

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

IDENTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE IN TEENAGERS: FEMALE EDUCATORS SPEECH*
IDENTIFICAÇÃO DE VIOLÊNCIA EM ADOLESCENTES: DISCURSO DE EDUCADORAS
IDENTIFICACIÓN DE LA VIOLENCIA EN ADOLESCENTES: DISCURSO DE EDUCADORAS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to apprehend indicative signs and factors that compromise the identification of domestic violence against adolescents. **Method:** this is a qualitative, descriptive study, based on Paulo Freire's critical-liberating perspective, with 20 female educators from a public elementary school. An interview was conducted and the data was systematized in the Collective Subject Discourse. **Results:** it is reported that the female educators report the presence of body marks, behavioral changes and the impairment of school performance and attendance as signs that suggest the experience of domestic violence experienced by young people, although the high demand for work and unpreparedness make identification of the grievance difficult. **Conclusion:** the urgency, in view of the repercussions of domestic violence for the health and life of adolescents, is perceived by a management that considers the praxis of female educators in the process of recognizing and overcoming the problem. **Descriptors:** Domestic Violence; Adolescent; School Teachers; Education, Primary and Secondary; Faculty; Nursing.

RESUMO

Objetivo: apreender sinais indicativos e fatores que comprometem a identificação da violência doméstica contra os adolescentes. **Método:** trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, descritivo, fundamentado na perspectiva crítico-libertadora de Paulo Freire, com 20 educadoras de uma escola pública de Ensino Fundamental. Realizou-se uma entrevista e os dados foram sistematizados no Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo. **Resultados:** relata-se que as educadoras assinalam a presença de marcas corporais, mudanças comportamentais e o comprometimento do rendimento e assiduidade escolares como sinais que sugerem a vivência da violência doméstica pelos jovens, embora a alta demanda de trabalho e o despreparo profissional dificultem a identificação do agravo. **Conclusão:** percebe-se a urgência, diante das repercussões da violência doméstica para a saúde e a vida dos adolescentes, de uma gestão que considere a práxis das educadoras no processo de reconhecimento e superação do agravo. **Descritores:** Violência doméstica; Adolescente; Professores Escolares; Ensino Fundamental e Médio; Educadores; Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: apreender signos y factores indicativos que comprometan la identificación de la violencia doméstica contra los adolescentes. **Método:** este es un estudio cualitativo, descriptivo, basado en la perspectiva de liberación crítica de Paulo Freire, con 20 educadoras de una escuela primaria pública. Se realizó una entrevista y los datos se sistematizaron en el Discurso del Sujeto Colectivo. **Resultados:** se informa que las educadoras indican la presencia de marcas corporales, cambios de comportamiento y el deterioro del rendimiento y la asistencia como signos que sugieren la experiencia de violencia doméstica por parte de los jóvenes, aunque la gran demanda de trabajo y la falta de preparación dificultan la identificación de la queja. **Conclusión:** la urgencia, dadas las repercusiones de la violencia doméstica para la salud y la vida de los adolescentes, se percibe como una gestión que considera la praxis de las educadoras en el proceso de reconocer y superar el problema. **Descritores:** Violencia Doméstica; Adolescente; Maestro de Escuela; Educación Primaria y Secundaria; Docentes; Enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence against adolescents is understood as a public health problem that demands articulated strategies aimed at favoring the prevention and coping with the phenomenon. For this, it is necessary the early identification of the problem, as well as the factors that compromise this process, being the female educators, due to the proximity with the students, essential for the transformation of the reality.

