

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**WORK VIOLENCE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN RELATION TO COPING MEASURES\***  
**VIOLÊNCIA LABORAL: PERCEPÇÕES DE PROFESSORES QUANTO ÀS MEDIDAS DE ENFRENTAMENTO**  
**VIOLENCIA LABORAL: PERCEPCIONES DE LOS PROFESORES CON RESPECTO A LAS MEDIDAS DE AFRONTAMIENTO**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** to know the perception of teachers of elementary and high schools about measures to avoid violence in classrooms. **Method:** this is a qualitative, descriptive study, with teachers from elementary and high schools in two public schools. Data was collected through recorded audio interviews, and for the analysis, the Content Analysis technique was adopted in the Thematic Analysis modality. **Results:** it is registered that the majority of teachers were female (n = 24; 77.42%) and were in the age group from 31 to 40 years old (35.48%). It is revealed, in relation to education (54.84%), that they had the title of specialist *Lato sensu*. Based on the speeches, a thematic category was constituted, << Perceiving the forms of protection against the violence suffered by the teacher >>, subdivided into five subcategories. **Conclusion:** it was noticed that measures to reduce violence in the perception of teachers include strict legislation and the punishment of aggressors, the decrease in the number of students in classrooms, the appreciation of teaching work and teacher support networks, the presence of security professionals in the school environment, the creation of spaces for dialogues and the support of psychologists. **Descriptors:** Workplace Violence; Faculty; Occupational Health; Public Health; Schools; Primary Prevention.

**RESUMO**

**Objetivo:** conhecer a percepção dos professores dos Ensinos Fundamental e Médio sobre as medidas para se evitar a violência em salas de aula. **Método:** trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, descritivo, com docentes dos Ensinos Fundamental e Médio de duas escolas da rede pública. Coletaram-se os dados por meio de entrevistas em áudio gravadas, e, para a análise, adotou-se a técnica de Análise de Conteúdo na modalidade Análise Temática. **Resultados:** registra-se que a maioria dos docentes era do sexo feminino (n=24; 77,42%) e estava na faixa etária dos 31 aos 40 anos de idade (35,48%). Revela-se, em relação à escolaridade (54,84%), que tinham titulação de especialista *Lato sensu*. Constituiu-se, a partir das falas, uma categoria temática, << Percebendo as formas de proteção contra a violência sofrida pelo professor >>, subdividida por cinco subcategorias. **Conclusão:** percebeu-se que as medidas para a diminuição da violência na percepção dos professores incluem a legislação rigorosa e a punição dos agressores, a diminuição do número de alunos nas salas de aula, a valorização do trabalho docente e as redes de apoio ao professor, a presença de profissionais de segurança no âmbito escolar, a criação de espaços de diálogos e o apoio de psicólogos. **Descritores:** Violência no Trabalho; Docentes; Saúde do Trabalhador; Saúde Pública; Instituições Acadêmicas; Prevenção Primária.

**RESUMEN**

**Objetivo:** conocer la percepción de los docentes de las escuelas primarias y secundarias sobre las medidas para evitar la violencia en las aulas de clase. **Método:** este es un estudio cualitativo, descriptivo, con maestros de escuelas primarias y secundarias en dos escuelas públicas. Los datos se recopilaron a través de entrevistas de audio grabadas, y para el análisis, se adoptó la técnica de Análisis de Contenido en la modalidad de Análisis Temático. **Resultados:** se registra que la mayoría de los docentes eran mujeres (n = 24; 77.42%) y pertenecían al grupo de edad de 31 a 40 años (35.48%). Se revela, en relación con la educación (54.84%), que tenían el título de especialista *Lato sensu*. Sobre la base de los discursos, se constituyó una categoría temática, << Percibir las formas de protección contra la violencia sufrida por el profesor >>, subdividida en cinco subcategorías. **Conclusión:** se observó que las medidas para reducir la violencia en la percepción de los docentes incluyen una legislación estricta y el castigo de los agresores, la disminución del número de estudiantes en las aulas, la apreciación del trabajo docente y las redes de apoyo docente, la presencia de profesionales de la seguridad en el entorno escolar, la creación de espacios de diálogo y el apoyo de psicólogos. **Descriptor:** Violencia Laboral; Facultad; Salud Laboral; Salud Pública; Instituciones Académicas; Prevención Primaria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence in the workplace is a serious violation of people's rights, as it constitutes a disturbing social stressor, presenting itself as a threat to the dignity, safety, health and well-being of all those involved.<sup>1</sup> There is a significant correlation between violence at work and physical and mental illness, presenting itself as an occupational risk.<sup>2</sup>

