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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: FACTS AND CONTEXTS OF POLICE REPORTS

VIOLÊNCIA CONTRA A MULHER: FATOS E CONTEXTOS DE BOLETINS DE OCORRÊNCIAS

VIOLENCIA CONTRA LA MUJER: HECHOS Y CONTEXTOS DE DENUNCIAS POLICIALES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to assess the contexts and facts involved in police reports filed by women victims of violence at Women's Defense Police Stations. **Method:** documentary, retrospective, and cross-sectional study with quantitative approach carried out using the police reports filed by women victims of violence in Sobral, State of Ceará, Brazil, in 2009. The data were processed using Excel and SPSS-13 software programs and presented in tables and a figure. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee. **Results:** it was observed that the main victims of violence were 31 to 40 years old, had incomplete elementary education, around two children and were married to the perpetrators under common law marriage at the time of the perpetration. In most cases, violence had occurred due to the use of alcohol by the perpetrator. Psychological violence was the most prevalent with 84% of the cases, followed by physical with 57.5%. **Conclusion:** the detection and assistance of cases and the response of services require a specific approach so that to this violence can emerge beyond denounces. **Descriptors:** Violence; Woman; Public Health.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar os contextos e fatos envolvidos nos boletins de ocorrências de mulheres vítimas de violência na Delegacia de Defesa da Mulher. **Método:** estudo documental, retrospectivo transversal, com abordagem quantitativa, realizado a partir dos boletins de ocorrência das denúncias de mulheres vítimas de violência no Município de Sobral (CE) em 2009. Os dados foram processados pelos programas Excel e SPSS-13 e apresentados em tabelas e uma figura. Este estudo foi aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa. **Resultados:** observou-se que as principais vítimas de violência tinham de 31 a 40 anos de idade, ensino fundamental incompleto, cerca de dois filhos e união estável com o agressor no momento da agressão. Na maioria dos casos, a violência tinha ocorrido pelo uso de álcool por parte do agressor. A violência psicológica constituiu a maioria com 84% dos casos, seguida da física com 57,5%. **Conclusão:** a detecção de casos, seu acolhimento e resposta do serviço requerem especificidade de abordagem para que esta violência possa emergir para além da denuncia. **Descritores:** Violência; Mulher; Saúde Pública.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar los contextos y los hechos involucrados en denuncias policiales de mujeres víctimas de violencia en Comisarias de Defensa de la Mujer. **Método:** estudio documental, retrospectivo y transversal con enfoque cuantitativo llevado a cabo con las denuncias policiales de mujeres víctimas de violencia en el municipio de Sobral, estado de Ceará, Brasil, en 2009. Los datos fueron procesados usando los programas Excel y SPSS-13 y presentados en tablas y una figura. Este estudio fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación. **Resultados:** se observó que las principales víctimas de violencia tenían entre 31 y 40 años de edad, enseñanza primaria incompleta, alrededor de dos hijos y unión estable con el agresor en el momento de la agresión. En la mayoría de los casos, la violencia había ocurrido por el consumo de alcohol por parte del agresor. La violencia psicológica constituyó la mayoría con el 84% de los casos, seguida de la física con el 57,5%. **Conclusión:** la detección de los casos, su acogida y respuesta del servicio requieren especificidad del enfoque para que esta violencia pueda surgir más allá de la denuncia. **Descriptor:** Violencia; Mujer; Salud Pública.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence in everyday life constitutes a problematic and representative aspect of the current social life organization, especially in large urban centers, occurring in various spheres of social life. The phenomenon of violence and its counterpart, i.e., public safety, has become one of the main concerns not only in Brazil, but also in the Americas and throughout the world, as has been shown by several studies on public opinion.¹

Since the 1950s, women began to question about the naturalization of oppression and discrimination of which they were victims. Thus, a series of reflections, movements, literary productions, and resistance actions started taking place, such as the "Empty Pan March" (*Women got together to protest against the cost of living in São Paulo, 1953*), the participation in the struggle for the amnesty and democratization of the country, and the creation of feminist groups to discuss the literature related to women or about sexuality. The social condition of women, as a result of the historical construction of patriarchy and capitalism, had already been questioned since the beginning of the 20th century by the suffragette movement.²

In mid-20th century, with Simone de Beauvoir's theoretical discussion in her book "The second sex", a reflection on specific women's issues started.³ In the 1980s, Joan Scott differentiated sex from gender as follows: "Gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a first way to give meaning to power relations".^{4:86}

From this new category of analysis, studies started being geared toward women and the phenomenon of violence in their lives. Thus, in the context of patriarchal societies, domestic violence—also referred to as family violence—is considered a difficult topic to be addressed, because it questions the traditional values of female submission.

