



Aquichan

ISSN: 1657-5997

ISSN: 2027-5374

Universidad de La Sabana

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Aquichan, vol. 19, no. 3, e1938, 2019, July-September

Universidad de La Sabana

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5294/aqui.2019.19.3.8>

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=74161171008>

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Strategies by Educators within the School Setting to Prevent and Cope with the Experience of Domestic Violence by Adolescents*

Theme: Promotion and prevention

Contribution to the discipline: This article highlights the performance of Nursing professionals, who are fundamental in the intersectoral articulation process, frequently occupying areas of program management to promote health and prevent violence. These professionals are trained to recognize the signals and symptoms that identify adolescents in situation of violence, which makes them, therefore, co-protagonists of actions that promote the quality of life of these individuals.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This work sought to identify, in the discourse of educators, which strategies they can implement, within the school setting, to prevent and cope with the experience of domestic violence by adolescents. **Method:** Qualitative study based on the critical-liberating perspective of Paulo Freire, conducted with 20 educators from a public school in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. To collect the data, the interview was used and, to systematize them, the discourse of the collective subject. **Results:** The discourses reveal the following coping strategies of domestic violence experienced by adolescents: place into action the Guardianship Council; create reception and listening spaces for students; strengthen bonds between the school and family; promote educational actions, and articulate knowledge. **Conclusions:** The study provides paths to prevent and confront family abuses that compromise the physical and mental health of children and adolescents,

DOI: 10.5294/aqui.2019.19.3.8

Para citar este artigo / Para citar este artículo / To reference this article

Cordeiro KCC, Gomes NP, Estrela FM, Silva AF, Magalhães JRF, Lório JGDS. Strategies by Educators within the School Setting to Prevent and Cope with the Experience of Domestic Violence by Adolescents. *Aquichan* 2019; 19(3): e1938. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5294/aqui.2019.19.3.8>

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- * Financed by the Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado da Bahia, Brazil.

Received: 26/02/2019
Sent to peers: 12/03/2019
Approved by peers: 09/04/2019
Accepted: 28/06/2019

with impact upon school performance. The study suggests the contribution of primary health care through actions linked to the Health in School Program and the insertion of the theme of violence in the different university careers, given that caring for children and adolescents and defending them constitutes an obligation for all citizens.

KEYWORDS (SOURCE: DECS)

Domestic violence; adolescent; adolescence; school health services; schools; school teachers; faculty.

Estrategias de educadoras en el ámbito de la escuela para prevención y enfrentamiento de la vivencia de violencia doméstica por los adolescentes*

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar, en el discurso de educadoras, qué estrategias pueden implementar, en el ámbito de la escuela, para prevenir y enfrentar la vivencia de violencia doméstica por adolescentes. **Método:** estudio cualitativo, basado en la perspectiva crítico-libertadora de Paulo Freire, llevado a cabo con 20 educadoras de una escuela pública, en Salvador, Bahía, Brasil. Para recolectar los datos, se empleó la entrevista y, para sistematizarlos, el discurso del sujeto colectivo. **Resultados:** los discursos develan las siguientes estrategias de enfrentamiento de la violencia doméstica vivida por adolescentes: accionar el Consejo Tutelar; crear espacios de acogida y escucha para los escolares; estrechar vínculos entre escuela y familia; promover acciones educativas y articular saberes. **Conclusiones:** el estudio aporta caminos para prevenir y enfrentar abusos familiares que comprometen la salud física y mental de niños y adolescentes, con impactos sobre el rendimiento escolar. Se sugiere la contribución de la atención primaria a la salud por medio de acciones vinculadas al Programa Salud en la Escuela y la inserción de la temática de la violencia en las diversas carreras universitarias, ya que cuidar a niños y adolescentes y defenderlos constituyen obligación de todos los ciudadanos.

PALABRAS CLAVE (FUENTE: DECS)

Violencia doméstica; adolescente; adolescencia; servicios de salud escolar; instituciones académicas; maestros; docentes.

* Financiado por la Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado da Bahia, Brasil.