Among the professions that are most prone to violence, teachers are, that is, educators have an occupational risk of exposure to violence.<sup>3</sup> It is emphasized that suffering acts of violence can affect the physical and psychological integrity of workers, which can cause or aggravate diseases, changes in sleep, depression and anxiety, in addition to affecting students, employees and society.<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that mental problems have been presented as a major problem for the well-being of teachers and, consequently, of students.<sup>3</sup>

It was identified, in a study carried out in the United States with two thousand teachers of different educational levels, that 80% of the interviewees reported having suffered at least one experience of acts of violence, with 94% being carried out by students and 44 % of respondents pointed out that they were physically assaulted.<sup>4</sup> In Brazil, it was indicated in an investigation carried out in the city of São Paulo (SP), that, among the cases of violence carried out against teachers, verbal aggression appeared in 39%, moral harassment, in 10%; bullying, 6%, physical aggression, 5%, discrimination and theft, 5%, and armed robbery or robbery, 1%.<sup>5</sup>

It is believed, in view of this scenario, that a study on the theme of workplace violence among teachers is essential, as expanding knowledge about violence at work in this population may provide managers, together with teachers and society, with the search for strategies to face this problem and improve the quality of life in the work environment. It is also argued that work can be a source for public policies against violence in the school environment. It is also noted the scarcity of studies on school violence in the Brazilian reality.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the following question is asked: "What measures do teachers think would contribute to prevent or reduce violence in their work environment?"

## OBJECTIVE

- To know the perception of elementary and high school teachers about measures to avoid violence in classrooms.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative, descriptive study, carried out with teachers from two public schools (A and B) of Elementary and High School in a medium-sized city in the North of the State of Paraná (PR), Brazil. These schools are located in different regions of the city.

Teachers from schools who met the following inclusion criteria were invited by intent: teachers from elementary and high schools involved in the teaching-learning process of students and with effective contracts for at least 12 months. Teachers who worked in other modalities were excluded, such as special education, professional education not linked to high school and teachers of complementary education, as well as those on vacation and / or leave of any kind.

It is pointed out that, when the convergence of the speeches occurred, that is, the redundancy of information, the data collection was ended.

Thus, it appears that a total of 22 teachers took part in the study, 12 from school A and ten from school B.

Data was collected between the months of July 2018 and February 2019, through individual, semi-structured and audio-recorded interviews, previously scheduled and held in rooms reserved in the schools themselves, with an average duration of 18 minutes and conducted by principal researcher, based on the following guiding question: "What measures do you think would contribute to prevent or reduce violence in your work environment?"

Thematic Content Analysis was used to systematize the data,<sup>7</sup> which is configured as a set of techniques that are used in the analysis of data in order to establish the core meaning of each discourse. Thus, three steps were followed: 1) pre-analysis, in which the floating reading and the formulation of hypotheses occurred; 2) exploration of the material, when coding and classification into categories and subcategories took place and 3) treatment of the results obtained, guided by the method of reflection and interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

The ethical precepts established in Resolution nº 466/12 of the National Health Council were respected in all stages of the research and the project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under CAAE nº 87890218.4.0000.5231. It is noteworthy that all participants consented to participate through the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICT) and, to preserve anonymity after the speeches, the letter P followed by the numbering 1, 2, 3 was used to identify the interviewees and so on.