Violence against women is a topic that has been highlighted in the media for some time, since it is a silent practice that victimizes many women, causing disorders not only psychological, but also physical, emotional, and social. Some authors call attention to the fact that the concern with the problem of violence is recent in history, which would be related to modernity and its values of freedom and happiness, consolidated in the conception of citizenship and human rights.⁵

In its supplementary notes,¹ the map of violence in Brazil highlights murder of women in Brazilian states, capitals, and municipalities. The evidence of the growing number of rates in all instances is overwhelming. The report reveals that femicides usually take place in the domestic sphere. In 68.8% of the cases of women victims of violence, the perpetrations had taken place in the victims' homes. In Brazil, it was possible to observe that 42.5% of the total number of violence perpetrations against women had been committed by partners or ex-partners. If we take into consideration the range from 20 to 49 years of age, the rate rises to 65% of the perpetrations.

The Brazilian situation is worrying if compared with other countries, since the complexity of the problem is observed nationwide. Among the 80 countries studied around the world through the statistical system of the World Health Organization (WHO), Brazil had a rate of 4.4 homicides per 100,000 women and was in the seventh place. The study shows that the high levels of femicides are often combined with high levels of tolerance of violence against women.¹

In this context, many women who suffer violence do not even realize the seriousness of the problem, since most of them are immersed in the system and contexts of a society that is culturally patriarchal. In general, the perception that women have about violence is represented by the logic of passive acceptance. This makes it necessary to demystify the naturalness of violence perpetrated by men against women, because the values and beliefs about this fact can influence these victims to perceive its susceptibility and the severity of the issue, so that they start reporting the violence perpetrations.⁶

The Maria da Penha Law—sanctioned in 2006 with the intent of reducing domestic violence—and Women's Defense Police Stations constitute a step forward to restrain and confront violence against women. However, there are several constraints and barriers that limit the effective reduction of the problem in Brazil.⁷ Still, with this gender protection perspective, the Special Department of Policies for Women launched the National Pact for Combating Violence against Women in 2007.⁸

The context presented made us reflect on the following guiding question for this study: What are the facts, contexts, and determinants that lead a woman victim of domestic violence to file police reports in

police stations specialized in women's defense?

OBJECTIVE

- To assess the contexts and facts involved in police reports filed by women victims of violence at Women's Defense Police Stations.

METHOD

This is an exploratory, descriptive, documentary, retrospective, and cross-sectional study, with quantitative approach, carried out using the police reports (PR) filed by women victims of violence at the specialized Women's Defense Police Station (WDPS) of Sobral, State of Ceará, Brazil, in 2009.

Since its inception in March 2003, the WDPSs have been assisting victims of violence filling the PRs. In 2008, a total of 1,546 PRs were filed, resulting in a monthly average of 129 complaints and daily average of five complaints from women victims of violence. However, of this total, few complaints are investigated by the police.

A consent form for using the files was signed. It was approved by the Research Ethics Committee and presented to the police chief responsible for the WDPS and the other professionals requesting permission to conduct the research.

We used PRs of violence against women, characterized by perpetrators being partners or ex-partners of the victims, recorded in 2009 at the WDPS of Sobral. Each PR was listed in ascending order according to the date and time of the complaint and decoded according to the form used to collect the information. The exclusion criteria included the PRs containing incomplete information and those in which the perpetrators were not the partners, ex-partners, spouses, or former spouses.

The collection instrument was drawn up based on the script used by the service itself when the victims were first assisted. This form included data on the profile of the victim, such as age, educational level, and offspring, as well as PR's content data, such as

marital status, types of drugs used by the partners, types of violence experienced. The perpetrations suffered were subdivided into the following categories: physical; moral; patrimonial; psychological; and sexual.

