

Reflection on violent attacks in schools

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We need to talk about the attacks in schools, we need to deepen the discussions about violence in schools...

According to Rezende (2021), violence and aggression constitute abuse of force and power of a stronger individual over another in a situation of inferiority with a desire for destruction. In the school context, violence has a multifaceted character, ranging from swearing to the emergence of weapons in schools.

It is also necessary to distinguish between violence against school, school violence and violence at school, which, according to Ritsum (2023), correspond respectively to violence committed against school as an institution and structure; symbolic violence committed by the school against teachers and students; and finally, internal-physical, verbal, psychological violence committed between students, or between them and teachers, and with employees.

Ferreira, Santos and Oriente (2023) define violence in school as diverse acts, physical, psychological violence, threats, fights, bullying and others, which are practiced and suffered by students, teachers and school staff. In this context, we found different terms being used, such as extremist violence, school shooting, massacres and armed attacks (Camine; Neitzel, 2023; Guimarães *et al.*, 2022; Ritsum, 2023).

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As for the definition, it is a little difficult to find, but, according to Langman (2015), when it comes to school shootings, literature is usually restricted to cases where a student, current or recent, school or university, practice the violent act with the specific purpose of perpetrating a massacre.

From this, focusing on recent events that have frightened the Brazilian population, this text will consider as attacks of violence in schools the most serious attacks, which result in attack in the collective context, with attempted murder, deaths and/or injuries. They may have been practiced by students, another subject of the school community or external agent; and have as a victim both students, staff and teachers.

Ferreira, Santos and Oriente (2023) highlight that, in recent years, violent acts have become more serious and more frequent. The authors draw attention to the fact that, between the years 2022 and 2023, violent attacks in schools in Brazil surpassed the number of attacks of this type in the last 20 years, with invasions, attacks using firearms and other artifacts, practiced by both students and external agents.

These recent attacks and threats of violent actions in Brazil have hit day care centers, elementary schools, high schools, universities and federal institutes; they have caused deaths of babies, children, adolescents and teachers. In addition to deaths and injuries, panic and fear spread throughout society, with threats of new violent attacks on schools across the country (Heck, 2023).

It is also noteworthy that the attacks on schools are highly profitable for the media, because their exposure causes commotion and great audience; thus, these events are also used by the game trade, music and the cinematographic (Silva; Coelho; Pirozi, 2019). The media reproduction focuses too much on the perpetrators of the crime, the details of what happened, with the aim of audience and public attention. Such positioning ends up deifying the shooters, bringing media recognition, which is often the goal of these attacks, and influencing other young people to repeat these acts (Guimarães *et al.*, 2022).

Regarding the cause of the massacres, after analyzing several attacks on schools inside and outside the country and the reflection of several authors, Silva, Coelho and Pirozi (2019) affirm that there are several reasons, among them: violence previously suffered by these aggressors, social ideologies and the influence that the previous massacres themselves exert on the occurrence of the new ones.

Social exclusion and bullying are usually indicated as the causes of violent acts committed by young people, but according to Camine and Neitzel (2023), this

statement is superficial. The authors believe that structural problems contribute to these actions of violent self-assertion. Gomide (2023) reports that the increase in violence in schools is associated with extremist, right-wing attitudes that dislike hatred of minorities; and neo-Nazi publications on social media. It also cites the removal of human subjects from the school curriculum and the competitive model adopted by teaching.

In addition to all the causes discussed above, it is also necessary to pay attention to the mental health of these young people who practice attacks, many of whom suffer from depression, anxiety and other psychological disorders (Ferraz, 2023).

Haeney, Ash and Galletly (2018) point out that young people who commit such violence can suffer from bullying, panic attacks, social anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation. Psychiatrists, psychologists and the surrounding community should be aware of warning signs, violent behavior, threats and others. The authors also report that the school environment that contributes to isolation, anonymity, deprivation, marginalization and repression can promote or intensify violent behavior.

Likewise, the mental health of the victims should be considered since there is a reference that both the participation or testimony of violent acts in schools and the perception of safety in school harm the psychological of adolescents. They point to a higher incidence of generalized anxiety symptoms and panic disorder among students who had higher levels of concern with shootings and school violence, in addition to the association with depressive disorder, higher among black adolescents than in other races (Riehm *et al.*, 2021).

Any type of violence suffered in the school environment can trigger psychological suffering and impacts on mental health in the long term, in addition to creating insecurity, fear and impairing school performance (Ferrara *et al.*, 2019). Duru and Balkis (2018) also bring consequently to the victims of violence in school damages to physical and mental health, such as: psychosomatic symptoms, headache, back pain, stress, anxiety and depression. They emphasize the importance of family support, school, peers and colleagues, who minimize the negative effects of violence and function as a protective factor for mental health.

Given the above, it is necessary to think of measures to prevent and combat attacks. According to C ezar (2019), our attitudes and decisions are motivated by feelings and emotions; the lack of self-knowledge and repression of these end up causing acts of violence, intolerance to the other, bullying and resulting in the

most extreme attacks. With this, the adoption of education for peace and spaces to express and work feelings and emotions in the school environment make it possible to combat these violent acts.

Schools should also introduce the debate on violence and massacres themselves, to develop empathy, respect for others and generate knowledge for the entire school community of how to act in the face of such a situation (Guimarães *et al.*, 2022).

The Ministry of Education (Brazil, 2023) proposed measures to prevent and combat attacks in schools, which include: confronting hate groups and extremists; controlling the possession and sale of weapons; holding social media accountable, media and people for the dissemination of hate content and information from attacks; combating hate crimes, bullying and violence in schools; promoting spaces for socialization, inclusion, mental health policies and improving working conditions in schools; improve the intelligence sector and develop guidelines for post-attack action.

The measures presented should also be considered by states and municipalities to mitigate causes related to extremist attacks. Attention is also drawn to school management and teachers, so that they involve communities effectively in a culture of peace.¹

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Note

¹ A. C. Morais e M. A. Carneiro: conception and design, writing of the text, final approval of the version to be published and is responsible for all aspects of the work in ensuring the accuracy and integrity of any part of the work.

