

## VIOLENCE AND THE SCHOOL CONTEXT: MEANINGS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION TEACHERS<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Descriptive, exploratory qualitative study, performed at a public school in Goiânia -GO. The objective was to understand the meanings of the phenomenon of violence from the perspective of teachers. Data were collected through participant observation and focus groups, and analyzed by the method of interpretation of meanings, which emerged from the categories "Professor and violence in their work context", which deals with the understanding and strategies used to violence in work context and "The influence of family violence in the school context" which discusses how teachers understand the family's influence on pupil behavior. Thus, the research allows us to understand the importance of intersectional work between the areas of Health and Education, with the support of institutions of higher education to protect the role of teachers in its essence and in addition, we realized the need for further studies on the influence relationships with their students' families.

**Palavras-chave:** Violence. School health. Faculty.

### INTRODUCTION

The study on violence demands caution, since it consists of a comprehensive, multifactorial issue. Although the number of scientific publications on the subject arouses the growing interest of researchers, it is still incipient, considering the social and economic impact generated by situations of violence<sup>(1)</sup>.

The issue of violence is inseparable from the social context involved, because they both influence the course of history. Violence is expressed in several forms, and their meanings vary according to historical and cultural moment, which gives it a mutable character and dependent on other variables, such as political and economic organization, social inclusion, income distribution and work and strengthening of families<sup>(1)</sup>.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is classified as self-inflicted, interpersonal and collective and involves physical, psychological, sexual and deprivation

or neglect aspects<sup>(2)</sup>. This classification is used for notice of violence in Brazil, which, in 2011, 107,530 cases of violence were recorded<sup>(3)</sup>.

As children and adolescents are in the process of formation and have immature mechanisms of reflection and defense, they tend to suffer more from the consequences of violent acts and are more vulnerable to situations that cause them<sup>(4)</sup>. Sometimes they are victims of their parents in their homes through domestic violence, in which there is an agreement of silence and, at times, they suffer the lack of preparation of health professionals who might deal with the cases<sup>(5)</sup>.

Among the reports of violence committed against children aged under 10, made in Brazil in 2011, neglect was the most common type of violence (43.1%), followed by physical violence (33.3%). Since the most likely assaulter was a family member, and the mother was held liable for over 36% of reported cases<sup>(4)</sup>.

The violence witnessed or lived at home is often perpetuated in other environments in which the child is inserted. The school is the place in which the children spend much of their

<sup>1</sup>Article based on the Master Dissertation "The violence at the school context: the meanings and perceptions by teachers of public education institution", presented to the Nursing Post- Graduation Program of the College of Nursing of the Federal University of Goiás, 2011.

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time, and it is the place in which violent behavior is visible. With the experience of violence, it is possible that the students have their school performance adversely affected, which interferes with the progress of their school activities. Without proper perception of the cycle of violence that forms between family, school and society, there is a risk we analyze the behavior of students in isolation and in a condemnatory manner<sup>(6)</sup>.

In turn, in addition to dealing with such issues, educators suffer wage devaluation and bad working conditions. This professional category is seen as avocation, undermining society's perception that the teachers need to support themselves financially and need to have decent working conditions. These factors lead to mental and emotional distress, directly influencing the health and therefore on their work performance<sup>(7)</sup>.

In this context, the pursuit of cross-sector partnerships is of paramount importance in managing violence, considering in particular the areas of health and education. Primary care, through their professional, adds ideas, strategies and efforts to better deal with violence within the school context. In this regard, this study is justified as the results show consistent intervention possibilities and that can contribute to some extent to minimize the existence of violence at schools.

According to the assumption that preventing and reducing violence in the school environment is to promote health of all subjects in the school context, and that it is need to pursue partners, we start from the ideal principle is to start with what they know and with what they can do, according to the Ministry of Health's recommendation<sup>(8)</sup>. It is not relevant to make proposals to reduce violence in the school environment without firstly knowing what the individual think about the issue and how to deal with this problem in their daily work.