The Excel software program (Microsoft®) was used to organize the data into categories in which the findings of the PRs were subdivided statistically. Subsequently, the SPSS version 13 software program was used for the systematic analysis of the data obtained. The results were presented in tables.

A sample calculation necessary for conducting the research was carried out and it resulted in 204 PRs. However, it was decided to double the sample number suggested, which resulted in a final sample of 497 PRs of domestic violence perpetrated by the partners.

The present study was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Vale do Acaraú. It also complied with the ethical and legal aspects of the Resolution 196/96, among which is the principle of Justice. It provides that, with the purpose of preventing discrimination, no judgment of values or inference about women or the data contained in the PRs should be performed. As a result, the data were presented in the form of statistics to the officers of the WDPS of Sobral.

RESULTS

Regarding the age groups of the 497 PRs filed by women victims of violence, there was higher prevalence of violence in women aged 31 to 40 years, representing 34.2% (n=170) of the cases. As for the level of education and number of children of the subjects, it was observed that most of them had not completed elementary school (29%; n=144) and they had one to two children, representing 48.4% (n=241) of the cases.

Table 1. Distribution of sociodemographic characteristics of women victims of domestic violence who filed a police report at the WDPS of Sobral, Ceará, 2009.

Variables	n	%
Age groups		
< 20 years	44	9%
21 to 30 years	168	33.8%
31 to 40 years	170	34.2%
41 to 50 years	81	16%
> 51 years	31	6%
Not reported	3	1 %
Total	497	100%
Education		
Illiterate	34	7%
Functional literate	118	24%
Incomplete elementary education	144	29%
Complete elementary education	79	16%
Incomplete secondary education	35	7%
Complete secondary education	64	13%
Incomplete higher education	7	1.2%
Complete higher education	12	2%
Not reported	4	0.8%
TOTAL	497	100%
OFFSPRING		
Without children	124	25%
1 to 2 children	241	48.4%
3 to 4 children	88	17.6%
≥ 5 children	44	9%
Total	497	100%

The type of relationship that victims of violence had with the perpetrators at the time the PRs were filed was taken into consideration. There was higher prevalence of

women married under common law marriage (42.3%), representing 210 of the cases, and of the lowest prevalence corresponded to divorced women (0.2%).

Table 2. Types of relationships with the perpetrators according to the victims of domestic violence at the time of filing the police reports at the WDPS of Sobral, Ceará, 2009.

Marital status	n	%
Married	121	24.4%
Divorced	1	0.2%
Common law marriage	210	42.3%
Single	24	4.8%
Separated	115	23.1%
Not reported	26	5.2%
TOTAL	497	100%

With respect to the use of drugs by the perpetrators, according to the victims of violence, alcohol consumption—considered the major cause of domestic violence—was found in 197 cases (39.6%) and in 16 cases (3.6%) alcohol was consumed in combination with other drugs. However, the lack of information about drugs used by partners is a fact that

must be taken into consideration, since it represented an estimate that exceeded half of the data collected (253 cases; 51%) and the contents of the PRs did not reveal whether it was because the perpetrators did not use drugs or the information was not provided at the time that women reported the violence suffered.

Table 3. Distribution of the drugs most commonly used by the perpetrators according to the victims of domestic violence who filed the police reports at the WDPS of Sobral, Ceará, 2009.

Drugs used	N	%
Alcohol	197	39.6%
Marihuana	11	2.2%
Crack	15	3%
Cocaine	5	1%
Alcohol and other drugs	16	3.2%
Not used or Not reported	253	51%
Total	497	100%

The present study also addressed the type of violence. The following data was found: 419 (84%) reported having suffered psychological violence; 289 (57.5%) physical violence; 194 (39%) moral violence; 104 (21%) patrimonial violence; and 19 (4%) sexual violence.

Table 4. Typology of violence related to the amount of statements in the police reports filed at the WDPS of Sobral, Ceará, 2009.

