

THE ACQUISITION OF INFORMATION ON JUVENILE SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE TRIANGULO MINEIRO

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to characterize undergraduate freshman students at a public university in the Triângulo Mineiro, a region in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais; to describe how they obtain information regarding juvenile sexual violence; and to discuss ways to integrate the theme into their formal education. This is an exploratory, cross-sectional, quantitative-descriptive study, using data collected by means of a structured and self-administered questionnaire in classrooms at the university in 2011. A total of 946 students (70.2% of all freshmen) participated in the study, with a mean age of 19.5 years, 59.8% of which were female, 93.7% were single, 79.0% white, and most of them completed high school at private educational institutions. Sexual abuse and pedophilia were the most well-known themes among the study participants, and television and the Internet were the communication media through which most obtained information on these themes. Only 40 undergraduates had attended courses or events that addressed the issue of juvenile sexual violence, and they identified several ways to approach juvenile sexual violence in university education, such as case studies, watching and discussing films, and lectures. Channels of communication must be enhanced between universities and young students in order to improve the treatment of juvenile sexual violence. The results of this study can guide actions towards a better dialogue among educational institutions, society and government so as to promote more effective approaches to combat juvenile sexual violence.

Keywords: Communications Media. Sexual Violence. Data Collection. Adolescent Health.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, communication and information are at the center of innovative technologies, especially for adolescents, who are at an advantage due to their abilities to use these technologies in their everyday lives ⁽¹⁾. These adolescents currently have access to devices that are sources of information and efficient means of communication, also providing entertainment resources – a very different situation from that of previous generations ^(1,2).

In this context of technological innovations in information and communication, there is the need to approach the problem of violence, which is increasingly present among adolescents. Violence is currently a widespread

problem, primarily due to its impacts on health, and may result in the reduction of years in the lives of victims ⁽²⁻⁴⁾.

The growing transformations in society, such as accelerated urbanization, consumerism and technological advances have influenced human relationships, unleashing unbalances in their socioenvironmental aspects. These asymmetrical relationships are expressed by a reality laden with inequalities, which increases vulnerability to violence ^(2,3).

In this setting, juvenile sexual violence stands out. The expression of this violence is perverse; through the power of the abuser, children and adolescents are induced to perform sexual acts that are inappropriate to their phase of development, causing major physical, psychic and moral damage to victims ⁽³⁻⁶⁾.

In Brazil, juvenile sexual violence is a theme

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permeated by sociocultural issues that make its treatment more complex. Since the 1990s, the problem of juvenile sexual violence in Brazil has been presented as a public issue with national political importance⁽⁶⁾. It is an expansive theme that requires interdisciplinary and intersectorial strategies to confront it^(5,6).

In order to approach the problem of juvenile sexual violence, increased approximation and articulation between society and the public and private sectors is needed, so as to organize a protection network for children and adolescents^(2,5). Nevertheless, in order for this network to be developed, it is fundamental to train qualified professionals in the areas of health, social development, education and public safety, capable of effectively engaging to promote more resolute interventions in each case⁽²⁻⁴⁾.

In order to fight juvenile sexual violence, it is necessary to seek innovative solutions based on the realities of the lives of children and adolescents⁽⁴⁾, in order to spark the interest to investigate the influence of mass media and information sources on adolescents.

Hence, addressing the theme of juvenile sexual violence is important in the education of young undergraduate students, given their potential to tackle this problem in their professional future. Furthermore, approximation with the theme of juvenile sexual violence may uncover situations that occurred among the undergraduates themselves, or with people close to them, encouraging a more effective confrontation of these cases.

Mass communication media have played an important role in fighting sexual violence, through campaigns that provide information and clarification on the issue, thereby reducing this delinquency and its negative interference on the development and health of children and adolescents⁽⁷⁾.

Based on the above, this study had the objective to characterize undergraduate freshman students at a public university, describe how they obtain information on juvenile sexual violence, and discuss ways to access information on the theme during their formal education.

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory cross-sectional study was developed using a quantitative descriptive approach, between January and December of 2011. The study population was 946 undergraduate freshman students from a public federal university located in the *Triângulo Mineiro*, a region in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais (MG), enrolled in the following courses: biomedicine, biological sciences, physical education, nursing, environmental engineering, civil engineering, food engineering, production engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, physics, physiotherapy, geography, history, literature, mathematics, medicine, nutrition, psychology, chemistry, social work and occupational therapy. Study participants were selected using a non-probabilistic sampling by convenience, according to the individual willingness of each student to participate in the research, and their presence at the time and place of data collection.

