

Prevalence of Child Sexual Violence in Brazil in the Period 2010-2018: an Ecological Study

Prevalência de Violência Sexual Infantil no Brasil no Período de 2010-2018: um Estudo Ecológico

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Abstract

Violence is characterized as a sociocultural phenomenon that can affect the individual physically, psychosocially and cognitively. Child sexual abuse is one of the biggest public health problems, however, its prevalence is still undefined. It is also the cause of several psychopathological disorders and future difficulties in the context of the victim's interpersonal and sexual relationships. To describe the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Brazil in the of period 2010 – 2018. Descriptive ecological study, whose data were obtained by consulting the SINAN database, made available by DATASUS. Where cases of child sexual violence between 0 and 14 years old were selected from 2010 to 2018. A steady progression was evidenced in all regions and in almost every year, in cases of sexual violence. The North and South regions have the highest prevalence. Cases were more frequent in females (82.7%), between 10 and 14 years old (49%), with the main aggressors being parents (13.8%) and stepfathers (12.9%). The prevalence of child sexual violence is higher among children aged 10 to 14 years, female and the cases are more concentrated in the north region.

Keywords: Childhood Abuse, Sexual. Epidemiology. Child.

Resumo

A violência é caracterizada como um fenômeno sociocultural que pode afetar o indivíduo em âmbito físico, psicossocial e cognitivo. O abuso sexual infantil é um dos maiores problemas de saúde pública, porém, sua prevalência ainda é indefinida. Sendo também causador de diversos transtornos psicopatológicos e dificuldades futuras em âmbito de relações interpessoais e sexuais da vítima. Portanto o objetivo do presente estudo é descrever a prevalência do abuso sexual infantil no Brasil no período de 2010 - 2018. Trata-se de um estudo ecológico descritivo, cujos dados foram obtidos por meio de consulta à base de dados SINAN, disponibilizados pelo DATASUS. Onde foram selecionados os casos de violência sexual infantil, de 0 a 14 anos registrada no período de 2010 a 2018. Foi evidenciado uma progressão contínua em todas as regiões e em quase todos os anos, nos casos de violência sexual. As Regiões Norte e Sul apresentam maior prevalência. Os casos eram mais frequentes no sexo feminino (82,7%), entre 10 e 14 anos (49%), sendo os principais agressores pais (13,8%) e padrastos (12,9%). Pode-se concluir que a prevalência de violência sexual infantil é maior entre crianças de 10 a 14 anos, do sexo feminino e os casos estão mais concentrados na região Norte.

Palavras-chave: Abuso Sexual na Infância. Epidemiologia. Criança.

1 Introduction

Violence is characterized as a sociocultural phenomenon that can affect the individual physically, psychosocially and cognitively. Within these parameters, there is sexual violence against children and adolescents. This, in turn, is defined as any sexual act or game intended to sexually stimulate the child or adolescent, with the aim of using it to obtain sexual satisfaction, in which the authors of the violence are at a more advanced stage of psychosocial development than the child or adolescent and which may have permanent consequences in the life of this individual¹.

According to the World Health Organization (who), child sexual abuse is one of the greatest public health problems and its prevalence is still undefined, since many children and adolescents do not reveal abuse, but are only able to report in

adulthood. In addition, most abusers have a direct connection with the victim and exercise a form of power and persuasion. Violence is often camouflaged and imperceptible, because of the place where it is practiced, most of the time within their own home, and whose aggressors are usually their relatives, close people or those who trust them and/or their parents².

Thus, often, this victim becomes susceptible to other victimization situations, being unable to avoid them, and associated with it, they may develop psychopathological disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety disorders, totally related to shame and low self-esteem caused by violence. Moreover, it is common for these victims to begin to develop sexual difficulties and interpersonal relationships in adulthood, due to the association of sexual activity with negative emotions and memories, generalizing these reactions for future experiences. In addition to impacting

various health problems in childhood and adult life, sexual abuse generates substantial burdens on the health system, due to the need for more medical consultations, hospital admissions and referral to specialized and integral care for people in situations of violence^{3,4}.