Type of violence	n	%
Physical	286	57.5%
Moral	194	39%
Patrimonial	104	21%
Psychological	419	84%
Sexual	19	4%

Some characteristics in the context of violence suffered by the subjects of the research show great prevalence of combination of types of violence, and psychological and physical were the most evident. In this sense, the following types were observed with greater occurrence: threat, with 52.2% corresponding to psychological violence; maltreatment, with 42.7% corresponding to physical violence; injury, with 23% representing moral violence; damage to matrimonial property, with 16.7% of property violence; and attempted rape, corresponding to 3.8% of the perpetrations, Sexual violence was the least evident.

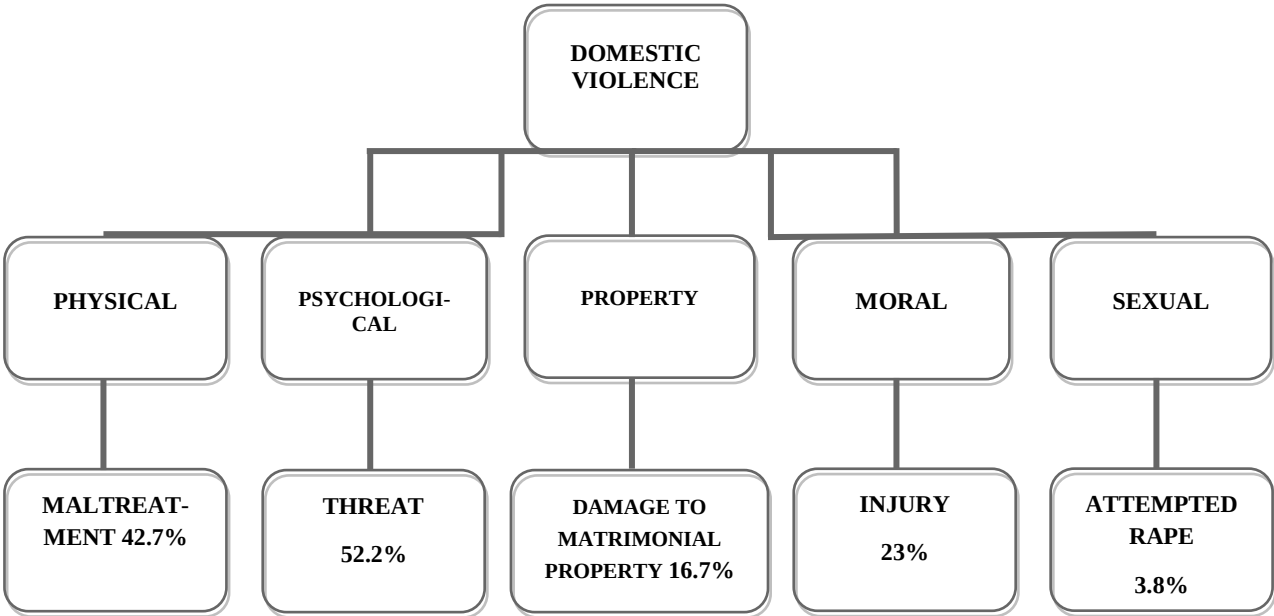


Figure 1. Specificities of violence identified in the police reports filed at the WDPS of Sobral, Ceará, 2009.

DISCUSSION

Among the 497 PRs filed at the WDPS of Sobral by women who suffered violence, there was greater predominance of subjects aged 31 to 40 years, married under common law marriage, and that had not completed elementary school. Most of them had one to two children, in agreement with the current context of Brazilian families, in which the number of children is decreasing, resulting in percentage changes with respect to Brazilian birth rates.

Married to the perpetrator under common law marriage is a fact found in a previous study,⁹ representing the most endemic situation in which violence against women occurs. That way, some reasons that lead to domestic violence can be mentioned, namely: when the marriage is in crisis (banal everyday reasons that gain prominence and become

themes of arguments); when conflicts become a part of the daily routine (verbal arguments—whether or not combined with physical perpetration—are a daily practice of the couple); when women engage in "men's business" (women complain of male behavior, like looking at another women, having lovers, sleeping away from home); and when the perpetrators do not accept the separation or are drunk (alcoholic husbands usually offend and hit physically their wives).¹⁰ These basic core senses are not able to cover all the complexity of the topic; they are just some signs observed in real daily life.