**RESULTS**

In relation to the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, the majority was female (n = 24; 77.42%). The ages were distributed by age group, with most of the interviewees being between 31 and 40 years old (n = 11; 35.48%), followed by 51 to 60 years old (n = 9; 29.03 %) and 41 to 50 years old (n = 7; 22.58%). The age groups between 18 and 30 years old (n =

3; 9.68%) and over 60 years old (n = 1; 3.23%) were revealed in a smaller number. It is noted, with regard to education, that 17 (54.84%) had the highest degree of specialization, 11 (35.48%) had a master's degree and three (n = 3; 9.68%), undergraduate.

From the empirical corpus resulting from the interviews, a thematic category and its subcategories were identified, as shown in figure 1.

| Thematic category   | Subcategories   |
|---|---|
| Perceiving the forms of protection against violence suffered by the teacher | Laws as protective measures against violence<br>The ratio of the number of students per teacher<br>Valuing and supporting networks for teachers<br>Punishment and presence of security professionals in the school environment<br>Creation of spaces for dialogues and support from psychologists |

Figure 1. Thematic category and subcategories extracted from teachers' testimonies according to the concept of measures to prevent or reduce violence in their work environment. Londrina (PR), Brazil, 2019.

The results presented in Figure 1 are detailed below by subcategories.

**Laws as protective measures against violence**

It appears that the teachers pointed out that there must be laws, that they are enforced and that these laws can impose limits.

*We should have school rules and regulations that can be followed, that is, we need laws that protect us. (P1)*

*The laws do exist, but they are soft and nothing happens. It needs clear laws and to be followed. (P21)*

*Laws are required that impose limits on freedom and that public bodies work effectively. (P22)*

◆ **The ratio of the number of students per teacher**

It was revealed that classrooms have a large number of students, which favors acts of violence, as indicated by the statements.

*I would need to have smaller classes. There are a lot of students in the classrooms, which leads to acts of violence of all kinds. (P8)*

*Having a lot of students per classroom, that is, more than 40 students per teacher, leads to violence. (P14)*

*Classrooms with a maximum of 20 students and not overcrowding from 45 to 50 students. How can there be no violence with this number of students for just one teacher? (P16)*

*Small classes, for sure, would reduce acts of violence against teachers. We have 45 to 50 students per class. (P17)*

◆ **Valuing and supporting networks for teachers**

It was mentioned that support and appreciation, both by students and by the family, are essential for teachers to be respected, reducing acts of violence. It was suggested, as a way to guarantee recognition, the creation of safety nets that involve different bodies responsible for basic education.

*The students see us as a class of "employees", they do not value us and so do many families. Local and national actions are needed for the teacher to be valued. (P3)*

*Policies for valuing the education professional and, dialogues between students, parents and society about the importance of respect for others. (P4)*

*We need a real Protection Network involving Guardianship Council, CRAS and other segments. Still, public programs are needed to respect and value teachers. (P5)*

*We need to be valued and recognized by students, families and society. Without proper valuation, violence does happen. (P9)*

**Punishment and presence of security professionals in the school environment**

In relation to punishment, a sense of indignation and revolt on the part of these teachers was detected, as they do not see effective measures being taken by the management in the face of the students' inappropriate conduct, whatever they may be, leading them to think about more safety, with the presence of trained professionals to deal with certain situations described in the following statements.

*It needs effective punishment against the aggressors or we will continue to be attacked. (P6)*

*Penalty to the aggressor is required. (P10)*

*School patrol presence and real punishment. (P12)*

*Increased punishments or more forceful punishments. (P15)*

*The school should have security staff and the punishment of minors should be stricter. (P20)*

#### ◆ Creation of spaces for dialogues and support from psychologists

*According to the interviewees' statements, dialogue and psychologist support are configured as a way to face and prevent acts of violence in the school environment.*

*Support from a psychologist and psychopedagogue in each institution would certainly reduce violence. (P2)*

*Preventive work is needed. I believe in more frequent conversation spaces between students, teachers and guardians could help a lot. (P7)*