It was evident from a nationwide survey that, in 2015, over 153,000 anonymous reports of violations of rights against children and adolescents, expressed through negligence and psychological, physical and sexual abuse, were made.¹ It is known that when adolescents experience and/or experience domestic violence, they tend to develop immediate damage, such as bodily injury and burns, or late results of somatization, which are expressed through headache, depression and suicide.²⁻⁶ These factors lead to poor school performance, difficulties in interpersonal relationships and the use of alcohol and other drugs, which impairs the full development of the potential of children and adolescents.⁷

Recognizing that the impacts of domestic violence are reflected in both health and education, the School Health Program (SHP) is an effective strategy to address the vulnerabilities that undermine the development of children and youth, which is domestic violence.⁸ However, it is noteworthy that many professionals have difficulties in addressing this problem, as revealed in a study that addressed Primary Health Care (PHC) and pointed out the weaknesses of the health care network for the recognition of the problem and its referrals.⁹ This difficulty was also reported by teachers who tend to pass the responsibility of coping to the health sector, without seeking alternatives to discuss the issue.¹⁰ It is assessed, as Paulo Freire would say, that this so-called neutrality is the most comfortable, if not the most hypocritical, way of hiding the option, revealing the fear of accusing injustice. However, it is noteworthy that “to wash one's hands” in the face of oppression is to reinforce the power of the oppressor, opting for him.¹¹

OBJECTIVE

- To apprehend indicative signs and factors that compromise the identification of domestic violence against adolescents.

METHOD

This is a qualitative, descriptive study, based on Paulo Freire's critical-liberating perspective, conducted in a public elementary school located on the outskirts of Salvador (BA), Brazil.

The research population consisted of 20 teachers who had been teaching for at least six months at the institution. It is noteworthy that only one teacher was not found after two attempts, and the others, after clarifying the ethical issues, agreed to participate in the study, signing the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICT). It is pointed out that the research is linked to the action research entitled “University and public school: seeking strategies to address the factors that interfere in the teaching/learning process”, under the funding of the Bahia State Research Support Foundation (FAPESB), and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) (n° 384.208/2013).

The teachers were approached through extension educational actions on the themes: use/abuse of alcohol and other drugs; sexuality; bullying and domestic violence. These actions were promoted from 2013 to 2017, inserting them in the curriculum component Curriculum Action in Community and Society (CACS), and calling them “Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach to health problems related to violence”.

Regard to data collection, interviews were conducted between August and October 2017, in a private room, located in the educational institution itself. The interview was guided by a semi-structured form containing aspects related to the characterization of the collaborators and the following guiding questions: “How do you identify schoolchildren experiencing domestic violence?” and “What are the difficulties encountered in recognizing this problem?”.

The speeches were systematized through the Collective Subject Discourse (CSD). This method is defined as the organization of central ideas (CI) or anchorages (AC), and their corresponding key expressions (CKE) in similar thematic groupings, to compose a single collective statement. The speech organized to the collaborators was presented for validation. The interpretation of the data was based on Paulo Freire's critical-liberating perspective.

RESULTS

It is mentioned the female educators, participants of the study, in the female, considering that they were mostly women (70%), who declared themselves black, single and aged between 31 and 57 years. It is recorded that all reported having completed higher education and 90% declared to have specialization. It is emphasized that, although it is a subject little addressed in graduation, 90% revealed that they discussed the theme of violence during their specialization.

Two categories were listed from the Collective Subject Discourse: the first reveals the suggestive signs of the experience of domestic violence by

the female educators and the second consists of the factors that compromise the identification of the offense.

◆ **Central Idea 1: Suggestive signs of experiencing domestic violence in school children**

It is demonstrated in the discourse that the female educators suspect the experience of domestic violence from the presence of body marks, behavioral changes and the impairment of school performance and attendance, as illustrated by the central ideas.

◆ **Core Idea Synthesis 1A: Presence of Body Brands**

It is revealed that one of the indications for the suspicion of domestic violence by the female educators is to observe signs in the body of the students, such as bruises.

I notice physical marks on teens who experience domestic violence if there is any scratch or bruise. We already had students who always arrived with marks on their bodies and, in talking with them, we realized that the aggression had not happened at school, in some fight with the colleague. So we found it was at home. There was a student who had a purple face on one side and when I asked him he said the mother who had hit. That was a punch there! A physical aggression!

◆ **Core Idea Synthesis 1B: Behavioral Changes**

It is also understood that the female educators suspect domestic violence in the face of sudden changes in the way students behave towards their peers, and these changes may occur in different ways, either in relation to more hostile behaviors or in attitudes of retraction.