The teachers as an agent of change and reference not only to school subjects, but of behavior for students, they are individuals of utmost importance in changing in the current situation of violence at schools. Thus, this study aims to understand the meanings of the phenomenon of violence from the teachers' standpoint s in a public educational institution.

## METHODOLOGY

Descriptive study of qualitative approach, based on social research. Qualitative studies work with particular realities that should not be quantified, since they are meanings, beliefs and values that are part of social reality, considering that human beings interpret their actions from their context<sup>(9)</sup>.

We follow the assumptions of the Strategic Social Research that aims to "shed light on certain aspects of reality," without prioritizing practical solutions on the issue for which it pursues response<sup>(10)</sup>.

The research was conducted in a Brazilian public elementary and high school in the state network of school of Goiânia, Goiás, in Brazil. Data were collected from January through May 2010, by observing the school environment by the researcher, when there was greater contact with the field of study. These observations were recorded in a field diary and provided important support in the description and interpretation of data. There were also two focus groups for discussion and dialogue between participants<sup>(11)</sup>, and the first one having five and the second one with six participants, amounting to 11 teachers, conducted at their own educational institutions, after the teachers having accepted the invitation of the researcher. They were conducted in a classroom assigned by the school, on the days of school teacher planning. Teachers of the three work shifts were invited to be part of the research, however, only some of the morning and night shifts could participate. It was also administered a sociodemographic questionnaire for the characterization of the participants.

Participation in data collection was preceded by the signing of the Informed Consent Form and then we followed the recommendations of Resolution 196/96, now replaced by Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council - Ministry of Health. The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Hospital das Clínicas, Federal University of Goiás, under the Protocol no. 167/09.

To guide teachers' discussion in groups, it was asked the question "What do you understand by violence at schools?". Such discussion was recorded and transcribed in full for subsequent analysis which was done by the method of

interpretation of meanings following steps: **Comprehensive Reading** of the selected material so we could absorb the collected content, have a broader view of the set of lines and at the same time, seize particularities in such group. At the second stage it was made **construction of inferences** which are "operations by which it is accepted a proposition by virtue of its relationship with other previously obeyed as true." At the third stage, it made and **interpretive synthesis** considered a reinterpretation by means of a creative construction of possible meanings<sup>(12)</sup>.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characterization of subjects

The participating teachers in this study worked in Goiania state education network and taught several elementary and high school subjects in the morning and night shifts. Six of the eleven participants were women, aged 19-61 years with a mean of 35.4 years. Three individuals had incomplete higher education, four with a college degree and three holding a postgraduate degree. Most participants (six) was married, born and residing in Goiânia, with income ranging from R\$ 500 to R\$ 5,000, averaging R\$ 1,733 and a teacher did not report her income. Working time in education ranged from five months to 29 years and eight months, with an average of 11.3 years.

After analyzing the meanings of the words spoken by the participants, we identified the following themes that emerged from the empirical material: "Teachers and violence in their working environment" and "Family influence on the violence of the school context" that support the discussion that follows.

### Teachers and violence in their working environment

Technological advances and expansion of information generated an increasing need for systematization of knowledge. This movement became a key element for professionals as teachers, since the school is one of the important individual socialization contexts, which makes this professional a key individual for social

development and that, unfortunately, often they get sick in development their role<sup>(13)</sup>. They face intrinsic issues related to the school and its surroundings are also challenges to other segments of society, such as violence.

According to the meanings attributed by the individuals, violence in the school context is expressed through certain behavior of students and their own issues of the educational system, such as salary and professional devaluation of the teachers and the precarious physical structure of schools:

[...] I've been assaulted so... in the classroom, in other schools, they called names, they told to kiss my [...] (Q9)

[...] This is not a school to me, this could not work as a school, this is an aggressive treatment [...] (Q9)

For participants, indiscipline was considered either as synonymous with violent behavior or physical or verbal nature, sometimes as a synonym of disagreement of the students with the own school's rules.

