



Violence against children and its psychological consequences during their development

Violência contra a criança e suas consequências psicológicas durante seu desenvolvimento

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INTRODUCTION:

According to the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), an individual is considered a child until the age of 12, and it is the duty of the family, society and the state to ensure that children have their basic rights in life, such as education, food, leisure, health, protection and dignity. However, children's basic needs are not always respected. There are various types of ill-treatment and neglect that can damage children's physical, psychological and cognitive development (ECA, 1991).

According to data collected by UNICEF in 2019, there were 18,971 reports of sexual violence against children and adolescents in Brazil. This analysis shows the high rate of underreporting of violence and impunity for perpetrators (UNICEF, 2019).

Violence against children, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is all forms of mistreatment, from emotional to physical, that result in potential or actual damage to the child's development in its entire biopsychosocial sphere, in the context of a relationship of trust, responsibility or power (World Health Organization, 1996).

According to the Ministry of Health, 2002, physical aggression against children is defined as acts of physical violence, practiced through slaps, bites, injuries, trauma, among others, in short, the use of objects with the intention of hurting or injuring the child. It is practiced by the parents or guardians of the minor (Ministry of Health, 2002).

Psychological abuse is a means of verbal aggression, such as insults, discrimination, rejection, extreme demands or ridicule that cause trauma and psychological damage to children.

According to Ramos et al., (2011), who refers in his article to the definition of abandonment and neglect by Claramunt (1999) as carelessness and inattention on the part of the parents or legal guardians of the child, failing to provide care and basic needs for the healthy and proper development of the child, whether physical or cognitive. (Ramos et. al. 2011).

In addition, the Ministry of Health adds the definition of sexual abuse as any act of a libidinous nature, with or without sexual contact, in which the aggressor has more development on psychosexual issues than the child or adolescent (Ministry of Health, 2002).



Early reporting and prevention of violent acts against children is therefore of the utmost importance, since such traumas can trigger behavior and/or mental disorders throughout the child's development and into adulthood.

OBJECTIVES:

Search the literature to find out how violence against children can contribute to the development of mental disorders throughout life.

METHOD:

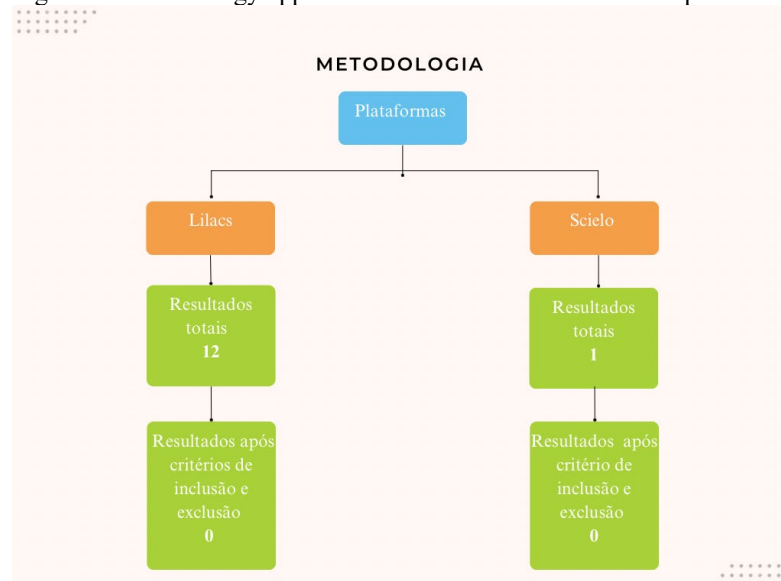
This work consists of an integrative review of the literature produced in May 2023. Based on the analysis of scientific articles found on the main research platforms Lilacs, PubMed and Scielo, obtained using the descriptors: "abused children AND types". Initially, before using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 4,518 articles were found.

The study's guiding question was: What are the consequences of violence on children's mental health?

The inclusion criteria used were: free full text, written in the last 5 years, classified as a literature review and meta-analysis or clinical trial.