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed by the researchers, composed of 23 questions and divided into two parts. The first part of the questionnaire had questions regarding the sociodemographic profile of the students, including the variables sex, age, place of birth, race/skin color, marital status, family head members and number of children. The second part addressed the knowledge of the participants regarding juvenile sexual violence, protection networks and primary communication media through which they obtained information on the theme. In this section of the questionnaire, the participants were allowed to provide more than one answer.

The following documents were considered when formulating the questionnaire: *Plano Nacional de Enfrentamento à Violência Sexual Infanto-Juvenil* [National Plan to Confront Juvenile Sexual Violence] (2002)⁽⁸⁾, *Plano Estadual de Minas Gerais de Enfrentamento da Violência Sexual Infanto-Juvenil* [State Plan of Minas Gerais to Confront Juvenile Sexual Violence] (2009)⁽⁹⁾ and *Programa de Ações Integradas e Referenciais de Enfrentamento à Violência Sexual Infanto-Juvenil em Minas Gerais* [Program of Integrated and Reference

Actions to Confront Juvenile Sexual Violence in Minas Gerais] (PAIR)⁽¹⁰⁾.

The questionnaire was previously applied to a pilot group composed of a representative of each undergraduate course to be studied, in order to better adapt the wording of the questions. The questionnaire was then applied collectively in classrooms, based on the authorization of the professor, and following signature of the Free and Informed Consent Form by participating students, whose identities remained anonymous. The mean time to fill out the questionnaire was 20 minutes. Inclusion criteria were: being enrolled in an undergraduate course at the university, and being in the first course term. Exclusion criteria were: students under the age of 18, and not being present in the classroom during application of the questionnaire. Students with sight disabilities were read the questions individually by a trained team.

The data obtained were entered into a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet, and then uploaded into IBM SPSS statistics® software, version 17.0. A descriptive analysis of the variables was performed, considering mean, absolute and relative frequencies, and minimum and maximum values.

This study was developed in compliance with the ethical guidelines of the resolution 196/96 of the National Health Council, under the protocol no. 1721 of the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Triângulo Mineiro.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In 2011, the university offered 1,324 vacancies in undergraduate courses in health, humanities and exact sciences. Of this number, 946 students (70.2%) participated in this study. The mean age of the participants was 19.5, with the minimum age being 18 and the maximum 69. Among them, 78.2% were aged between 18 and 21, 566 (59.8%) were women, 886 (93.7%) were single, and 748 (79.0%) were white. Of the 181 municipalities listed as place of residence, the majority of the study participants (N=335, 35.4%) were from the municipality of Uberaba, state of Minas Gerais (MG), 60 (6.3%) were from Ribeirão Preto, state of São Paulo (SP), and 53 (5.6%) were from Franca, also in SP. The

other 178 municipalities cited had representation under 2% (Table 1).

In regard to high school conclusion time, the mean time was 2.7 years, with the minimum time being less than one year and maximum time being 11 years. A total of 341 (45.6%) participants attended private high schools, 229 (31.6%) attended public high schools, and 213 (22.5%) attended both public and private institutions. Of the 14 students who stated they were disabled, 12 (1.3%) had sight disabilities, and two (0.2%) had hearing disabilities. Most (n=788, 83.3%) of the students did not have their own income. In regard to income of the family head of the participants, 237 (25.0%) reported one to three minimum salaries, 276 (29.1%) three to five minimum salaries, and 258 (27.2%) five to ten minimum salaries.

In Brazil, approximately 36% of young adults attend higher education institutions, and only 25% of these are at public universities⁽¹¹⁾. Because access to public higher education institutions is competitive, the young adults that enroll in these institutions are better prepared and informed in comparison to those who attend private higher education institutions, or those who do not attend higher education institutions at all⁽¹¹⁻¹⁴⁾.

Although students of public higher education institutions constitute a small percentage of Brazilian young adults, they play an important role in influencing the behavior and formation of the opinions of other young adults. Thus, it is important to understand better these students' sexual behaviors and their sources of information, considering the conflicts experienced in the student academic life, for better protecting them from juvenile sexual violence⁽¹¹⁻¹⁴⁾.

In regard to the students participating in this study, their sociodemographic characteristics are similar to those described in other studies developed in public universities: a prevalence of single, white women aged 25 and under, with the majority of freshmen having graduated from private high schools⁽¹²⁻¹⁴⁾.