Since the Federal Constitution of 1988, the principles of full protection of the children's and adolescents' rights have been included, with absolute priority and that the theme sexual violence has special relevance. But still, in the Brazilian scenario, child sexual abuse was characterized by veiled violence, little discussed and little taken up by public policies. Due to that, in 2000, a National Plan was created to confront sexual violence against Children and Adolescents based on 6 strategic axes aimed at combating and ensuring care and safety to children and adolescents against impunity for such violence, but still, child sexual abuse has been growing and becoming more frequent in Brazilian society⁵.

Therefore, the present study aims to describe the prevalence of child sexual abuse, from 0 to 14 years, in Brazil according to the regions, between 2010 and 2018.

2 Material and Methods

This is a descriptive ecological study, whose data were obtained by consulting the Notification Records Information System (SINAN) database, made available by the SUS computer Department (DATASUS), at the electronic address (<https://datasus.saude.gov.br/sistemas/>), which was accessed on 09/23/2020 until 10/01/2020.

For the present study, all cases of child sexual violence, aged from zero to 14 years, recorded from 2010 to 2018, were selected. In order to avoid errors of delay of notification, it was chosen to analyze the data available until 2018, the last year in which the complete data were included.

Data on sexual violence were systematized by age group, year by year, in the period from 2010 to 2018, level of schooling, color, more prevalent sex of victims and abusers, as well as the relationship of the abuser with the victim. Prevalence rates were calculated (number of children and adolescents who suffered violence in relation to the total number of children and adolescents x 100,000). All cases were performed with support in the Microsoft Office Excel® 2016 program.

3 Results and Discussion

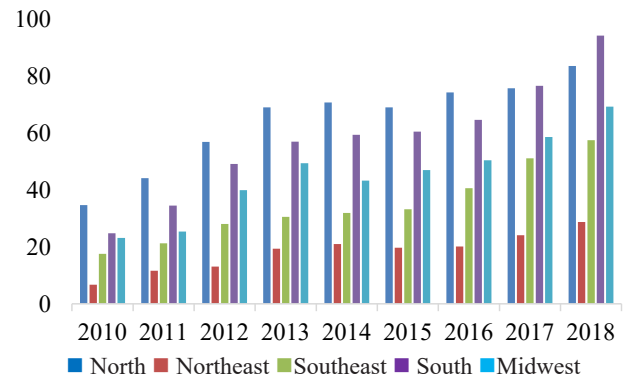
Table 1 shows the absolute number and percentage of child sexual abuse or violence records in Brazil, from 2010 to 2018. While Figure 1 shows the prevalence of cases distribution of sexual violence in the macro-regions of the country according to the years, and a continuous progression is evidenced in all regions and almost every year. The North and South Regions have a higher prevalence, however, in 2018, the South region surpasses it, reaching a number three times higher than the Northeast Region, which has a lower prevalence when compared to all regions.

Table 1 – Absolute number of children who suffered sexual violence between 2010 and 2018

Variables	Absolute number (%)
Gender	
Male	26244 (17.3)
Female	125479 (82.7)
Race	
White	53394 (39.8)
Black	11666 (8.7)
Yellow	905 (0.7)
Brown	66460 (49.5)
Indigenous	1695 (1.2)
Age	
<1 year	3170 (2.0)
1-4 years	30623 (20.1)
5-9 years	43724 (28.9)
10-14 years	74218 (49.0)

Source: Research data.

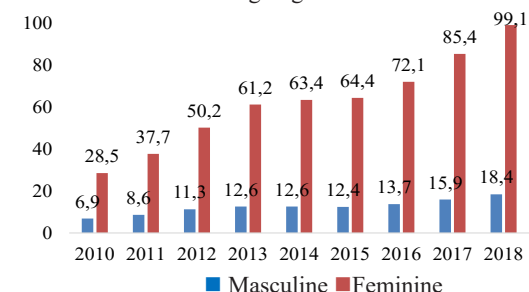
Figure 1 - Prevalence (number of cases/100,000 inhabitants) of sexual violence in Brazilian macroregions



Source: Research data.

