



## Physical violence against the elderly

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Health defines violence as events arising from intentional acts and comprising assault, homicide, sexual violence, neglect or abandonment, psychological violence, self-harm, among others, which are amenable to prevention (BRASIL, 2015). Therefore, mistreatment can be defined as single or repeated acts that cause suffering, within a context in which there is trust. Therefore, they are classified as: psychological, financial or material abuse, physical, sexual abuse, and neglect (IRIGARAY *et al.*, 2016).

In what concerns physical violence there is an unequal power relationship, aiming or not, to cause damage by physical force when the elderly refuse to do something against their will, usually the violence is practiced by close people like family members, children, grandchildren, and caregivers (BRASIL, 2022).

The main signs that an elderly person may be suffering physical violence are: wounds on the body that have not been treated, cuts on the body, bruises, burns, injured or broken limbs, pain, fear, insomnia, cognitive and physical decline, social isolation (BRASIL, 2022).

Publicizing the issue of violence and elder abuse can help encourage reporting, as people who experience this situation in their homes feel more motivated to seek help.

In order to learn more about the local reality regarding intrafamily physical violence against the elderly in the city of Manaus, Amazonas, the following guiding questions were drawn: How is the prevalence of violence against the elderly in the city of Manaus?

### 2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to map physical violence against the elderly in the administrative zones of the city of Manaus, Amazonas.



### 3 METHODOLOGY

This is a population-based, quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive and analytical epidemiological study.

According to the IBGE (2018), the elderly population of the municipality of Manaus is composed of 108,081 elderly people distributed in different age groups. Based on this universe of the elderly population residing in Manaus, a sample size calculation was performed, arriving at a number of 380 elderly per chosen zone, making a total of 2,280 elderly interviewed.

The sample for this study was of the random type obtained by: Drawing neighborhoods from the corresponding administrative areas; Call for participation in the survey in community centers, churches, associations, Open University of the Third Age Foundation and other services for the elderly in the neighborhood drawn. During the pandemic, data collection was restricted to health units and churches.

The eligibility criteria for participation in the research were: elderly aged  $\geq 60$  years, who agreed to participate in the research by signing the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF), in possession of their cognitive abilities and not being self-declared indigenous. As exclusion criteria, we considered those who presented any manifestation of psychological distress during the application of the instruments, who showed difficulty in understanding the questions inherent to the form or who did not meet one of the eligibility criteria described above.

The instrument used was the Evaluation Instrument of Violence and Mistreatment Against the Elderly, developed in Puerto Rico to assess possible situations of violence against the elderly, adopted by the Ministry of Health in the Basic Care Notebooks. It investigates physical, psychological, financial, and economic abuse. A positive response to one of the items characterizes the presence of violence against the elderly (BRASIL, 2006).

The study was submitted to Plataforma Brasil to ensure the ethical precepts of Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS) and approved under Opinion: 3.173.698.

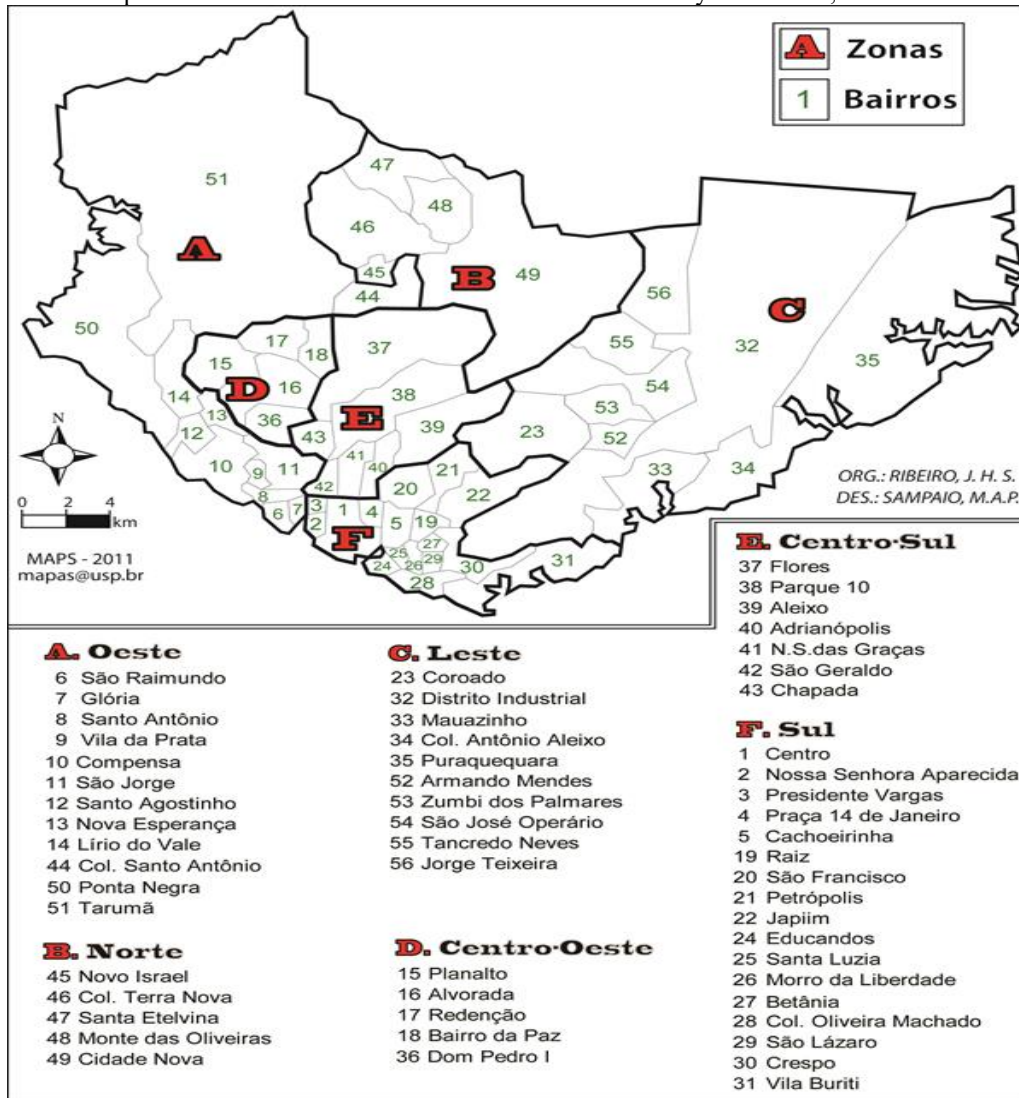
The data were plotted in a spreadsheet and transferred to the statistical program Epi Info. Simple absolute ( $f_i$ ) and relative (%) frequencies were calculated. The data will be presented in a thematic map of violence distribution.