The Internet (71.7%) was the mass communication media most commonly used by the participants, followed by the telephone (11.8%), then television (11.4%). Due to the intense technological advances and their

implications on the everyday lives of the students, it was expected that the Internet would be indicated as the primary media used

by participants in this study. Currently, the Internet is an important tool for research, information, study, recreation and work^(1,13).

Table 1: Undergraduate students according to sociodemographic variables. Uberaba-MG, 2011.

Variables	n	(%)
Sex		
Female	565	59.7
Male	380	40.2
No information provided	1	0.1
Age range		
18 - 20 years	598	61.1
20 - 25 years	230	26.6
>25 years	118	12.3
Race/skin color		
White	748	79.1
Non-white	188	19.9
No information provided	10	1.0
Marital status		
Stable union/married	46	4.9
Separated/divorced/widowed	11	1.1
Single	886	93.7
No information provided	3	0.3

The search for information on the Internet is more targeted and facilitated, different from television, which airs daily pre-established programming. It is possible to change the television channel, but sometimes it is necessary to watch an entire program in order to be able to access news or a specific item of interest, which can diminish viewers' interest. Regardless, television remains an important source of information due to its low cost and the ability of families from different social classes to purchase this home appliance^(1,13).

In regard to the acquisition of information regarding juvenile sexual violence, sexual abuse and pedophilia were the most commonly mentioned themes by the undergraduates. The most recurring communication media used for obtaining information by the undergraduates regarding any type of juvenile sexual violence were the Internet and television (Table 2).

The theme of juvenile sexual violence is poorly discussed in the family sphere.

According to the results of this study, family dialogue is surpassed by TV, the Internet, newspapers, magazines and even friends as an information source on the theme. In this sense, investments must be made to improve family dialogue between parents and their children regarding sexuality, keeping in mind the growing number of victims of juvenile sexual violence^(15,16).

When questioned regarding which institution they would contact in the event of juvenile sexual violence, more than half (53.8%) cited the police; followed by the Disque-Denúncia (15.9%), a state hotline; and the state guardianship council (13.6%), (Figure 1).

In regard to the notification of cases of juvenile sexual violence, studies show that most notifications should first be made to the state guardianship council, as this agency is the gateway for various situations of vulnerability in communities⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁹⁾. Nevertheless, according to

this study, the participants cited the police as the first agency to notify in cases of sexual violence, having poor knowledge regarding the existence of the state hotline. Half of the

participants stated they did not know of the existence of the hotline in their home municipality.

Table 2: Absolute and relative frequencies of the communications media identified as sources of information by types of juvenile sexual violence. Uberaba-MG, 2011. n=946

Communication Channels	Type of juvenile sexual violence											
	Sexual abuse		Sexual exploitation		Pedophilia		Child pornography		Sex tourism		Sex trafficking	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Friends	56	5.9	31	3.3	49	5.2	37	3.9	25	2.6	14	1.5
Cell phone	2	0.2	1	0.1	4	0.4	5	0.5	2	0.2	3	0.3
Relative	40	4.2	20	2.1	32	3.4	13	1.4	11	1.2	16	1.1
Internet	269	28.4	246	26.0	293	30.9	342	36.1	209	22.1	212	22.4
Radio	33	3.5	28	2.9	30	3.2	23	2.4	17	1.8	18	1.9
Magazines and newspapers	183	19.3	157	16.6	167	17.6	115	12.2	117	12.4	119	12.6
Television	708	74.8	678	71.7	682	72.1	484	51.2	509	53.8	586	61.1