In this study, the participants consider predominate among students, physical and verbal violence, and among students towards teachers, verbal violence.

Formulating concepts of violence or even discussing it is important and at the same time difficult within the schools<sup>(14)</sup>. We have noted by the study participants there is difficulty in understanding the several nuances of violence at schools. The physical aspect has the greatest impact and most addressed by the individuals, exemplifying the trend towards greater awareness that the physical aspect of violence causes.

Teachers often have difficulty in identifying situations of violence at school and in the classroom. They excuse the violent actions as forms of normal behavior expected among students, and they not consider the request for help of the victims. Often they do not feel they are capable or they not consider the seriousness of the consequences generated by the violent acts<sup>(15)</sup>.

For teachers participating in this study, there is a difference between violence perpetrated among students and one that occurs between students and teachers. Such idea is based on behaviors mainly shown by the students, and the

teachers do not regard their actions often disciplinary and repressive as practices of violence, which has been discussed by some authors<sup>(6)</sup>.

We note that when there is mention of cases of verbal violence committed by students against teachers, there is some agreement between the individuals and a normal posture of such phenomenon. When aggression or violence is externalized physically, it causes more astonishment and indignation in the individuals witnessing or living the situation.

Where are we going to arrive at like this [Verbal abuse] It is becoming so natural, so normal, you mean "are you my mother? If it is not, then whatever" (Q1)

He reminded me of a case here a person until last year this when I started, a student threw a piece of chalk right in teacher's eye. (Q9)

To deal with violence, participants seek to understand students and adopt a posture in order to understand the origin of aggressive behavior, but, on the other hand, they also resort to punishment and have more rigid attitudes, when the first alternatives do not work:

[...] so well, we will thus be interacting, you know, we have to be friends with them, I like a lot too [...] (Q3)

[...] if you are not a dictator, if you are not dictatorial you cannot teach them. (Q2)

In the teacher-student relationship, we must consider the different family and social contexts that both bring to the school life<sup>(16)</sup>. Conflicts between the two sides are likely to occur. Moreover, it is difficult to find solutions to phenomena that are not well differentiated by the individuals. It seems to be difficult for the participants to tell apart what is violent and what is not. What is lack of discipline or a discontent student, or even what the teachers' responsibility is or not.

As for the training received in undergraduate courses, participants reported that this was addressed in ideal situations and, at school, they are faced with the real world, where it is difficult to apply theories, as can be seen in the participants:

[...] and you get stuck with that {with the fact that the reality is different}, at least I get stuck because I was seven years between graduating,

specializing, then when you get here you are disappointed [...]. (Q6)

At college you live this ideal world, it is a concept, at school, practice. (Q10)

In this regard, we noted the importance of providing teachers with a supervised training for previous contact with reality, since only so we can observe and experience the reality of which we will be part and since the training we reflect improvement opportunities and contribution to change the school reality<sup>(17)</sup>.

### **Family influence in the violence of the school context**

In this study, participants demonstrated they realize the importance of the family in formation and behavior that the student presents and it is in it that several feelings, emotions and behaviors are well founded, and where, today, parents face many questions on education that should answer to their children. The meanings attributed by Individuals to violence in the school context also show a tendency to family's accountability for the education of children and consequently for the acts of indiscipline and violence presented at school. They found that parents have poorly developed that role, providing a family atmosphere of violence and neglect and delegating their responsibility for their children to school:

There are many children out there who are orphans, fatherless, motherless, and there are many children who have a father, mother and are orphans anyway. That's why children arrive at school with so many difficulties you are talking about, all because even when at home, the father, he does not know to guide his children, he does not have a moment like that to talk about what is right what it's wrong [...] (Q5)

Participants demonstrate firstly they realize an association between the unpreparedness and insecurity of parents to raise their children and the use of violence. Also, they discussed the reflection of the use of violence as a form of education in aggressive behavior of students at schools, as shown by the lines:

[...] We don't know what that is the reality those children out there in their homes, what environment they live in, or out of the blue here there is a father who is violent perhaps, or an

uncle or a brother or mother, in this case they can take that... for these situations. (Q8)

[...] Every student... each case was a case. Students who were starving, others were abused by their parents in many ways [...] the issue of abandonment [...]. (Q3)

Domestic violence is a proven change-causing factor in the behavior of students and is often committed by parents themselves<sup>(1)</sup>. Additionally, some factors are significantly influential on violence against children, for example, unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, urban violence, use of alcohol and drugs<sup>(18)</sup>.