Regarding the number of cases of Child Sexual violence according to the victim's gender, within an age group <1 year up to 14 years, between 2010 and 2018, a total of 151,735 cases occurred. In addition, it is important to point out that 125,479 (82.7%) were female, and 25,244 (17.3%) were male. Thus, the number of cases of Sexual Violence against girls is 5 times higher when compared to the number of cases against boys during the period 2010 to 2018. In both genders, the number of cases increased every year, resulting in a higher increase in 2018. Finally, it is worth adding that the numbers of cases against male children had small variations from one year to the other, with a drop of 99 cases registered from 2013 to 2015.

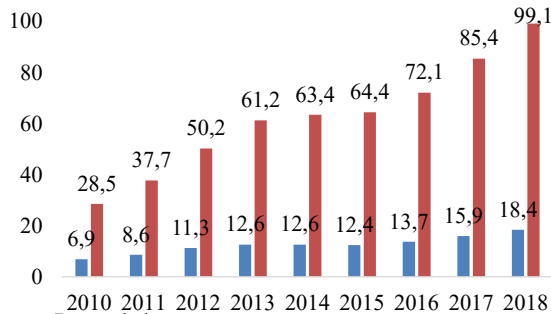
Figure 2 - Prevalence (Number of Cases/100,000 inhabitants) of sexual violence according to gender between 2010 and 2018



Source: Research data.

The present study analyzed the number of cases of each age group according to gender, from 2010 to 2018. Figure 3 shows a greater occurrence of cases in female gender, with ages under 1 year, 1 to 4 years and 5-9 years of age a small difference between female and male gender. Whereas, against children in the age group 10-14, there was a substantial increase in the total cases of sexual abuse in the female population, representing 70.2% of the cases, which shows a significant difference of about 40% in the number of cases comparing the genders in this age group.

Figure 3 - Prevalence (Number of Cases/100,000 inhabitants) of child sexual violence by age and gender



Source: Research data.

Cases of child sexual abuse also had a distinction as to the prevalence per race, being higher in children of brown race, with a constant increase in this period analyzed.

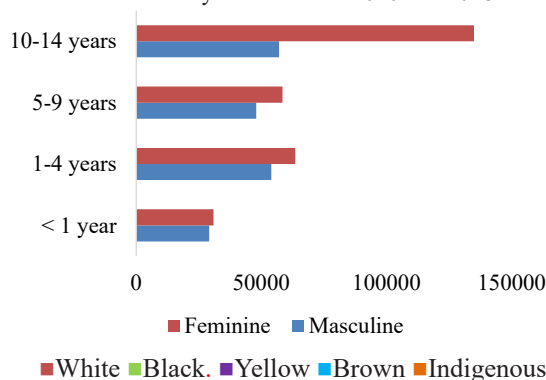
As to the aggressor characteristics, Table 2 shows the absolute number and percentage of child sexual abuse or violence records in Brazil, according to the aggressor mother, father, stepfather and/or stepmother, between the periods studied.

Table 2 – Absolute number of children who suffered sexual violence between 2010 and 2018

Bond	Absolute number (%)
Mother	4464 (3.3)
Stepmother	364 (0.3)
Stepfather	17463 (12.9)
Unknown	14714 (10.9)
Father	18646 (13.8)

Source: Research data.

Figure 4 - Prevalence (Number of Cases/100,000 inhabitants) of child sexual violence by race between 2010 and 2018



Source: Research data.

According to the data presented, most cases of children sexual violence in the period studied were caused by parents, representing about 13.8% of the total. Right after, in the sequence, the stepfathers, responsible for 17463 cases, 12.9%. Such numbers reveal that men are the main aggressors and stepmothers compose the profile with fewer notifications.

Female children are the main victims, regardless of the profile or sex of the aggressor and there is a significant difference in the proportion of cases. Analyzing the stepfather as an aggressor, about 90.2% of the victims were female. Next comes unknown aggressors (85.2%), parents (83.3%), mothers (79.8%) and stepmothers (77.1%).

According to the data collected, when the parents were the aggressors, most of the victims were in the age range of 1-4 years (35.3%). Children aged 10-14 years were the most attacked when the aggressors were stepfathers (50.3%), mothers (41.8%) or unknown (67.4%). The stepmothers did not have a significant age group with discrepancy for preference of victims, but the children in the 1-4-year-old age group were the least abused by this profile (2.4%).