*Estratégias de educadoras no âmbito da escola para prevenção e enfrentamento da vivência de violência doméstica pelos adolescentes**

RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar, no discurso de educadoras, que estratégias elas podem implementar, no âmbito da escola, para prevenir e enfrentar a vivência de violência doméstica pelos adolescentes. **Método:** estudo qualitativo, fundamentado na perspectiva crítico-libertadora de Paulo Freire, realizado com 20 educadoras de uma escola pública, em Salvador, Bahia, Brasil. Para a coleta de dados, utilizou-se a entrevista e, para a sistematização destes, o discurso do sujeito coletivo. **Resultados:** os discursos revelam as seguintes estratégias de enfrentamento da violência doméstica vivenciada pelos adolescentes: acionar o Conselho Tutelar; criar espaços de acolhimento e escuta para os escolares; estreitar laços entre escola e família; promover ações educativas e articular saberes. **Conclusões:** este estudo contribui para indicar caminhos para a prevenção e o enfrentamento de abusos familiares que comprometem a saúde física e mental de crianças e adolescentes, com impactos sobre o desempenho escolar. Sugere-se a contribuição da atenção primária à saúde por meio de ações vinculadas ao Programa Saúde na Escola e a inserção da temática da violência nos diversos cursos de graduação, visto que cuidar das crianças e dos adolescentes e defendê-los constituem obrigação de todos os cidadãos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE (FONTE: DECS)

Violência doméstica; adolescente; adolescência; serviços de saúde escolar; instituições acadêmicas; professores escolares; docentes.

* Financiado pela Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado da Bahia, Brasil.

Introduction

Domestic violence consists of a condition of oppression that physically and psychologically harms children and adolescents. This condition compromises their human development, above all, by the implications on school performance. The greater proximity of this population with educators puts them in strategic positions for early recognition of the grievance; in addition, it is important for the school's concern to adopt measures that favor a professional praxis to confront the phenomenon.

Perpetrated predominantly in the domestic environment, intrafamily abuse presents worrisome data. A study conducted in 30 countries revealed high rates of child maltreatment and recurrent cases, indicating the need for preventive actions (1). In the United States, 2,203 schoolchildren suffered from child and juvenile abuse experienced in the home and expressed through negligence and psychological and physical violence (2).

Regardless of the form of expression, children and adolescents who experience violence in the home environment tend to present physical and psychological health problems. Research conducted at emergency and emergency surveillance services in the United States indicated that fractures, bruises, and cuts correspond to the most frequent types of injuries (2). Damage extends beyond visible marks, leading to depression, fear, retraction, delinquency or aggressive behavior. Within this context, it is important to mention that, in the sense of containing the pain suffered, many adolescents present aggressive, self-directed practice, ranging from self-harm to suicidal thoughts (3).

It is emphasized that physical and psychological repercussions resulting from the experience of domestic violence are aggravated and make children and adolescents vulnerable to other diseases, affecting the commitment of academic performance. A study carried out with 827 adolescents from a public school in California showed that low income, lack of attendance, and school dropout are consequences of the experience of domestic violence (4). Such repercussions can still bring problems in adult life, as corroborated by an international study that points to the interface between lower academic performance and greater difficulty in obtaining better positions in employment (5). It is, therefore, perceived that violence compromises the development of individuals, with the potential to limit their personal and professional achievements.

In spite of such damages, it is important to mention that these are not always associated with the experience of intrafamily abuse. A study carried out in the East African Coast points to the need to prepare professionals who work with children and youth, such as health and education professionals, to investigate and discern whether the injuries were caused by accidents or violence (6). In this process, permanent education can be one of the strategies used so that professionals can be empowered to recognize the cases and act upon them (7).

In light of the damage caused by the experience of domestic violence, which brings about compromise in the physical and psychological health of adolescents, reflecting, consequently, on school performance, educators become important allies in preventing and coping with this problem, in view of their greater proximity with the schoolchildren. Thus, considering the school as a privileged location to recognize intrafamily abuse and perform preventive and anti-abuse measures, this study sought to identify, in the discourse of educators, what strategies they can implement to prevent and confront the experience of domestic violence by adolescents.

