



## **Combating child sexual abuse and exploitation: an experience report**

### **O combate ao abuso e à exploração sexual infanto juvenil: um relato de experiência**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The violation of sexual rights, which involves the abuse or exploitation of minors' sexuality or bodies, is called sexual violence (BRASIL, 1988). Although many associate sexual violence with the sexual act itself, it actually encompasses a much wider range of actions that can result in traumatic experiences for children and adolescents. Regardless of the form it takes, the impact of child sexual violence is devastating (BRASIL, 2000).

Between 2011 and 2017, the Brazilian public health system recorded 184,524 incidents of sexual violence perpetrated against children and adolescents across the country. The epidemiological analysis of sexual violence against children and adolescents in Brazil, released by the federal government the previous year, presented the profile of these notifications which revealed that 70% of the assaults took place in the victim's home and 80% of the aggressors were male. In addition, 64% of the victims had some kind of relationship or friendship with the aggressor (BRASIL, 2018). The year 2020 reported more than 60,000 cases of rape in Brazil, with a worrying 73.7% of victims unable to provide consent as a result of their vulnerable state, and 86.9% of these victims being female (BRASIL, 2021).

Therefore, the prevention and resolution of sexual abuse against minors depends heavily on sex education. By teaching children about self-defense, the importance of consent, bodily autonomy, understanding emotions and distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate physical contact, we can increase the likelihood of protecting them from possible violations. It is crucial to tailor teaching methods to each age group and approach the topic with sensitivity (CERQUEIRA; COELHO, 2014).

Discussing sexuality can have positive effects on the physical, emotional and sexual health of children and adolescents. It is essential to know when and how to talk about sexuality with them. Respecting the different stages of development and addressing topics appropriate to each one can avoid confusion and misunderstandings about how to approach the subject. It is important to recognize and validate the ways in



which children and adolescents express their sexuality, without trying to suppress it, and to empower them to take ownership of their own bodies (SASAKI, 2012).

In Brazil, nurses have been active in campaigns and initiatives aimed at combating the sexual exploitation of minors and adolescents, further reinforcing their fundamental role in tackling these issues. An effective strategy to increase nurses' competence in combating the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people is through specialized training and education programs (BRASIL, 2021).

Nursing programs offer primary health care units (UAPS) and basic health units (UBS) a continuous source of health education, training and resources to help nurses stay informed about the latest research and best practices in their field. In addition, support programs can provide nurses with guidance and emotional support when facing the challenging issue of sexual abuse and exploitation. By investing in the continuous professional growth and assistance of nurses, healthcare institutions can create a more capable and empathetic response to the mistreatment and exploitation of children and young people (LOPES et al., 2020).

## **OBJECTIVE**

To report on the experience of an extension between a public school and the local Primary Health Care Unit (UAPS), to generate greater visibility for the issue during the Ministry of Health's May Orange campaign, aimed at preventing and combating child and adolescent sexual abuse and exploitation on an ongoing basis in the municipality of Fortaleza, Ceará.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive study of the experience of nursing students during their supervised internship in primary care. The location was a municipal comprehensive school in the city of Fortaleza, Ceará. The population included students from three 7th grade classes, aged between 10 and 13.

The health education carried out was based on a lecture on the subject proposed by the UAPS, where the undergraduates do their internship, in partnership with the Municipal Health Department, Municipal Education Department and municipal public schools, through the "Gente Adolescente" project. The talk took place during the month of May 2023, alluding to the Ministry of Health's May Orange campaign.

For the didactics, we used a slide presentation, an educational video taken from the channel "Plenarinho o jeito criança de ser cidadão", from the year 2020 on the YouTube platform and dynamics prepared by the students themselves, aiming at the active participation of the students. The content covered on the slides and in the dynamics was taken from the booklets "Campaign for the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents" and "Sexual Abuse against Children and Adolescents -



Approach to Concrete Cases from a Multidisciplinary and Institutional Perspective", from the Ministry of Health in 2021.

During the week prior to the educational action, there were three meetings between the academics and the team responsible for the UAPS area, where topics were divided up for making the slide, choosing the dynamics for greater interaction with the school's students, searching for and analyzing a video that suited the age group of the students and fit in with the theme.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

Given the high rate of violence in the country, there was a need for health education on sexual abuse, with the aim of making young people aware of the issue, clearing up doubts, providing reflections and thus enabling greater access to information. Given that this audience belongs to one of the most vulnerable parts of society and does not know their rights in depth, they require a greater network of protection and information.

Throughout the lecture, it was possible to observe the students interacting with the speakers, being interactive and showing interest in the subject matter. This made the moment productive and attractive for the participants.

By carrying out this project, we can see the importance of tackling this issue, given that young people are the ones most affected by the violence that happens every day in society.

This is a very important discussion, since it serves as a warning to society about sexual abuse, raising the risks and highlighting the importance of health education, showing the ways to prevent it through education so that young people will learn to recognize inappropriate behavior and seek help. (BEATRIZ, et al..., 2022)

Carrying out this work enabled the students to grow professionally, taking into account that they will be future professionals and will deal daily with social issues involving children and adolescents.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The relevance of the issue in question is highlighted by the Ministry of Health's 27th epidemiological report in 2018, which states that ill-treatment of children and adolescents is a public health problem and a violation of their human rights.

The damage caused by such behavior has far-reaching implications that affect individuals on an emotional, psychological and social level. It is essential that every child receives adequate attention, protection and specialized care in order to become a healthy adult, with the fundamental right to a life free of violence and access to health.



As a result, it is hoped that the participants will have acquired more knowledge about this subject, which is so pertinent in society, in a didactic way, and that they will be able to combat new cases, know how to act and how to report them.

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