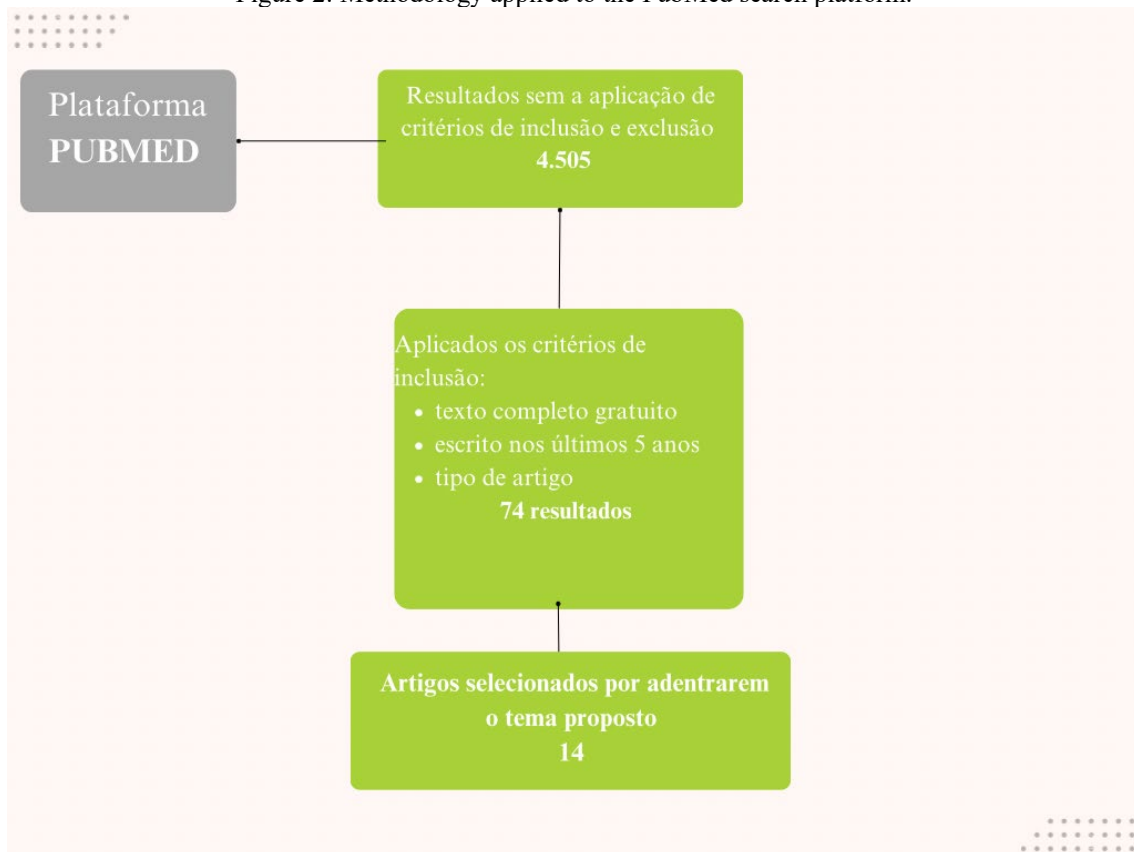
The exclusion criteria were: not addressing the focus of the work, causes and consequences of child violence and not meeting the inclusion criteria.

Figure 1: Methodology applied to the Lilacs and Scielo search platforms.



Source: The authors, 2023.

Figure 2: Methodology applied to the PubMed search platform.



Source: The authors, 2023.

DEVELOPMENT:

During the analysis of the articles, which were 100% taken from the PubMed research platform, it became clear in approximately 71% of them that violence against children generates serious psychological problems that directly influence the child's development, making the victims more likely to develop depression, eating disorders, become aggressive parents or even attempt their own lives.

Another fact analyzed in one of the articles was underreporting during the pandemic, which allowed children to become more unprotected in the place that should have been their "Safe Haven". This shows that, contrary to what was imagined, the high frequency of abuse occurs within the victim's own home.

ARTICLE TITLE	AUTHORS	YEAR	SUMMARY
<u>Child Neglect - Causes and Consequences.</u>	AVDIBEGOVIĆ, Esmina; BRKIĆ, Maja. 2020.	2020	It describes the causes of violence based on three main models: the parents, the environment and the ecological. In addition, they point to problems related to the child's mental health as a serious consequence of constant neglect.
Linking childhood emotional abuse and depressive symptoms: The role of emotions dysregulation and interpersonal problems.	CHRIST, Carolien et al., 2019.	2019	It analyzes the main types of violence against children and correlates them with depression in adulthood. Of all the types of abuse, psychological violence was the most associated with depressive