I realize that the change in behavior is an indication that they are experiencing violence. Some do very well at school, being aggressive. Most students who have no attention from their parents, to get their attention, do a lot at school. Another student who was dedicated, quiet and polite last year, I am noticing a radical difference in him this year: more response, playing a lot in the classroom, speaking bad words, is not doing the activities. It may be that he is being abused. The other extreme also happen: they may become more introvert, apathetic, melancholy, become isolated, lose contact with other colleagues, and their self-esteem diminishes. I attribute violence to these behavioral changes because each one reacts in a way, so you can pay attention to the behavior: if they start to have attention-grabbing attitudes, if they get aggressive or withdrawn.

◆ **Core idea synthesis 1C: School performance impairment and attendance**

It is considered that the suspicion of experiencing domestic violence can occur through the perception of changes in school performance, as indicated by the speech.

When the student has family problems, he or she cannot concentrate in the classroom, they are

bewildered, many lose interest in their studies. Lack of family foundation directly affects learning and can even cause them to miss classes. Since we have a way of knowing student attendance and behavior, even in other subjects, I identified that a boy spent a whole semester out of school, so I took the case to the board to investigate what was happening. If the teenager misses a lot of classes, it is a warning sign for the experience of violence.

◆ **Central Idea 2: Unfavorable Factors for Identifying Domestic Violence in School Children**

According to the female educators' view, the difficulty in recognizing the experience of domestic violence in schoolchildren is due to the high demand for work and the unpreparedness to identify the problem.

◆ **Core Idea Synthesis 2A: High Work Demand**

It is identified by the female educators, the excessive workload as a hindering element for the recognition of domestic violence, since there is no time to interact with the students, not even to listen, which would favor the identification of the offense.

Although school is not a place for treatment, students bring to the school environment the problems they have at home. But as much as we are all the time with the student, we experience a reality of going in and out of classes that can not capture situations of domestic violence. The teacher often ends up playing the role of father and mother, is overwhelmed, can not provide the necessary support, especially for lack of time, and ends up not having a good time to talk. Taking care of some students' private affairs ends up, in a way, overwhelming us, we have a limit. As much as society itself wants to put us in this role. We are not superheroes.

◆ **Core Idea Synthesis 2B: Professional Preparedness**

The lack of academic and professional training is listed as a limiting factor in the role of female educators in the face of violence, making it difficult not only to recognize the grievance, but also to act in such cases.

We teachers are not prepared to identify or deal with it. Despite being a very current problem, there are no spaces for discussion of these themes in the professional formation of the teacher. There is a gap in identifying and dealing with these situations of violence. I believe that if the theme of violence were addressed during teacher training, we would be better able to recognize and also to work with students who were experiencing this type of problem. I will not say that we would solve, but we would have more structure, including psychological to be able to direct the student. [...] I realize that one of my students suffers some kind of violence, but I don't know how to talk to her. I don't know how to act in these cases, call the police, call the Guardian Council, make the complaint. I don't even know how to recognize the violence. [...]

There are things that are beyond our reach, because we have no technical competence.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the female educators' discourse that the presence of physical marks, expressed on the body of adolescents through scratching and bruising, is a sign that suggests the experience of domestic violence. This hypothesis is corroborated by studies conducted in Brazil and the United States of America (USA), which showed that the head and neck are the main sites affected by lacerations, burns and bruises in adolescents related to violence.¹²⁻³ In studies conducted in Brazil and Uganda, it was argued that physical violence is the most identified by professionals working with children and adolescents, because it is easier to understand the marks resulting from aggression, as they are generally, immediate and visible.¹⁴⁻⁵

It is worth noting that, although body marks represent a strong indication of violence, they are not, by themselves, sufficient to confirm or refute aggression, as indicated by a study conducted in Sweden that precisely discusses the difficulty of recognition of domestic violence. It was argued by the teachers participating in this study that the identified traces can be understood as emerging from family problems, but are not necessarily related to violence, since the signs presented by the students may be the same as those found in other clinical situations, revealing the need to exercise a critical and reflective posture, seeking to seek explanations,¹⁶ and not stand as a passive character in the face of what happened.