The lack of supervision of children follows, according to the participants, the long working hours of parents, required by the economic system, often expressed by the word "capitalism." According to the individuals, such workday generates the absence of parents and the lack of dialogue and perpetuation of family values, and let the children exposed to too much video games, television, and computer. These technological means, in turn, are stimulators of violent behavior and replace games that long ago were common, according to the participants:

[...] the parents appear in a consumer society [...] they {the parents} think they have to work to earn more money, to give more, as a result there is the absence [...] it is one of the problems that I think it reflects much on violence [...] (Q4)

[...] many of these children then were generated so much, so you know, there's that segment, the parents work all day long, the mother also has to work, you know, there is no control [...] (Q9)

[...] in many cases television is the forming element of the personality of that person, because it grows with television. (Q2)

[...] they almost do not have it because of technology, don't they? Today, children's circle game, I myself working with small children sometimes [...] they do not know. (Q5)

So that parents can work, avoid daily conflicts with their children nonviolently, it is required time and also training of non-violence. However, the current lifestyle requires that parents be absent during increasingly longer periods of the day.

Unarguably the role of work in the life of any family, however, employment has consequences

with which contemporary society has to deal, one of them is the lack of time to carry out other activities, among them living with the family.

And, on the other hand, currently work takes on a form that requires flexibility of the worker's performance. In this requirement imposed by the market economy, it may occur that both student's parents and teachers themselves feel inhibited to seek another job or source of income in which they working less. The influence of the requirements of market economy, the educational and political system are aspects that should be visible and be discussed in the teachers' working environment.

In the context of the demanding economic system, lack of time, mentioned by the teachers of this study as triggering the excessive use of television and computer, deserves attention from the society. The media systems have contributed to the perpetuation of violence, once children and adolescents spend much of their day in contact with the TV and connected to the Internet. In this regard, too much exposure of children and adolescents to violence expressed in the media can lead to some consequences to behavior in this age group, with encouraging antisocial and aggressive attitudes, the viewer's desensitization to violence in real life and increased sense of fear<sup>(19)</sup>.

We must underscore the importance of teachers, participants in this study, as they recognize the family as an object to be worked, considering the importance of the influence of contemporary social mores in education that the family gives to their children. This recognition opens opening possibilities of such individuals to any proposed initiative, as recognized to be inadequate the way families have brought up their children.

These considerations show that these individuals are placed in the roles of the parents, because they also have children and see the situation with the lens they built based on their own experience. This reflects the rapid diffusion, which have occurred in past few years, computers, tablets and mobile phones in the households. This has generated some behavior changes in the family, especially the children who now have frequent contact with such tools. This abrupt insertion of large amounts of information in the households have not allowed

there was a previous preparation for this phenomenon. This leaves the parents undecided on how to deal with such attractive mechanisms.

The data suggest that an important challenge for the teachers is to understand that their role as knowledge transmitter should be replaced by the mediator of that knowledge and they should show interest and proximity to the student's reality by using technology that is part of student's life<sup>(20)</sup>.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the results, it is possible to see that the study objective has been achieved, by the method used, since we have managed to understand the teachers' idea about violence.

The meanings of violence that have emerged from the teachers' words composed two thematic categories: "Teachers and violence in their working environment and "Family influence on the violence of the school context." We have managed to learn that teachers do not know how to deal with several forms of violence to which they are subject in the school context.