			symptoms, emotional dysregulation and interpersonal problems.
Parental Risk and Protective Factors in Child Maltreatment: A Systematic Review of the Evidence.	YOUNAS, Fatima; GUTMAN, Leslie Morrison. 2022.	2022	It addresses the risk and protective factors for the development of child violence within the family environment, dividing the factors into 4 levels: micro individual, micro, mezzo and macro. The micro individual risk factor is the mental health of the parents.
Child abuse and psychopathy: Interplay, gender differences and biological correlates.	DI GIACOMO, Ester et al. 2021.	2021	It analyzes the types of child abuse, relates them to post-traumatic stress and the victim's personal environment as a possible mediator between abuse and the development of psychopathy.
Current issues and challenges in the definition and operationalization of child maltreatment: A scoping review.	LAAJASALO, Taina et al. 2023.	2023	It addresses the concept of child maltreatment, seeking a definition for it and highlighting a gap when this topic is discussed, since despite being quite recurrent there is no clear definition for it and no modes of operation for approaching and combating it.
The Relationship between Childhood Maltreatment and Risky Sexual Behaviors: A Meta-Analysis.	WANG, Zi-Yu et al. 2019.	2019	They associate the different types of abuse with risky sexual behavior (multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, starting sexual activities at a young age). They also highlight the need to protect, educate in health and care for victims of such violence.
A meta-analysis of childhood maltreatment in relation to psychopathic traits.	DE RUITER, Corine et al. 2022.	2022	It addresses the correlation between the development of psychopathy and childhood violence, showing a greater connection between victims of maltreatment, abuse and neglect than those who have suffered sexual violence.
Exploring the Link Between Emotional Child Abuse and Anorexia Nervosa: A Psychopathological Correlation	RAI, Tehrima et al. 2019.	2019	It explores the relationship between eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia) and children who are victims of violence, and shows that the two have a correlation.
Association of Childhood Maltreatment with Suicide Behaviors Among Young People: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis	ANGELAKIS, Ioannis; AUSTIN, Jennifer L.; GOODING, Patricia. 2020.	2020	It explores the correlation between childhood abuse and suicidal ideation. It shows that victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse are 2.5 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts than people who had a "normal" childhood. Victims of sexual abuse, on the other hand, are 4 times more likely to plan to commit suicide in their young lives.
Childhood maltreatment and adult suicidality: a comprehensive systematic review with meta-analysis	ANGELAKIS, Ioannis; GILLESPIE, Emma Louise; PANAGIOTI, Maria. 2019.	2019	He reports that child abuse increases the chances of suicidal ideation in adulthood by two to three times. The biggest challenge, according to Angelakis, is to understand the mechanism that leads to the development of suicidal ideation in people exposed to this type of violence during childhood.
The prevalences, changes, and related factors of child maltreatment during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic review	HUANG, Ning et al. 2022.	2022	It portrays how the context of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the markers of child violence. The incidence of physical abuse rose from 0.1% to 71.2%. Psychological abuse ranged from 4.9% to 61.8%, neglect from 7.3% to 40% and sexual abuse from 1.4% to 19.5%. On the other hand, it is important to note that isolation led to a decrease in complaints.
An Integrative Literature Review of Interventions to Protect People	SALEME, Pamela et al. 2023.	2023	It found that women and children are the most frequent targets of violence, with sexual, physical and verbal abuse being the most frequently



with Disabilities from Domestic and Family Violence			reported by victims. These traumas can lead to learning, intellectual, mental and physical disabilities.
Influence of the type of childhood violence on cannabis abuse and dependence among adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis	LUCIA, Martinez-Mota et al. 2020.	2020	It can be concluded that physical and sexual abuse is a vulnerability factor that causes adolescents to use cannabis.
Depression, cardiometabolic disease, and their co-occurrence after childhood maltreatment: an individual participant data meta-analysis including over 200,000 participants	SOUAMA, Camille et al. 2023.	2023	It concludes that adults with a history of childhood abuse are 3 times more likely to develop cardiometabolic diseases and depression than adults who had a "normal" childhood.

According to Christ et al. (2019), violence against children is a public health problem that has been linked to depression in adulthood. Of all the types of violence, psychological abuse has been strongly associated with depressive symptoms, emotional dysregulation and interpersonal problems (cold, distant, domineering and controlling people).