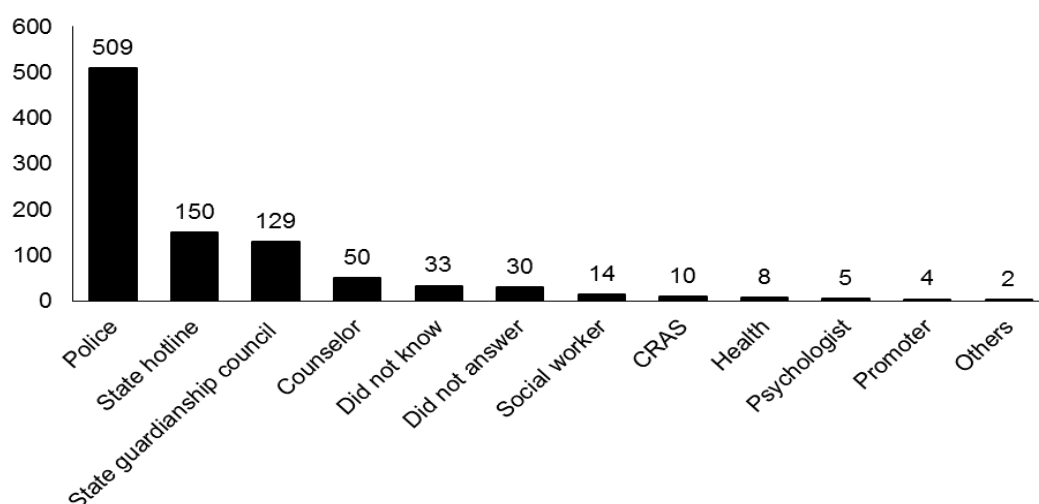


Figure 1. Instances of notification identified by the participants, for first contact in cases of juvenile sexual violence. Uberaba-MG, 2011.

According to the National Plan to Combat Juvenile Sexual Violence (PNEVSIJ), it is important to invest in strategic axes, such as the analysis of the violence situation, mobilization and articulation of society, defense and

responsibility in regard to the rights of children and adolescents, qualified care for victims, prevention of occurrences, and primarily juvenile protagonism^(8,19,20).

It is necessary to instruct young undergraduates better regarding the appropriate intervention in suspected cases of juvenile sexual violence, indicating the work of a protective network, since these mechanisms are not well known among the young undergraduates studied.

The need to support and strengthen the protective network of the rights of children and adolescents is emphasized, aimed at optimizing the existing resources, preventing abuse and exploitation, strengthening the system of protection and responsibility, and consequently improving the care of children, adolescents and young adults⁽²⁻⁵⁾.

In this study, the importance of formal education on the theme of juvenile sexual violence at the university was stated by 665 students (69.2%), yet only 40 had already participated in some event or course on the topic. Related topics cited as being of interest were psychosocial development (n=516), concepts on abuse, exploitation and trafficking (n=324), and efficient care practices for victims (n=244). The preferred method of studying these themes varied, including discussion of case studies (70.4%), exhibition and discussion of films (60.0%), and lectures (41.3%) (Table 3).

Table 3: Categories of interest on the themes and preferred method for formal education regarding juvenile sexual violence, according to the undergraduates. Uberaba-MG, 2011. n=946

Categories of interest	n	(%)
Themes		
Psychosocial development of the child and adolescent	516	54.5
Concepts on abuse, exploitation and trafficking	324	34.2
Effective care practices	244	25.8
Functioning of care services	191	20.2
Sexual tourism	147	15.5
Method of approach		
Case study discussion	571	70.4
Film exhibition and discussion	568	60.0
Lectures	391	41.3
Workshops	212	22.4
Workgroup	199	21.0
Text study in classrooms	125	13.2
Distance learning	30	3.2

As observed, juvenile sexual violence is poorly approached during academic education, reflected in the fact that the majority of the undergraduates studied reported they had never participated in events or courses focused on this theme. It is a challenge for educational institutions to incorporate the theme into the organization of curricular frameworks, even as a strategy for protecting undergraduate students^(13,14,18,20).

In light of this reality, the thematic approaches to questions involving sexuality in professional education, such as juvenile sexual violence, should be innovative so as to synergistically promote safer sexual behavior among undergraduate students themselves, as well as among the populations to be assisted in the future. In knowledge of the opinions, information sources and sexual behaviors of undergraduate students is a strategy for

implementing practices for more effective health protection^(11,20).

It is vital that different methods to approach the theme are employed, evaluated for each academic situation, respecting the life contexts of the undergraduate students, and encouraging multidimensional understanding of this violence and its expression in the particularity of each case.

In order to confront juvenile sexual violence, intense political and ethical commitment of different institutions is essential, including universities, to promote the construction of social mechanisms capable of emancipating vulnerable populations at risk of assault⁽²⁾.

In this sense, approaching the theme together with undergraduate students can support the confrontation of sexual assault, as it helps young adults make personal decisions, thereby strengthening their role as protagonists and guiding them towards articulated actions in the protection network. Thus, it is worth highlighting that when children and/or adolescents cannot count on a network of social or institutional support to help them confront a crisis situation, whether these are diseases, questions inherent to their development and growth, or support to their intellectual formation, they become more vulnerable to sexual violence^(2,15-19).

CONCLUSION

Information on the theme of juvenile sexual abuse is increasingly becoming easier to access,

more rapid and more frequent among young adults. Communication using the Internet is also increasingly frequent among them, and television continues to be an important vehicle of information for this age range. For this reason, stronger communication channels must be established between universities and young adults when dealing with juvenile sexual violence, and it is essential to develop strategies to support the protagonism of these actors.

