

Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents

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Introduction

During the 49th World Health Assembly held in 1996, the World Health Organization (WHO) agreed that violence should be a public health priority for the world; taking into account the dangerous consequences it has on health and the health system; it is considered by this organization as a pandemic. It is a widespread and growing problem in almost all societies. This problem takes many forms and appears at work, at home, at school and in the community, this is not visible in sociodemographic, medical, legal-criminal statistics and especially, in the perception of the population.

The United Nations defines violence against children and adolescents as “any form of physical or mental harm or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, ill-treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” in accordance with article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child [1].

In violence against children that includes physical, sexual and emotional violence, as well as the abandonment and exploitation of children under the age of 18, it can occur in the home and in the community. Being a victim of violence can have consequences for the health and well-being of the child or adolescent and could even lead to death including homicides.

Children have the right to physical and personal integrity and protection from all forms of violence. It has the right to enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The family has the greatest potential to protect them against all forms of violence and can also teach them to protect themselves. As highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, in particular for children. (Convention on the Rights of the Child).

It is considered that a minimum part of the violence that children and adolescents receive is that which is reported, documented or officially known. A large part of the violence remains hidden. Sometimes, children feel unable to report acts of violence for fear of reprisals from their aggressor.

The WHO states that target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”.

Development

Violence is linked to a number of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health problems, including impairment of social, emotional and cognitive development, injuries and health problems throughout their lives, as well as the adoption of high-risk behaviours such as smoking, alcohol abuse, drugs and unprotected sex. The social and economic costs of violence are high and often lifelong, including poor school performance, an increased risk of unemployment and poverty, as well as an association with gang membership or organized crime.

Physical, psychological or sexual violence against children and adolescents constitutes one of the main threats to their integral development that continues to be present in society, under precepts that normalize, endorse and in many cases go unpunished.

Violence has multiple forms: from shouting, insults and threats, to humiliation, beatings and sexual abuse, and including discrimination and neglect, leaving in all cases severe consequences at the physical, psychological and social level, which erodes the ability to develop care mechanisms and skills for their entire lives [2].

According to statistical data on the study of violence against children [3] highlights that:

- It is estimated that up to 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 worldwide were victims of physical, sexual, emotional or neglect abuse in the past year and that violence suffered at this stage would affect health and well-being throughout life.

Violence is often seen more frequently in disabled children. Studies indicate that children with disabilities are victims of some form of violence with a frequency 3.7 times higher than non-disabled children; of physical violence with a frequency 3.6 times higher, and of sexual violence with a frequency 2.9 times greater. Children whose disability is accompanied by mental illness or intellectual impairment are the most vulnerable, suffering sexual violence 4.6 times more frequently than their non-disabled counterparts [4].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that some 3,500 children between the ages of zero and 14 die each year in Europe from domestic violence, although not all cases are reported. It has been reported that for example in Germany and the United Kingdom between three and four children die every day from this cause. According to UNICEF's Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe, Italy's Maria Calivis, violence against children "occurs in all countries, including the most developed". In the United States, for example, 1,600,000 cases of abuse are reported annually with 2,000 deaths, with only the tip of the iceberg being those who come to receive medical assistance. In Latin America and the Caribbean there are 185 million people under the age of 18, of whom 50% are children. About 6 million children and adolescents suffer severe physical aggression and 80,000 die in a year due to them. Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay, due to the increase in socio-economic tensions and unemployment and the decrease in wages, the rates of violence increased, to such an extent that in countries such as Colombia and Guatemala these constitute one of the main causes of death in the group of 5 to 14 years of age [5].

Studies conducted in the MICS-19 found that minors maintain the use of punishment and violent forms of discipline in the home, 41.6% of children between 1 and 14 years experienced psychological aggression and/or physical punishment of their caregivers during the last month [6].

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its report "Health for the World's Adolescence" called for greater attention to be paid to adolescent health because road traffic injuries, HIV/AIDS and suicide are the main causes of mortality and because depression is the leading cause of illness and disability in this population group [7].

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines "suicidal act" as any action by which an individual causes harm to himself, regardless of the degree of lethal intent and whether or not the true motives are known [8,9]. Suicide is the maximum expression of violence since it occurs towards the person himself. An increase in its mortality rate has been observed in Cuba in children under 19 years of age for both sexes and in the population of 10 to 19 years it is the third cause of death. Rate of 2.5 x 100 thousand inhabitants for both sexes. According to statistics, Aggressions occupy the 5th place within the main causes of death in children from 1 - 4 years of age, Intentional self-inflicted injuries and Aggressions occupy the 4th and 5th place respectively in children from 5 - 18 years of age. Intentional self-inflicted injuries and assaults are in 3rd and 4th place in the ages of 10 - 19 years [10].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) points out the need to increase investment in all aspects of the life and well-being of adolescents, including in the fight for survival, noting that every year 1.4 billion adolescents die from traffic accidents, complications of childbirth, suicide, AIDS, violence and other causes [11].

In Latin America and the Caribbean, it is the region where there has been an increase in homicide rates among adolescents and reports that almost half of all homicides among adolescents that occurred in 2015 occurred in this region [12].

Final Considerations

- Health professionals, working in a multidisciplinary team with education professionals, must be alert to the issues of violence in children and adolescents, in order to establish effective strategies for the evaluation, intervention, argued referrals, and follow-up of children and adolescents who are at high risk for violence.
- The current era requires facing social and educational challenges for which families are not fully prepared. Assuming the formation of the new generations in the new scenarios that are lived, generates needs that society as a whole must help satisfy, so it is necessary to create spaces for reflection about the intra-family relations of families with society among other aspects.
- Target 16.2 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children”. Evidence has been collected around the world showing that violence against children is preventable [12].

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