Methods

This was a study with a qualitative approach, based on the critical-liberating perspective by Paulo Freire, which understands education as a form of intervention in collective life, in the sense of acting in a certain reality to maintain or overcome that lived (8). This study is linked to the matrix project "University and public school: Seeking strategies to face the factors that interfere in the teaching/learning process", under the auspices of the Foundation for Research Support of the State of Bahia (FAPESB, for the term in Portuguese).

The study scenario was a public school located in the outskirts of the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. This teaching institution offers education to adolescents in the 6th to 9th year of elementary school, with predominance (53.97 %) of male students, a situation that justifies adopting, throughout the study, expressions related to students in the masculine gender.

The approach to the school was made feasible through extension actions, foreseen in the matrix project, developed from 2013 to 2017, in partnership with the component Curricular Action in Community and Society (ACCS, for the term in Portuguese) titled

“Interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach to health problems related to violence”. This component is part of the curricular structure of the undergraduate courses at Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA) and has the participation of students from diverse areas of knowledge.

Selection of the research participants was intentional, so that all the permanent teachers in the staff who had been teaching for at least six months in the school mentioned were invited to participate in the study. It is emphasized that only one professional was excluded after two unsuccessful contact attempts. This way, 20 teachers integrated the research. All the educators participating in the research were informed about the purpose of the study and the ethical guidelines that guide it, described in Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council, and signed the Informed Consent Form (TCLE, for the term in Portuguese). It should be noted that this research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP, for the term in Portuguese) of the School of Nursing at UFBA (Substantiated concept 384.208/2013).

As a data collection technique, the semi-structured interview was used, guided by a form constructed by the main author and validated by female professor doctors, which contained aspects related to the characterization of the collaborators and the following guiding question: What strategies can be implemented, within the school setting, to prevent and confront the experience of domestic violence by adolescents? The interviews were conducted by the principal researcher and took place from August to October 2017, in a reserved room in the school-locus, with the intention of promoting a space of privacy, trust and respect between interviewer and collaborators.

The talks, which lasted between 15 and 20 minutes, were recorded and transcribed completely with support by the Microsoft Word® program. In order to maintain methodological rigor, the transcripts were made available to the research participants to validate their content. As support tool, the study considered the criteria recommended by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ).

The data were systematized through the collective subject discourse (CSD) and validated by the collaborators. This method consists of grouping the reports to construct a single report, in first person, to synthesize the understanding of a collectivity (9). From the transcribed interviews, the central ideas and their key

expressions were removed. In this text, the talks are referenced by the CSD code plus the number of the interview order.

Results

The 20 educators, collaborating in this study, were, mostly, women (70 %), which is why we decided to adopt the feminine, so that the term “educators” refers to female and male educators. Most of the interviewees were single (45 %), ranging in age between 31 and 57 years, who declare themselves black (90 %), all reported having completed upper level and almost all said to have a specialization (90 %). With regard to knowledge about violence, a little more than half (55 %) mentioned that the issue was not addressed during their teacher training, which contrasted with the large portion (90 %), who stated that they had worked on this object during the specialization in their areas of activity.

In order to organize the educators’ collective thinking about the identified strategies that can be implemented within the school to prevent and confront the experience of domestic violence by adolescents, this study revealed the central ideas presented in the following subsections.

Central idea 1: Activate the Guardianship Council

Upon the identification of cases of domestic violence, the collective discourse points out the need to activate the Guardianship Council, so that they can adopt the appropriate measures.

I believe that some situations of domestic violence can also be routed to the Guardianship Council to resolve. If I were aware of a case, I would speak to the direction to refer it to the Guardianship Council. There are cases that only they have the conditions to do something: Calling parents to talk, would force them to be closer to their children. (CSD 1)

Central idea 2: Create reception and listening spaces for adolescents

The discourse of the educators revealed that one of the strategies to confront domestic violence against adolescents consists in creating spaces with emphasis in reception and listening. This seeks to enable students to talk and share their wishes and demands.