*I think it is necessary to hold meetings between parents, teachers and students more frequently. (P13)*

*I believe that more dialogue is needed as between teachers, students and those responsible. (P14)*

*Insert support from Psychology professionals in the school environment, both for students, teachers and guardians. (P18)*

*The support of professionals of Psychology constant in our workplace attending students, teachers, parents or guardians. (P19)*

## DISCUSSION

It was pointed out, through the statements of the interviewees of this study, that stricter laws are needed to curb acts of violence. It is understood, in fact, that laws should be protective measures against violence and, for that, they need to be known by society, strictly followed and respected, however, this often does not occur, leading to episodes of violence, mainly, reflected in the school context.<sup>8</sup>

The need to offer assistance and support workers who are victims of violence is revealed, therefore, it is necessary to create laws and norms so that, in fact, acts of violence are restrained.<sup>9</sup> It is also highlighted by the results obtained in this research, that teachers cannot feel charged with educating and teaching without feeling, also, safe in their work environment.

On the other hand, it is pointed out that only school laws and norms are not enough to face violence due to the complexity of this phenomenon. It is known that there is an enormous social debt of governments that, in most cases, have inflamed speeches on the theme, but have done little in the search for real attitudes that indicate answers, even in the medium and long term, so that, that social inclusion, the reduction of crime and poverty can be effectively promoted and, in turn, reduce acts of violence against schools,<sup>10</sup> since violence in schools is directly related to community and intra-family violence.<sup>11</sup>

In relation to the number of students per teacher, a factor related to acts of violence was confirmed in the conception of the participants in this investigation in another study, by revealing

that classes with more than 25 students are more likely to register acts of violence.<sup>12</sup> Other authors are found<sup>13</sup> that indicate that the ratio of the number of students per teacher, in addition to preventing violence, is also linked to the quality of education, since the overcrowding of classrooms, in addition to causing a deficit in the quality of teaching, also brings losses to the health of teachers and, consequently, of students.

It is emphasized that the number of students per teacher is a very important point for the effective progress of teaching, and it is possible to resolve the issue by determining a maximum number of students per class, through Law 9.394 / 1996. It is known that this law mentions that pre-school classes and the first two years of elementary school cannot exceed 25 students and the classes of the other grades of elementary school and those of high school must have a maximum of 35 students.<sup>14</sup>

Teachers' appreciation of this investigation was defined as a mechanism to combat violence. It appears that researchers<sup>22</sup> affirm that the valorization of the teacher is of fundamental importance for the development of his activities with satisfaction and, consequently, of a teaching with quality, however, little is done by the managers and by the public policies to make the recognition of this category so real important for any nation.<sup>15</sup>

Schools were created with the purpose of educating and protecting adolescents, however, a significant portion of these schools have been configured in spaces that violate their rights.<sup>16</sup>

It is believed, therefore, that they promote acts of violence against teachers and even among students, since the person who is a victim of violence may reflect negatively on their relationship with others, which ends up resulting in practices of violence against teachers. It should be noted that classroom environments with a positive climate, good interaction between professionals and students and students working in a team significantly reduce the aggressive behavior of students.<sup>17</sup>

It is pointed out, with regard to support networks as protection measures against violence, that it is necessary, first of all, that everyone involved in schools foster democratic relations, in which respect for individual differences is a daily practice, so that harmonious coexistence among all is encouraged and, for this to be effective, holistic, interdisciplinary and permanent measures are necessary<sup>18-19</sup>. It is necessary to adopt public policies to reduce the violence around (around, around) schools, as well as in society as a whole, since they may have a direct impact on reducing this phenomenon in the school environment.<sup>20</sup>

It is considered essential to understand that the violent actions imputed against teachers have a

direct influence on the environment in which the student lives in society. It is argued, therefore, that public policies to reduce crime in the neighborhood of the school can contribute to reduce the aggressiveness of students. It is also observed that school management actions can also collaborate to facilitate the socialization of students, such as distributing classes by grade equivalence, promoting extracurricular activities and decreasing the number of students per classroom.<sup>18</sup>

