emotional or socially to face a sexual violence. A sexually abusive relationship is a power relationship between the adult victim and the child who is victimized<sup>8</sup>.

However, to establish a reliable quantitative on the prevalence of violence, it is necessary to take into account the occurrences of profile that can vary depending on the source or place searched.

#### **Most prevalent sexual gender from the perspective of child abuse**

Just as important to quantify the form of violence that affects children, it is to differentiate which gender is most affected by bad-treatment, since the conduct of the action by the professionals responsible for the care of ill-treated children should be done in a particular way, respecting the individuality of each case.

With that in most studies you can see the prevalence of males as the gender most affected by violence<sup>9,11,14,15</sup> establishing forms of aggression different as to gender, and "lack of parental control" was significantly more frequent in boys. On the other hand, according Faleiros et al.<sup>9</sup>, girls more vivenciam the two other forms of negligence: the "physical abandonment" and "emotional".

A point that justifies the above statement, as reported by Mascarenhas et al.<sup>14</sup>, is that given by the different behaviors of each gender and cultural factors that determine greater freedom to the children and, in turn, greater vigilance on the girls.

In this respect, the higher incidence of aggression among boys may be related to one of the great male symbols in the world today, the weapons, which materialize the power to submit the other to their wishes and interests, power of life

and death through objects that are introduced early in a boy's life in the form of toys, and become part of the male universe.

To characterize the prevalent gender, says Assis et al.<sup>11</sup>, you must also include the type of perpetrated violence, whereas sexual violence tends to be directed more often against girls and physical violence and neglect more commonly seen in boys, according to the notification children between 1-9 years old.

For another view, will women's subordinate status in society seen since childhood, as well as the ideology of an alleged female frailty concept that women are weak, submissive, passive; averse man, strong, manly, rational concepts translated into just decades that need solution as to social values, compared to cases of violence, causing the female is regarded as the greatest prevalence of sex between aggression<sup>16,17</sup>.

Continuing the growing idea of the prevalence of the female is given a close relationship to the prevalence of physical abuse in male children in relation to other types of abuse, indicating no specific age range for the occurrence of these events, is the says Carvalho et al.<sup>19</sup>, the interface of relations between the maltreatment of children and aspects of violence between genders.

As much as is noted prevalence of males in this category, you can see that some studies do not clearly stating the prevalence of which focuses violence according to gender, making only a brief comparative typology in relationship / gender as mentioned earlier, the male gender affected more by physical abuse, and the psychological and neglect and violence the women suffered the most sexual violence<sup>10,12</sup>.

#### **Description of the aggressor concerning the grade of relationship/kinship**

In this category, nine (75%) of 12 analyzed articles reported that the offender is always one of the family members. Only one study (8,3%) showed the source is external aggression, as classified in this study and two other studies have described this category.

According to Mascarenhas et al.<sup>14</sup>, the home environment is the place where much of the violent events taking place, which is a favorable environment for the occurrence of attacks and abuses against children, especially girls. For stay longer in their homes, children end up being more often abused these sites.

Interestingly, through this problem, that any family member can become, under certain cir-

cumstances, a victim or perpetrator of violence. However, children, because they are more susceptible, helpless and dependent family as well as society, are the main victims of such violence, referring increasingly a gender perspective on this reality.

In this relationship, as quoted Moura et al.<sup>15</sup>, it is important to note that the mother was considered as the main aggressor when violence committed - the psychological and corporal punishment, followed by neglect.

In a very detailed way, there was the following representation as to the aggressors: the main authors of the aggression were responsible for the victims themselves - mother and father<sup>10-13,16</sup>, followed by step-parents - or acquaintances, included other family members, and according Gawryszewski et al.<sup>16</sup>, this distribution showed differences in relation to gender, which demonstrated the high proportion of mothers as perpetrators of assault against male children. Although these interface cases of sexual violence, stepfather or mother's partner took first place, followed by his father, grandfather, uncle and others with whom the victim kept ties of dependence, affection and cohabitation, concludes Pfeiffer et al.<sup>10</sup>.

Another issue which pointed out the mother as the main aggressor can be explained by the fact that she is closer physically child, is taking responsibility for the emotional and educational care of children, is ensuring its survival, since most of the time when the couple is separated, it is to her that the child remains, and this proximity is a risk factor for the development of violence<sup>19</sup>. However, several situations are described by their mothers as environmental factors to trigger the violent act, such as the cry of child or any action taken by it which has no control angering the caregiver.

All this configuration of violence goes against the idea that home is a safe place, which serves as a source of growth for children. The effects of violence can arise in the short or long term regarding the biopsychosocial aspects of abused children, which hinders their development in the social environment, reflecting the diminished ability to think and act and tackle difficult situations imposed on them, so living with stressful times throughout their life, since the violent event will be marked in their memory independent of age occurs.

Contributing once more to this study, Zambon et al.<sup>8</sup> states that a difficulty that can be observed in relation to violence when committed by family, is the child's own fear to report the incident, fearing future punishments; through the difficult diagnosis and notification to the lack of standardized and effective devices for the proper conduct of these cases by the health system.

In another look not so far on child violence, according to Carvalho et al.<sup>19</sup>, the attackers, mostly had an indirect relationship with the victims, and the profile of these offenders are males presenting an average of 31,55 years age.

Therefore, it is also necessary to stress the importance for the recognition of non-family violence, because usually social relations open with the other members of a community can foster the emergence of these episodes, since the trusts are given to neighbors, friends or anyone else without any parental bond. So cases of violence mostly when extra-familiar, are committed by someone the child knows and trusts considered by both as a friend of the family.

However, violence against children and adolescents can be understood as a serious form of disrespect for fundamental rights, which is treated as a natural fact or as just a particular way parents deal with their children, becoming regarded as a serious problem the responsibility of both the State, civil society and particularly their own families.

## Conclusion

Therefore, it becomes evident that parents are the main perpetrators of violence against children, especially among those of a younger age than or equal to 5 years old, especially the mother as the greatest aggressor. Regarding the type of harm, neglect emerges as the main form of harm, establishing itself as a serious social problem despite not having visibility expressed between the company and specific public policies to combat it. The distinction of violence was not significant when analyzed from the perspective of the victim's sex, noting only that there is a marked predominance of physical violence and neglect in males and sexual violence in females.

So once made this recognition tripod of child abuse is necessary for health professionals, with



emphasis on the nurse, set goals in order to intervene to rescue the family values and community involved in the violent context, with measures health education and continuously, the socialization of the actors involved and the stimulus for the development of social coping violence policies.

### **Collaborations**

AJ Nunes participated in the project design, data collection, data analysis and writing of the article. MCV Sales participated in the review and writing of the project and article.

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