From this perspective, it is suggested that dialogue, considered a central category in the relationship between students and teachers, is fundamental in the outcome of the cases.¹¹ In this communication process, it is essential that the teachers assume the position of listeners and are stripped of the belief of superiority in relation to the students, and sensitive to understand not only the verbal language, but also to interpret the "discourse", paying attention to facial features and gestures, which can often be stronger than orality itself.¹⁷

In this regard, it is noted that the teachers believe that each student manifests himself individually in the face of violence: there are those who become introvert and isolated in relation to the class; others are acting aggressively, undisciplined and/or irritably. It is inferred, therefore, that the suggestive signs of violence are not limited to physical marks, but also express themselves in the behavioral changes revealed in the discourse of the female educators.

In agreement with this research, it is noted that Swedish teachers have stated that, although it is difficult to detect or prove what happens in a

child's private life, many symptoms indicate that something is wrong, even if they do not really understand it, whatever the problem. It is mentioned that both the experience and the support of a skilled multidisciplinary team are essential to be able to perceive the subtle signs of violence, such as small changes in behavior. It is postulated, according to the teachers, that the most common way for a child to signal that he or she is not doing well is by showing altered or problematic behaviors such as aggression and depression. In addition to other evidence suggestive of domestic violence, there is the need for excessive attention, proximity and recognition by the female educator. However, it is noteworthy that some children do not show clear signs of cognitive or behavioral problems, even if they are experiencing violence, proving the importance of not ignoring the symptoms, even if vague.¹⁶

For the interviewees, these behavioral changes are configured as mechanisms used by young people to attract parental attention. However, it is noteworthy that behavioral changes are not always voluntary and/or deliberate, since people with a history of violence may sum up the experience of the event and present different body manifestations, even unconsciously. It was evidenced in a study with adolescent girls from the USA that those who suffered violence were the most likely to present chronic symptoms, such as: headache; sore throat; chest pain; stomach ache; menstrual cramps; painful urination; acne; cough; sweating; inappetence; weakness; tiredness; dizziness; insomnia; among others.¹⁸ Thus, regardless of the intention of calling attention or not, the urgency of professional preparation in order to recognize such signs as evidence of the experience of domestic violence, and should therefore be investigated. Therefore, it is necessary that female educators value the daily experiences of all subjects involved in the educational process and be willing to dialogue knowledge with the social reality of their students, as proposed by Paulo Freire.¹²

Another sign revealed in the discourse of the female educators, as an indication of domestic violence by the students, is the alterations in the school performance,¹⁹ indicating the need for school professionals to be aware of their students' absences and poor grades, and should not consider such events as natural and routine, since the conditions in which students live reflect on their learning ability.¹⁷ Despite the evidence of this commitment for the student, the variations in school performance and other behaviors related to adolescent and common changes in this phase of life are considered.

Due to the naturalization of domestic violence in society, it is possible that many students do not perceive themselves as victims because the daily

living in a family space permeated by disrespect and violence contributes for the teenager to understand it as something common and expected. Thus, it is suggested that experiencing or witnessing the offense may cause adolescents to reproduce disrespectful relationships in their future relationships, as in a study that showed a greater possibility of perpetration of violence against their partner by men who had experienced domestic abuse during childhood.²⁰

In view of the naturalized and transgenerational nature of violence, there is a need for strategies to contain it, requiring professional preparation to recognize and intervene in situations of violence. It is inferred that the professional unpreparedness, pointed out in this study, mainly regarding the recognition of signs suggesting the experience of violence, as well as in relation to what to do when the abuse is suspected, may be related to the absence of the theme in the curricula during vocational training. In a study conducted in Rio de Janeiro, it was pointed out that failures in academic education and the lack of professionals prepared to deal with issues related to violence, the relevance of professional training.²¹ It is found that the Statute of Child and Adolescent (SCA) discusses the relevance of continuing education for the development of skills necessary for the prevention, identification of evidence, diagnosis and coping with all forms of violence against children and adolescents.²²