It is noteworthy that teachers and society believe that measures should be taken against acts of violence only referring to students, that is, there is a culture that students are seen as the only ones to blame for this situation, however, it is known that violence has several causes, such as poverty, reduced social chances, political interests, economic interests, drug use, among others.<sup>21</sup>

Changes in teaching work conditions should be leveraged, especially by offering more security.<sup>22</sup> However, prevention actions at different levels are recommended, integrating social and educational policies,<sup>8</sup> highlighting the educational field. It is understood that preventing violence in schools is extremely necessary<sup>32</sup>, since education is the main way to fight violence.<sup>19</sup>

It is verified, by the teachers of this study, that the creation of spaces for dialogues is important for the prevention of violence. Similar data were found in a study with education professionals in which the need for a space with dialogue for the prevention of school violence is stated.<sup>20</sup>

It is noted that the creation of spaces for dialogues and support from psychologists can assist teachers in coping with violence, since speaking and being heard can be a way of reducing stress, as well as being the beginning of joint actions between those involved to face violence.<sup>23</sup>

It is known that listening to everyone, getting to know students' family life, promoting lectures and working with the multidisciplinary team to reduce interpersonal conflicts and affectivity in the school environment, as well as encouraging reporting and creating support networks, are essential measures so that everyone involved in the school community understands the rules imposed on everyday life and the functioning of the school, in addition to the development of educational actions on the topic of violence in schools.<sup>23</sup>

Sugere-se que escutar os professores sobre o seu trabalho é uma forma eficiente e de baixo custo, acolhendo as suas inquietações e potencializando-os para exercerem as suas atividades com o máximo de satisfação.<sup>24</sup> Percebe-se, com o crescimento da violência no âmbito escolar, a necessidade da presença de profissionais da segurança, como os policiais, para

intervir em situações indesejadas e que fogem do controle da própria escola.

Emphasize authors<sup>33</sup> who affirm that the existence of the police in the school is important, as it brings security through the appropriate postures against acts of violence.<sup>23</sup> The psychologist is considered as one of the professionals who can assist the teacher in conflict situations, such as violence, stimulating a better interpersonal relationship and helping them to face and transform their own feelings in the face of the situations to which they are exposed at work, seeking to reduce suffering. It is understood that this professional can also contribute to assist victimized teachers.<sup>25</sup> It stands out, in the light of the information collected, the figure of the work nurse, who works through methods and techniques for the prevention of occupational risks, understanding, in this sense, violence as a psychosocial risk<sup>26</sup> in which this professional can operate effectively in helping teachers who are victims of violence, creating safety measures for this type of work, in addition to strengthening social relationships between education and health professionals.<sup>27</sup>

It is noted that this study has, as a limitation, the fact that it covered teachers from two schools in a single municipality in the State of Paraná. It is observed, however, that this investigation did not intend to exhaust the possibilities of analysis on the theme of measures adopted against violence at work according to the perception of teachers, but rather to clarify the understanding of this phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the teachers, in their speeches, revealed that the measures that would contribute to the reduction of violence include the strict legislation and punishment for the aggressors, that is, laws that impose limits on the aggressors, the decrease in the number of students in classrooms, the appreciation of teaching work and teacher support networks, the presence of security professionals in the school environment and the creation of spaces for dialogues and support from psychologists.

It is noted that most of the measures pointed out by teachers against violence are of an immediate nature, that is, urgent, however, it should be emphasized that violence is directly related to the social debt of governments, that is, there are debts to the society with regard to social inclusion and the reduction of crime and poverty.

Finally, it is noteworthy that violence in the school environment is a complex phenomenon that encompasses issues of a cultural, family, economic and affective nature, requiring public policies that interact and must adjust frequently due to the complexity of the factors involved. Joint planning

becomes necessary, involving teachers, administrators, parents or guardians, students and society, so that actions are implemented in order to guarantee the safety of teachers and, consequently, of everyone in the school environment. It is considered essential to create a culture of zero tolerance for violence.

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