### 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The city of Manaus is divided into six administrative zones: North, South, Midwest and Center-South, with their specific characteristics, with the North and East zones concentrating the largest number of people in their territorial area, with the possibility of expansion (Map 1).



Map 1: Distribution of the administrative zones of the city of Manaus, Amazonas



Source: RIBEIRO (2011)

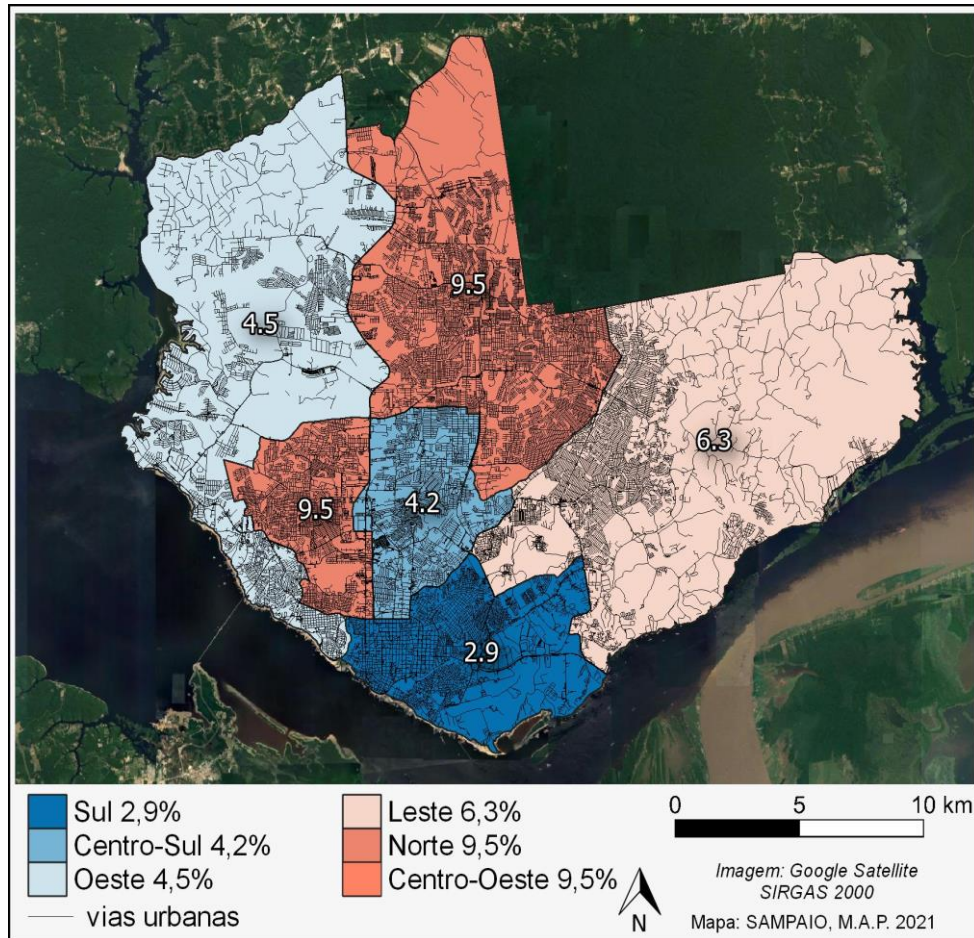
The occurrences of physical violence were identified from the information obtained by direct interview with the elderly people residing in these areas.