It has been possible to identify that the most present forms among the students relate to physical and verbal violence. Directed to teachers, verbal violence is the most committed one. For them to deal with this situation, the teachers take stronger stances, verbalized by expressions such as "having a firm hand" and punish students, at the same time, they take more comprehensive stances as to seek to be friends, talk to parents and seek to have dialogue, as described above, by presenting the data on violence in the teacher's working environment.

The analysis and interpretation of the data also signposts that the family has not assumed, as the claims and expectations of teachers, their

role as a locus of socialization and education. This fact that has contributed, according to the teachers themselves, directly, for overload of the teachers' work. Even without support, these teachers remain in their ideas, the need not to give up and always seek to join forces to continue their work.

With the results of this study, we can see how the search for partnerships for health and education sectors is needed so that the teachers' work and other school professionals are preserved in their essence. We highlight the role of the university that has valuable tools, both to train teachers aware of their role and provide support through other professionals, school educational activities, thus constituting actions for comprehensive care.

In this regard, it is also essential to conduct other studies on violence at schools, addressing not only the teachers, but also students and their families, since this phenomenon must be understood in its complexity.

Teachers, individuals in this study, have not mentioned any form of support, whether it is educational or emotional, from any institution or vocational education area or outside it. It is also needed to broaden the possibility of integrated, interdisciplinary and intersectoral work of schools and Basic Health Units (UBS) so that the promotion and violence prevention activities can be planned and implemented effectively by the schools and community.

It is necessary that interdisciplinary work initiatives in health and education are effective and awaken the leadership and citizenship in the school community, so that changes in health habits, interpersonal living and political and social awareness are in fact incorporated by the students and can bring changes of reality.

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## **VIOLÊNCIA NO CONTEXTO ESCOLAR: SIGNIFICADOS PARA PROFESSORES DO ENSINO PÚBLICO**

### **RESUMO**

Estudo descritivo-exploratório de abordagem qualitativa, desenvolvido em escola pública de Goiânia-GO. O objetivo foi compreender os significados do fenômeno da violência, na perspectiva de professores de uma instituição pública de ensino. Os dados foram coletados, em grupos focais e observação participante, e analisados pelo método de interpretação de sentidos. Emergiram as categorias "O professor e a violência em seu contexto de trabalho" que diz respeito ao entendimento e estratégias utilizadas frente à violência no contexto de trabalho e "A influência da família na violência no contexto escolar", apresentando como os professores compreendem a influência da família no comportamento dos alunos. A pesquisa permitiu compreender a importância do trabalho intersectorial entre as áreas da saúde e educação, com apoio de instituições de ensino

superior, para resguardar a função dos professores em sua essência. Percebemos, também, a necessidade de mais estudos sobre a influência das relações dos estudantes com suas famílias.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência. Saúde escolar. Docentes.

## VIOLENCIA EN EL CONTEXTO ESCOLAR: SIGNIFICADOS PARA PROFESORES DE LA ENSEÑANZA PÚBLICA

### RESUMEN

Estudio descriptivo-exploratorio de abordaje cualitativo, desarrollado en escuela pública de Goiânia-GO-Brasil. El objetivo fue comprender los significados del fenómeno de la violencia, en la perspectiva de profesores de una institución de enseñanza pública. Los datos fueron recolectados en grupos focales y observación participante, y analizados por el método de interpretación de sentidos. Surgieron las categorías "El profesor y la violencia en su contexto de trabajo" que dice respeto al entendimiento y a las estrategias utilizadas frente a la violencia en el contexto de trabajo y "La influencia de la familia en la violencia en el contexto escolar", presentando cómo los profesores comprenden la influencia de la familia en el comportamiento de los alumnos. La investigación permitió comprender la importancia del trabajo intersectorial entre las áreas de la salud y educación, con el apoyo de instituciones de enseñanza superior, para resguardar la función de los profesores en su esencia. Percibimos, también, la necesidad de más estudios sobre la influencia de las relaciones de los estudiantes con sus familias.

**Palabras clave:** Violencia. Salud escolar. Docentes.

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**Submitted:** 26/11/2016

**Accepted:** 08/09/2016