We try to welcome and transmit the affection and care they do not have at home, but there must be a space as the core of psycho-pedagogical support so that they can report difficulties. [...] a place for more open communication of the student with the teacher. I think if you can talk, you can achieve improvement. If there was such a space, I think it would facilitate. As incredible as it may seem, sometimes school is the only scenario they can count on. (CSD 2)

Central idea 3: Foster closer ties between school and family

For the educators, the school must create strategies that enable interaction with the family. It is believed that the school-family bond fosters knowledge and understanding about the behavior of schoolchildren, as well as situations of vulnerability that are susceptible, such as domestic abuse and the context for such an occurrence.

It is important to have a listening space for the whole family, since it does not help to work alone with a child. You should involve everyone. There are families that never go to meetings, but it is the school's role to make this approach. As an institution, we can think of promoting actions that bring these families closer to the school community. Maybe even the school will visit the teenager's house to try to talk to the parents. [...] we need to receive "feedback" about how the students are at home and in the street. This way, we can know: If the adolescent is attacked, what circumstances lead to violence, if it is related to alcohol and other drugs or if the parents are naturally aggressive. (CSD 3)

Central idea 4: Promote educational actions

Another strategy of prevention and/or confrontation of domestic violence is the promotion of educational actions that, according to educators, can be carried out under the pedagogical project model, including through theater language. For the educators, this educational process permits discussing the problem and helps in self-recognition and in finding paths for overcoming, besides enabling the improvement of the school-family relationship.

It would be great if there were educational actions at school or a specific project to take care of these boys who are being nabbed in the house. Forums, debate settings, and lectures on violence could be organized for both students and the family. I think sports and

theater can also help. [...] bringing the discussion of violence into the classroom theatrically can help students to identify and take action to get out of the situation. Often, parents do not see the potential of their children, but when they participate in these projects, they realize their capacity and start to value them. (CSD 4)

Central idea 5: Articulate knowledge

Considering the complexity of domestic violence, the educators point to the need for the school institution to establish partnerships to join knowledge to confront the phenomenon. It is important for the articulations to pay attention to the needs of the school, which transcend the issues of adolescence, crossing the various demands related to the experience of abuse.

Faced with situations of violence, teamwork would be necessary with the partnership of professionals from other areas because the teacher alone is not accountable for addressing this issue. Participation from other areas of knowledge is needed. There are issues specific to the adolescent phase and others resulting from violence that are more appropriate for psychologists, physicians, and nurses. (CSD 5)

Discussion

According to the discourse of the educators, a strategy to be adopted in the school context, upon identifying cases of domestic violence, consists in the referral to the Guardianship Council, a conduct advocated by the Child and Adolescent Statute (CAS). This legal provision determines the obligation to notify suspected or confirmed cases of domestic violence, and its omission is understood as an administrative infraction, which may include penalties (10).

It should be noted that the Ministerial Cabinet Ordinance (MC) / Ministry of Health (MH) 1271/2014 orders for notification forms in cases of violence to be filled out in three ways in cases involving children and/or adolescents: One stays at the health service, another must be sent to the municipal sector responsible for Epidemiological Surveillance of Serious Noncommunicable Diseases, and the third to the Guardianship Council and/or to competent authorities, as required by the CAS. It also guides that situations of violence, of any nature, should be directed to health services, to social assistance in its specialized component, to the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS, for the term in Portuguese), and to the other organizations in the Child and Adolescent Rights Guarantee System, which should assign the

highest priority to caring for this population, formulating a unique therapeutic project that includes network intervention and, if necessary, home monitoring (10).

The Guardianship Council is the public body responsible for ensuring compliance with the rights of children and adolescents through the application of protection measures, assistance and counseling of parents or guardians, requesting services and conducting transfers to the referral network (11). However, it is worth emphasizing the difficulties encountered by this body, as demonstrated in a study carried out in Minas Gerais, highlighting limitations, like lack of continuous training to perform the function, actions based on personal precepts and convictions, excessive bureaucracy in the progress of cases, and lack of adequate physical structure (12). In this sense, even though the importance of the Guardianship Council is recognized, it is possible to consider that its action is permeated by obstacles, which indicates the need for the teaching institution to create other coping strategies.