Through the Instrument of Evaluation of Violence and Mistreatment Against the Elderly, we obtained the following results: The highest index of physical violence corresponds to the North zone and the Midwest zone of Manaus with the percentage of 9.5%, followed by the East zone with 6.3%; West zone with 4.5%; Center-South with 4.2%; and South zone with 2.9% (Map 2).

Physical violence against the elderly refers to any action or omission that causes harm, injury, or physical suffering to an individual aged 60 years or older. These actions can range from verbal assaults and pushing to more serious physical assaults such as beatings, burns, and even attempted homicide (WHO, 2021).



Map 2: Distribution of the occurrence of physical violence in the administrative zones of the city of Manaus, Amazonas, 2021



Source: field research

The effects of physical violence against the elderly are numerous and can be devastating for victims. In addition to immediate consequences such as physical injury and trauma, victims may suffer from psychological and emotional effects such as depression, anxiety, and social isolation (DONG, & SIMON, 2021). In the long term, physical violence can lead to a deterioration in the elderly's overall health, including worsening chronic illnesses and an increased risk of premature death (ACIERNO *et al.*, 2021).

Physical violence against the elderly can occur in a variety of settings and circumstances, the main ones being: the home environment, long-stay institutions, and the public space (KRUG *et al.*, 2002).

In the domestic environment, physical violence against the elderly occurs frequently, often perpetrated by members of their own family, such as children, grandchildren, or spouses (KRUG *et al.*, 2002). This violence may be a result of intergenerational conflict, family stress, financial problems, substance abuse, or mental health problems of the perpetrator (YUNUS *et al.*, 2019).

In long-stay institutions, the elderly are vulnerable to physical violence. In these cases, violence can be perpetrated by staff or other residents (DONG & SIMON, 2021). Lack of training and





supervision of staff, as well as inadequate conditions and overcrowding in institutions, can contribute to the occurrence of violence in these settings (SCHIAMBERG *et al.*, 2012).

In public spaces, such as streets, parks, and public transportation, older people can be victims of muggings, assaults, and other forms of violence by strangers (BURNS *et al.*, 2016).

Some circumstances that may increase the vulnerability of the elderly include: 1) Social isolation, due to the lack of contact with other people and the absence of a support network, as the elderly are more vulnerable and have fewer resources to seek help (SANTOS *et al.*, 2021); and 2) Functional or cognitive dependence, as those who depend on caregivers to perform activities of daily living or who present cognitive decline may be more exposed to violence, since they may be seen as easier targets or less able to report aggression (MELCHIORRE *et al.*, 2021).

A study published in 2021 done in seven European countries using a multilevel approach noted an overall prevalence of elder abuse of men between 10.2% and 35.3% in the 12 months prior to the study. The research was done in the following countries: Spain with 10.2%, Germany 12.4%, Sweden 18.3%, Lithuania 30.6%, Italy 34.1%, Hungary 35.3%. The study also identified several risk factors associated with abuse of elderly men in these countries, including individual, relational, and social characteristics (MELCHIORRE *et al.*, 2021).

During the period from January to June 2022, the complaint channel Disque 100 registered more than 35,000 reports of violations against the elderly in Brazil. More than 87% of the reports refer to cases that occurred within the victim's own residence (BRASIL, 2023).

In this research, the data highlighted in the administrative areas of the city of Manaus, reflect a reality still hidden, because many of the elderly do not admit having suffered physical violence, because it presents itself as one of the most veiled, since the practice of such violence occurs, most often, within the residence itself, by family members close to the elderly. The denunciations of physical violence occur more by neighbors and close friends, because the victim always tries to protect the abusive relative. Thus, mild or moderate physical violence is the least reported in the statistics.

The Statute of the Elderly, enacted in Brazil in 2003, is a legislation that aims to protect the rights of the elderly and promote their well-being. Article 4 of the Statute states that "No elderly person will be subject to any kind of neglect, discrimination, violence, cruelty, or oppression, and any violation of their rights, by action or omission, will be punished as provided by law" (BRASIL, 2003).

Physical violence against the elderly is a crime provided for in article 99 of the Statute of the Elderly, highlighted as: "endangering the integrity and health, physical or psychological, of the elderly, subjecting them to inhuman or degrading conditions or depriving them of food and essential care, when required to do so, or subjecting them to excessive or inadequate work" (BRASIL, 2003).



It is important to emphasize the need for efficient public policies and strategies to prevent and combat physical violence against the elderly, as well as the training of professionals and the awareness of society about this serious problem (PILLEMER *et al.*, 2021).

## **5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The adoption of tools specifically built and validated to screen for elder abuse and violence in the family setting can be an important first step in exposing and understanding the nature of these problems. Detecting these situations is essential to managing and preventing violence and maltreatment, making it a key step in this process.



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