Low level of education causes reduced access to knowledge of laws and rights as well as defense mechanisms that these women can activate—while victims of family violence—to denounce the perpetrators. The lack of social and family support gained prominence in the reports of these women.

The victims also stated that the perpetrators used some type of drugs, especially alcohol. These findings are similar to those found in previous studies which showed individuals with alcohol-related problems and greater likelihood of suffering violence from intimate partners.¹¹ The explanation is related to a set of behavioral, cognitive, and physiological changes caused by drugs consumption that affect not only the spouses, but also children and older adults, influencing the physical and psychological well-being of the entire family. Therefore, the campaigns of denunciation and support for women victims of violence must consider these determinants to provide support and develop strategies to combat domestic violence.

Regarding the violence suffered by the complainants, it was possible to observe that the psychological violence had the highest incidence in the cases, followed by physical, moral, patrimonial, and sexual, respectively. The rates of violence perpetrated by intimate partners found in Sobral are not very different from the rates found in previous studies conducted in São Paulo. In both cases, the psychological violence was more broadly expressed, especially when associated with other forms of violence, causing serious consequences and disease susceptibility, configuring itself as one of the most serious social and public health problems worldwide.¹²

It is worth noting that it is impossible to unlink the remaining types of violence from psychological violence. Therefore, it is important to consider the psychosomatic reflexes in these women victims of domestic violence and the support provided in health and safety services.

However, a worrying factor is the low level of sexual violence found in the present study. This fact makes us assume that there was an omission in the reports of the cases, whether due to shame, fear, or having forgotten to approach the subject when the PRs were filed. This way, it is worth presenting the discussion of some authors¹³ who report difficulty in estimating the magnitude of sexual violence, because the victims tend to avoid talking about this topic. This attitude is due to fear of reprisal—when the author is a family member or known—shame, and even feelings of humiliation and guilt, since the idea that women are guilty of the violence suffered persists in the social imagery.

In this cognitive scenario of women's lives, the social interpretation of the relationships established with their partners is mediated by

the hierarchy of superiority, subordination, and power granted to men by historical, social, and cultural issues, perceiving, as a rule socially approved, men as superior in their relationships with women.¹⁴ In this case, revealing the violence suffered by women through PRs becomes a fundamental issue for combating this crime. It is also important to highlight factors involving national and local public policies, greater visibility of the phenomenon through the radical, television, and printed media, and to include the topic on the political agenda of governmental and non-governmental organizations.¹⁵

The Maria da Penha Law not only brought paradigmatic changes to the Brazilian legislation, but has also been a useful tool for formal and informal community leaders in order to address the forms of violence perpetrated by intimate partners.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Violence against women is a serious problem that deserves attention in society and a special attention by the government agencies, through the creation and strengthening of public policies that include preventing and combating this crime. It is essential that such a phenomenon is visualized as a human rights issue, since, in addition to injuring human dignity, it impairs the development of women's citizenship.

Studies have contributed to address this phenomenon. In the present study, we observed that the main victims of violence were aged 31 to 40 years, with incomplete elementary education, and one or two children. These women were married to the perpetrators under common law marriage at the time of the perpetration, which mostly took place due to the consumption of alcohol by the perpetrators. It is important to stress that the present study also addressed the types of perpetration, in which psychological violence constituted the majority, followed by physical violence.

The impact of this problem reaches from women's vision of themselves—reflected in feelings of insecurity and helplessness—to their relationships with the social environment, which are weakened due to the situation of isolation and expressed by the lack of disclosure of the perpetrations or even support by close persons. Sadness, anxiety, and fear are psychological consequences of this type of violence.

In order to bring violence against women to light, specificity and care is required on the part of the services when addressing the

problem, such as initial assistance and distinction of the facts, in addition to the preservation of the victims' identity. It is also necessary that these women report the perpetrations, so that early detection is possible. The creation of communication channels through which the reports can be filed by women and the development of policies to prevent the perpetrations, including the strengthening of the Maria da Penha Law, are important issues for the eradication of this problem.

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