It is noted that Paulo Freire also argued in favor of the “permanent formation” of female educators, which should be based predominantly on reflection on daily life, aiming at the creation and recreation of their praxis, based on the problems experienced. It is considered that being a transformative agent implies deconstructing in the face of conflicting situations in order to seek alternatives that generate results in the world, in the context of the lives of students. From this perspective, the challenges in addressing domestic violence cases can be considered as “limit situations” experienced by teachers, and should therefore be privileged objects of the critical-formative process.¹² Given this conjuncture, it is necessary to look carefully at the phenomenon of violence between children and adolescents in the school environment, in order to signal the importance of strategies that enable the discovery of children's and youth stories by education professionals.

It is pointed out that the perception of signs suggestive of the experience of domestic violence, either by physical marks, behavioral changes, or drop in school performance, and the ability to make the association with possible conflicts in the domestic space are influenced the bond established between the student and the teacher.

In this sense, it is suggested, considering the dialogue defended in Freire's perspective,¹² that teachers should be encouraged to talk with students about different personal issues such as home situation as well as asking direct questions about violence, but this opening will only occur if this professional has a good relationship with the child.¹¹ Thus, it is argued that the building of bonds of trust will contribute not only to make the adolescent feel comfortable to report the violence suffered, but also to make the teacher aware to understand the subjectivities of their students.

On the other hand, it is observed that the conjuncture in which the female educator's work process develops makes it difficult to establish the proximity between faculty and students and, consequently, the suspicion and investigation of domestic violence. It is evident from the collective discourse that work overload is a factor that impairs the process of identifying domestic violence. Faced with this reality, it is essential that the work processes of teachers be reevaluated in order to value the formation of integrity citizens, in detriment of a banking education with a traditional and content approach, as proposed by Paulo Freire, who defended that education is a way of intervening in the collective life, acting as a diffuser and producer of values that govern the lives of the subjects.¹¹ From this perspective, studies have indicated the direction for the progressive pedagogical approach, in which theory and practice go hand in hand with the formation of citizens capable of changing social reality.²³ For this, a model of education that guarantees children and adolescents fundamental rights, such as a life free of violence, is of utmost importance.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded from the discourse of female educators that they conjecture the experience of domestic violence by students through the observation of body marks, changes in behavior and based on implications on school performance and attendance of these young people. These evidences are considered as subsidies to alert not only female educators, but also health professionals, about the possibility that adolescents are experiencing abuse and also to raise concerns about the need to prepare them to identify violence.

It is noteworthy, despite the relevance of the findings to the unmasking of the grievance, that the study is limited by not being able to state that the presence of the listed signals, in fact, refers to the experience of the phenomenon. It is necessary, even if the study does not establish a cause and effect relationship, the consideration of these signs in the investigation of the injury, which represents the duty of professionals

committed to the health and quality of life of children and adolescents. It is proposed, according to Paulo Freire, that education should not be based only on the transfer of syllabus, but, above all, based on an ethics of the development of human life in its various potentials, since education changes people and people change the world. In this context, the importance of multidisciplinary action is highlighted, especially in the field of health and education, and the Health at School Program (HSP) is strategic for this purpose.

Even if they observe the suggestive signs of the experience of violence, the female educators refer to the lack of training and work overload as obstacles in this identification process, pointing to the need for studies that produce strategies to enable school management which calls for a reorganization of the way of working and qualifies professionals to favor the recognition and management of violence. It is demonstrated by the study, while recognizing the limitations encountered by education professionals when trying to reconcile work demands, associated with an extensive workload and focused on disciplinary content, the need for a more sensitive look at the issues experienced by adolescents that may affect their physical and mental development, as well as their school commitment and performance. In this sense, it can be seen that the HSP can be a care strategy combined with the school, taking into account the possibility of using health education linked to the theme of violence.

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