In this perspective, another strategy listed by educators to confront domestic violence is the creation of spaces to receive and listen to schoolchildren. Given that they spend much of their time in school, this space should be a safe place to express their fears and concerns about violence experienced at home (13). Experiences in Europe indicate that these spaces favor the creation of ties and effective communication between students and educators, which enables establishing relationships of trust, essential to permit identifying cases of intrafamily abuse and the necessary referrals (14).

Regarding the successful experiences mentioned, it is important to consider that recognizing the grievance, as well as other situations of vulnerability to which students are exposed, is not conditioned by the existence of a physical space and such identification may occur in any and all process of interaction with the other. Freirean pedagogy has confirmed that school is not only a physical space with rooms, blackboards, timetables, and concepts, but a place for people who deal with people. Therefore, school is not only a place to study, but also to build friends, exchange experiences, dialogue and, above all, a privileged space for liberation (8).

Thus, more important than a space intended for reception, is the professional and sensitive posture for such. In this sense, a study conducted in Liberia highlights the importance of educators

and other professionals working in the school environment, in any opportunity to interact with schoolchildren, to be alert to behaviors that indicate situations of domestic violence (15).

According to Freire (8), this interaction becomes possible when the relationship between educator and student takes place horizontally, which favors bonding and affection. In this horizontalization principle, the learning process takes place in a dialogical and meaningful way, taking into account the socio-cultural context of students, as well as their experiences, enabling the transformation of reality and overcoming oppression. However, education ceases to be a tool for liberation when teachers believe they are superior and have knowledge, and learners are mere repositories of information. In this traditional model, in which the relationship is vertical, teachers repress the emotional and affective elements of students. In this pedagogy, there is no possibility of reception, nor the possibility of the student overcoming oppression (8).

In addition to the existence of spaces to take in schoolchildren, educators also pointed out the need for actions that would permit approaching family members, even mentioning home visits, given that some relatives do not attend school meetings, when requested. Using the active search for family members and schoolchildren was an experiment conducted in the public education network of the city of Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil. Inclusion of the family in the school context allows parents to know the difficulties of their children, as well as to participate in debates with educators. This dialogic experience promotes changing old habits and constructing new attitudes (8), besides denoting the school's concern with the students, while favoring rapprochement among educators, students, and their parents to strengthen bonds and form a partnership to address violence, according to a study held in Israel (16).

Considering that the educational process is the responsibility of society at large, the 1996 Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education provides, in its article 12, the school's duty to promote articulation with the community and with the student's family. Concern should also exist about the students' academic performance, seeking to understand individual and collective situations that may be affecting their learning (17). These concerns were also shared by the educators interviewed, which claim that the school-family bond allows educators to be closer to the difficulties students face, their context, as well as their yearnings and expectations. Thus, the educational space, better articulated with parents and

students, constitutes an important source of information, which allows identifying situations of vulnerability and conflict (17).

These conflicts within the family and social context are often characteristic of adolescence because this phase is marked by the search for their own identity, in addition to intense discoveries and emotions (18). The yearning for new experiences often leads young people becoming involved with alcohol and other drugs or to seeking a sexual identity that is in keeping with their desires (18). Most of the time, these behaviors generate conflicts within the family context that culminate in conducts of violence, given an understanding by parents and/or guardians that this is the best way of solving these situations (17).

In this sense, school institutions sensitive to the specifics of this phase of life are essential to share strategies for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and, consequently, to promote more friendly relations between parents and children. In addition to spaces to approach and listen to students and their families, educational actions, as suggested in the collective discourse, also represent important strategies for coping with domestic abuses. A study conducted in southeastern Brazil argues that educational actions, like discussions of problem situations among parents, children, and school, as well as dramatizations and group dynamics are extremely important for individuals to resolve conflict situations respectfully (19). A study in South Africa, conducted with adolescents exposed to situations of violence, shows that educational experiences minimized conflict issues that caused violence (20).