Child sexual violence is characterized as a socio-cultural issue that affects several problems, whether social, physical, emotional, psychological and cognitive, that can endure throughout life, moreover, these repercussions on health are further intensified in this public because of the growth and development process that are included, and thus a public health problem. However, violence cannot be understood only as a violation or transgression of standards, rules or laws, but also as asymmetry of a hierarchical relationship of inequality, with the objective of domination, exploitation and oppression, with an impact on the silence and passivity of the assaulted^{6,7}.

For these reasons, it is possible to count on the protective measures of the child that should be treated by notifying sexual abuse to the protective organs (Guardianship Council, Police Stations and Public Prosecutor's Office), because this will contribute to the fight against the victim's individual violence and help to understand this phenomenon. In addition, in order to contribute to the reduction of rape as vulnerable victim, there are punitive measures to the aggressor that is described in Article 227-A of the Brazilian Penal Code, applied to every person who practices sexual assault or libidinous act with a minor aged 14 years, being punished with a penalty of imprisonment from eight to 15 years⁸.

When analyzing the prevalence of sexual abuse in the macroregions, although surprising the highest number of cases is found in the South region and the lowest in the Northeast, these results should be analyzed and considered with greater care, because, some regions may be more notified when compared to others, and therefore data such as these should not reflect the real enormity of the presentation of child sexual violence in the social context.

With the present study, it was also possible to observe that the prevalence of child sexual violence according to sex each year is more evident in female gender compared

to male gender, reaching 5 times higher, with a constant increase every year. However, girls are the greatest victims when compared to boys, however, this difference is not large enough to justify the lack of studies on the male population in Brazil, and the theme of male sexual violence still lacks greater social visibility, since sexual violence against girls is reported more frequently than sexual violence against boys. Therefore, aspects such as the shame and difficulty of boys and men in reporting the occurrence of sexual violence, as well as the difficulties related to the complaint itself, can contribute to this scenario⁶.

Regarding the age at which the abuse began, it was concentrated in three age groups, 20.1% of the children aged between one and four years, 28.9% of them aged between 5 and 9 years, and 49.0% were between 10 and 14 years old. These data are in line with epidemiological studies on child sexual abuse⁹ which reveal that girls are victims of sexual abuse more often than boys, mainly in the family environment.

It can be said that, in agreement with other studies, child and female sexualization is the greatest cause for the abuses committed at that age, due to situations of devaluation and conditioning to the other in which society places the female figure. In addition to the fact that the adolescence process is marked by changes which inserts a teenager with a woman's body^{6,7}.

According to the main aggressors involved in cases of child sexual violence, the present study shows the father with 13.8% and unknown with 10.9% as the main aggressors. This shows us that the aggressors are people who have affective and trusting bonds with the child. In addition, issues such as aggressiveness, unemployment, alcohol and other drug problems, mental disorders, level of education, rigidity, religious fanaticism, possessiveness are some risk factors for intrafamily violence^{6,11}.

It is well known that there has been an increase in the notification of cases of child sexual abuse, especially after the National Plan to face sexual violence against Children and Adolescents. In addition, the Ministry of Health proposed training professionals in preventing and combating violence against children and adolescents. The initiative was operationalized through workshops with didactic material entitled to a care line for integral health care of children, adolescents and their families in situations of violence.¹¹

Intrafamily violence against children is a complex and multifactorial problem, the consequences of which extend from the individual to the social plan. The multifactorial team is fundamental for coping with this abuse, comprising nurses, psychologists and even physicians. All professionals should work with health promotion and violence prevention, identifying warning signs and predisposing factors, and perform notification and prophylaxis. 5

3 Conclusion

According to the study, child sexual violence in Brazil

increased gradually in the period from 2010 to 2018. The prevalence of child sexual violence is higher among children aged 10 to 14 years, female, and cases are more concentrated in the North region, which requires greater attention and surveillance by public bodies, and even by the family and friends of the victim of this region.

In this way, it is of paramount importance the awareness and guidance campaigns of the families and friends of the victims by the health professionals, as recommended by the Health Care Line of Children and Adolescents and their families in situations of violence, of the Ministry of Health. Everyone needs to be aware of the warning signs and symptoms for these cases and that society knows how to act and how to report the aggressors through "Dial 100".

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