Furthermore, based on the meta-analysis carried out by Ruiter et al. (2022), psychopathy is a personality disorder characterized by traits with a four-faceted bias: affective (insensitivity and lack of empathy), interpersonal (grandiosity), behavioral instability (impulsivity, inadequate behavioral control) and social deviance (juvenile delinquency, criminal versatility).

(2019), violence during early childhood has an impact on the development of psychopathy. In their study, the behavior and antisocial facets were more strongly associated than the affective and interpersonal facets. In addition, a strong link was seen between general psychopathy and physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and maltreatment during childhood. The findings reaffirm the role of trauma in the development of severe personality disorders, in which therapeutic and preventive interventions can provide tests for the trauma psychopathy hypothesis.

(2021), violence against children is a major source of mental and psychological consequences for victims, their families and their community. Instead of internalizing symptoms, it is interesting to analyze the possibility of the victim becoming a stalker. By analyzing different types of child abuse, the authors have linked Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the personal environment as a possible mediator between abuse and the development of psychopathy

Similarly, Younas and Gutman (2022) in their systematic review, point to an association between the mental health of parents or guardians and the possible act of violence against the child. They show that parents with a history of abuse during childhood are more likely to carry out acts of violence against their children. In addition, they also describe that parents with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) are the most likely to neglect their children.



In addition, according to Wang et al. (2019), different types of maltreatment during childhood were associated with higher chances of risky sexual behavior (multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, starting sexual activities at a very young age). Following this analysis, Wang et al. (2019) state that it is essential to protect children from different types of violence, promote health education and provide support and care for victims.

In their research, Younas and Gutman (2022) address the perspective of the factors that lead to the development of child violence, one of which is family interaction, an issue also addressed by Avdibegovi, in his research citing the work of Blumenthal (2015), who defends three models of neglect causality: the parietal, environmental and transactional ecological deficiency model.

(2023) looked at family relationships within the same household, showing that children and women are the most frequent targets of abuse, with sexual, physical and verbal abuse being the most frequently reported by victims. These traumas can lead to learning, intellectual, mental and physical disabilities in the victims.

Another important point, according to Rai et al. (2019), is the association between eating disorders and violence against children. One of the main disorders reported is anorexia, described as a pathology in which the patient sees their body distorted from reality when they look in the mirror, leading them to eat inadequately and in a way that is harmful to their health. Bulimia, on the other hand, is a condition in which the patient eats normally, but at the end of the meal feels guilty for having eaten excessively and forces emesis. These are the main eating disorders that can be caused by childhood abuse.

Furthermore, Angelakis, Gillespie and Panagiotti (2019) report that child abuse increases the chances of suicidal ideation in adulthood by two to three times. The biggest challenge, however, is to understand the mechanism that leads to the development of suicidal ideation in people exposed to this type of violence during childhood.

With this data, it can be said that child abuse is a social problem that must be combated through clinical and political measures in order to raise public awareness, educate about existing policies and adapt protocols to improve the treatment of victims.

As a result, the presence of trained professionals who are attuned to the main signs of violence against children is of the utmost importance, in order to make the report and remove the child from the scene of violence as quickly as possible. An example of this was the increase in cases of violence against children during the COVID-19 pandemic, when reports were underreported due to social isolation. In this way, lockdown has become a risk factor for child abuse (HUANG, 2022).

Therefore, in order to change this reality of violence, it is necessary to focus on training, education and the creation of easy and accessible reporting channels for victims to seek help. (SALEME, 2023.)



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS:

These analyses show that violence against children favors the emergence of mental disorders throughout the child's development, which can be manifested by depressive symptoms, eating disorders, social interaction problems, psychopathic traits, post-traumatic stress disorders or personality disorders, using as an example one of the main ones evidenced, borderline personality disorder.

The manifestation of mental symptoms can appear at any stage of the child's development. Early diagnosis and immediate removal of the child from the risky environment is essential in order to avoid exacerbations of the pathology and to ensure the child's healthy development away from the aggressor. For this reason, it is extremely important to have trained and qualified professionals, especially in the areas of health and education, in order to detect a violent environment or an environment where the child is at risk of violence.

With this in mind, schools and nurseries should teach children about the types of violence that exist, so that they become aware of them and know how to identify situations in which they are in danger. In addition, minors should be informed about the main means and methods of reporting violence, with a view to preserving their quality of life and preventing future damage, reducing the chances of developing social and psychiatric disorders, which are so common in children who have experienced violence.

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