In the process of using educational actions as a means of health promotion, theater is a tactic that, in the eyes of educators, favors the recognition of conflicts by the students and the creative elaboration of solutions/ways out. Studies in Colombia and Spain have shown that dramatization, such as theater, causes students to actively participate, allowing emotions to flourish, repressed conflicts arise, generating transformations and producing change (21, 22). In addition, another Spanish study reveals that using educational video games provides students with the discovery of potentialities and abilities, making them improve their school performance with undeniable benefits in improving their linguistic knowledge, as well as stimulating respect for others, as they develop ways of thinking and acting in the face of their experiences and social practices (23).

The collective discourse also reveals that to deal with the complexity that permeates intra-family abuse and various demands of

victims, it is urgent to articulate knowledge, which refers to partnerships with other spaces. Considering that every professional must be able to recognize and intervene in the face of this aggravation, it is necessary to include the subject in the basic curriculum of the courses of the different fields of knowledge. It is worth mentioning the UFBA experience, which has been offering the optional discipline "Interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach to health problems related to violence". In the ACCS modality, this component has already been studied by future professionals in the area of health, education, among other areas (3).

In addition to training professionals with the ability to recognize domestic violence cases within the school context, it is worth mentioning the importance of intersectoral partnerships, focusing on the articulation between interdisciplinary knowledge, so that there are actions that contemplate, holistically, the demands of adolescents (24). Thus, insertion of multi-professional teams in the school, in a study carried out in Israel, permits working with the personal demands experienced by the students and their families, especially with regard to the experiences of domestic violence, considering the theoretical and methodological background (24).

In a study carried out in a city in Bahia, it was found that the partnership with social assistance services reduces the number of cases of violence, conflicts, and even learning difficulties, given that they would have adequate referrals and follow-ups to deal with the issue (7). Another successful inter-sectorial partnership experience is the Health in School Program, which deserves to be highlighted due to the articulation of public health and education networks that have favored development of citizenship and the qualification of Brazilian public policies, as well as the recognition of cases of domestic violence (19).

It is important to point out that partnerships, as well as other strategies indicated by educators, represent possibilities to be considered by educational management to prevent and confront not only intrafamily abuse, but also other situations of oppression to which students are exposed. Disclosure of such vulnerabilities is essential for the school to rethink its planning in order to create conditions for the full human development of these adolescents, as recommended by the CAS. In this sense, understanding the school as a space for social and symbolic constructions requires understanding this environment as a teacher not only of knowledge, but also of citizenship construction.

Conclusions

The collective discourse of the educators revealed the following possible strategies to be implemented in the school setting, in the sense of enabling the prevention and coping with the experience of domestic violence by adolescents: Activate the Guardianship Council, create spaces welcoming and listening spaces for adolescents, foster closer ties between the school and the family, promote educational actions, and articulate knowledge.

Although this study is limited because it does not evidence the implementation of such strategies in the school investigated, it contributes by indicating ways to prevent and cope with family abuse that may compromise the physical and mental health of children and adolescents with impact upon school performance.

Considering that the experience of violence impairs the full development of an individual's potential, it is essential to implement such strategies, especially those whose interactions with

adolescents and family members enable understanding that domestic violence has serious repercussions upon the health and quality of life of students. In this sense, the promotion of spaces for dialogue are emphasized, either by strengthening links with schoolchildren and family members, or through educational actions aimed at these groups.

Faced with the repercussions of the experience of domestic violence, the relevance of Primary Health Care is highlighted, through actions linked to the Health Program in the School. Such a partnership may favor the recognition of cases through the insertion of health professionals in the school community, while involving educators in a more sensitive observation for the possibility of this occurrence. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a training that addresses the subject in the various undergraduate courses, given that taking care of and protecting children and adolescents is an obligation of all citizens.

Conflict of interests: None declared.

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