It is worth noting that juvenile sexual violence is a complex phenomenon that has negative impacts on society. Visibility of this kind of assault, proper management of cases, and strengthening of the protection network are aspects that need to be increased by both government actions and society. Hence, the application of innovative strategies that are closer to the real experiences of children and adolescents represents a pathway to a more effective treatment of this violence.

Therefore, recognizing the importance of the theme of juvenile sexual violence in academic education proves the collective commitment to the cause, and although it is not an issue that is easily inserted into course programs, the identification of this area as being of interest in education will enable the opening of new paths to confront the problem. The results obtained in this study may direct the planning of actions related to greater dialogue between educational institutions, society and government, in order to promote more effective approaches to juvenile sexual violence.

OBTENÇÃO DE INFORMAÇÕES SOBRE VIOLÊNCIA SEXUAL INFANTOJUVENIL ENTRE UNIVERSITÁRIOS DO TRIÂNGULO MINEIRO

RESUMO

Objetiva-se caracterizar jovens ingressantes em uma universidade pública do Triângulo Mineiro, Brasil, descrever como obtêm informações sobre violência sexual infantojuvenil, e discutir formas de acesso à temática durante a formação acadêmica. Trata-se de estudo exploratório, transversal, quantitativo-descritivo. Os dados foram coletados por questionário estruturado autoaplicável nas salas de aula da universidade em 2011. Participaram 946 estudantes (70,2% do total dos ingressantes), média de idade de 19,5 anos; 59,8% do sexo feminino, 93,7% solteiros, 79,0% cor da pele branca, maioria frequentou ensino médio em instituições privadas. Abuso sexual e pedofilia foram os temas mais conhecidos pelos universitários. Televisão e internet foram veículos de comunicação em que mais obtiveram informações sobre a temática. Apenas 40 estudantes haviam participado de cursos ou eventos que tratassem deste assunto. Identificaram diversas formas para abordagem da violência sexual infantojuvenil na formação acadêmica, como: estudos de caso, exibição e discussão de filmes, além das aulas expositivas. Canais de comunicação precisam ser estreitados entre as universidades e os jovens, no sentido de aprimorar as abordagens à violência sexual infantojuvenil. Esses resultados podem direcionar ações de maior diálogo entre academia, sociedade civil e poder público, que promovam abordagens mais efetivas no enfrentamento da violência sexual infantojuvenil.

Palavras-chave: Meios de Comunicação. Violência Sexual. Coleta de Dados. Saúde do Adolescente.

OBTENCIÓN DE INFORMACIÓN SOBRE LA VIOLENCIA SEXUAL INFANTOJUVENIL ENTRE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS DE TRIANGULO MINEIRO

RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene el objetivo de caracterizar a los jóvenes estudiantes del primer año de una universidad pública en Triângulo Mineiro, Minas Gerais, Brasil; de describir cómo obtienen informaciones sobre violencia sexual infantojuvenil, y de discutir maneras de acceso al tema durante su formación académica. Se trata de estudio exploratorio, transversal, cuantitativo-descriptivo. Los datos fueron recogidos mediante un cuestionario estructurado, auto-aplicable en las aulas de clase, en 2011. Participaron 946 estudiantes (70,2% del total de estudiantes del primer año), edad promedio 19,5 años, 59,8% del sexo femenino, 93,7% solteros, 79,0% color de la piel blanca, la mayoría frecuentó la enseñanza secundaria en escuelas privadas. Abuso sexual y pedofilia fueron los temas más conocidos por los universitarios. Televisión e Internet fueron los medios de comunicación de donde más obtuvieron informaciones sobre el tema. Sólo 40 estudiantes habían participado de cursos o eventos que abordasen este asunto. Se identificaron varias maneras de abordaje de la violencia sexual infantojuvenil en la formación académica, como: estudios de caso, exhibición y discusión de películas, además de las clases expositivas. Canales de comunicación necesitan ser estrechadas entre las universidades y los jóvenes, con el fin de mejorar los abordajes a la violencia sexual infantojuvenil. Estos resultados pueden orientar acciones de mayor diálogo entre universidades, sociedad civil y poder público, para promover enfoques más eficaces en el enfrentamiento de la violencia sexual infantojuvenil.

Palabras clave: Medios de Comunicación. Violencia Sexual. Recolección de Datos. Salud del Adolescente.

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