

# Qualitative validation of a game to confront violence against women

Validação qualitativa de um jogo para enfrentamento da violência contra a mulher  
Validación cualitativa de un juego para el enfrentamiento de la violencia contra la mujer

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To qualitatively validate the game *Violetas* for professionals who work with violence against women.

**Method:** Study with a qualitative approach, carried out with 30 professionals from the *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* in Brasília, Campo Grande and Curitiba. Data were collected through Critical-Emancipatory Workshops and analyzed through thematic content analysis, using the webQDA software.

**Results:** From the analysis of the data allowed, three empirical categories emerged: Violence against women: the game asks and the professionals answer; Action and omission recreated on the board; and Cooperative work as a tool to confront violence against women.

**Conclusion:** The game *Violetas* motivated the recognition of different situations of violence against women and the reflection on strategies for preventing and combating the problem in the fictional reality. Due to the similarity between the questions addressed in the game and the concrete reality, it was possible to expand knowledge and its application in the professional practice of the participants.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** Validar qualitativamente o jogo *Violetas* para utilização com profissionais que atuam no enfrentamento da violência contra a mulher.

**Métodos:** Estudo de abordagem qualitativa, realizado com 30 profissionais das Casas da Mulher Brasileira de Brasília, Campo Grande e Curitiba. Os dados foram coletados por meio de Oficinas de Trabalho Crítico-emancipatórias e tratados através da técnica de análise de conteúdo temática, com o apoio do *software* webQDA.

**Resultados:** A análise dos dados possibilitou a emergência de três categorias empíricas: Violência contra a mulher: o jogo pergunta e as profissionais respondem; A ação e a omissão recriadas no tabuleiro; O trabalho colaborativo como ferramenta para o enfrentamento da violência contra a mulher.

**Conclusão:** O jogo *Violetas* motivou o reconhecimento de diferentes situações de violência comumente perpetradas contra as mulheres, bem como a reflexão sobre as estratégias para a prevenção e o enfrentamento do problema na realidade fictícia. Pela similaridade das questões abordadas no jogo com a realidade concreta, foi possível a ampliação dos conhecimentos e sua aplicação na prática profissional das participantes.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** Validar cualitativamente el juego *Violetas* para la utilización con profesionales que actúan en el enfrentamiento de la violencia contra la mujer.

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Conflicts of interest: none to declare.

**Métodos:** Estudio de abordaje cualitativo, realizado con 30 profesionales de las Casas de la Mujer Brasileña de Brasília, Campo Grande y Curitiba. Los datos fueron recopilados por medio de Oficinas de Trabajo Crítico-emancipatorias y tratados a través de la técnica de análisis de contenido temático, con el apoyo del *software* webQDA.

**Resultados:** El análisis de los datos posibilitó la emergencia de tres categorías empíricas: Violencia contra la mujer: el juego pregunta y las profesionales responden; La acción y la omisión recriadas en el tablero; El trabajo colaborativo como herramienta para el enfrentamiento de la violencia contra la mujer.

**Conclusión:** El juego Violetas motivó el reconocimiento de distintas situaciones de violencia comúnmente cometidas contra las mujeres, así como la reflexión sobre las estrategias para la prevención y el enfrentamiento del problema en la realidad ficticia. En función de la semejanza de las cuestiones tratadas en el juego con la realidad concreta, se posibilitó la ampliación de los conocimientos y su aplicación en la práctica profesional de las participantes.

## Introduction

Violence against women is a global problem and a threat to women's human rights. According to the United Nations, 18% of women and girls aged 15 to 49 experienced intimate partner violence in 2019. Nevertheless, 40% of victims did not report nor sought help.<sup>(1)</sup> This data demonstrates the low visibility of the phenomenon, as the number of complaints does not correspond to the number of reported episodes.

Violence against women usually gains visibility when it harms their mental, sexual, reproductive and physical health, causing short, medium and long-term damage.<sup>(2)</sup> It can also lead to work absences or reduced workload and increase the demand in social and justice services.<sup>(3)</sup>

The increased demand for services that assist women in situations of violence generates a need for qualified professionals that can deal with this complex problem, stimulate the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and held avoiding revictimization. Thus, professionals must receive specific and continuous training on the subject, considering that the more interesting the pedagogical strategy, the greater the adhesion of professionals.

A systematic review on the use of board games found that they were effective tools to encourage learners and increase motivation, while also providing greater interaction among participants.<sup>(4)</sup> Another scoping review identified the potential of educational games for broadcasting and producing knowledge related to the denaturalization of sexist patterns, recognition of violence, and coping mechanisms for the problem, from a gender perspective.<sup>(5)</sup>

Based on the above, this study used as its motto the game "*Violetas: Movie & action to confront violence against women*" to approach the theme with professionals from various areas of expertise in the

care of women in situations of violence. It is a cooperative board game, composed of four characters that are part of the coping network. Players need to act together to contain the violence in the cities on the board. The action occurs through answers to questions about policies and practices associated with the understanding of violence against women.<sup>(6)</sup>

The game has a minimum of four and a maximum of eight players per match. At the start of the game, each player receives a card that will indicate their character and its possible actions. All players move between cities that are distributed in five regions of the board. The objective is to enclose all cases of violence against women. As the questions are answered correctly, players get cards to acquire four tokens that guarantee victory. However, when the answers are incorrect, violence spreads and can result in losing the match.

To give continuity to the analysis of the gameplay dimensions of *Violetas*,<sup>(6)</sup> it was necessary to carry out the qualitative validation of the game. This type of validation occurs through coherent methodological processes and consistent results, that aim to contribute to the description and understanding of a given phenomenon.<sup>(7)</sup> In this research, the validation was carried out through the speeches of the participants, considering the context in which they were inserted.

The study had as a guiding question: What is the validity of the game *Violetas* for combating violence against women from the perspective of professionals? The objective was to qualitatively validate the game *Violetas* for professionals who work with violence against women.

## Method

This is an exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The concept of validation emerged within

the scope of quantitative research and was adapted to qualitative. It is associated with transparency, coherence, and communication of interpretations according to the studied reality. Although not measurable, it allows for greater breadth and detail of results.<sup>(7)</sup>

The study setting was the first three units of the *Casa da Mulher Brasileira* (CMB) in operation, located in Brasília (Distrito Federal), Campo Grande (Mato Grosso do Sul) and Curitiba (Paraná). The CMB is a government initiative to combat violence against women, and is responsible for coordinating the specialized and multidisciplinary services of the healthcare network.<sup>(8)</sup>

Thirty professionals from the CMB participated in the study, eight from Brasília, 16 from Campo Grande and six from Curitiba. At the time of data collection, all professionals were invited by the coordinators to participate in the study. However, only those that were interested in learning about the game *Violetas* and were available for data collection, as it occurred during working hours, participated. Professionals who did not participate in the first session of data collection were excluded. Therefore, all professionals included in the survey participated in the first and second sessions of data collection.

Data was collected from January to March 2018, through Critical-Emancipatory Workshop (CEW), which is based on four pillars: participation, shared responsibility, self-esteem and empowerment.<sup>(9)</sup> For data collection, a program with guiding questions to conduct the qualitative validation of the game was used.

To test the CEW, a pilot workshop was held with seven professionals who were students of the graduate programs of the University of São Paulo and showed interest and willingness to participate voluntarily. The data produced were used exclusively for improving the program.

The CEW was carried out in two three-hour sessions, totaling six hours per CMB unit. In the first session, participants played a match of *Violetas* and answered questions about their expectations at the beginning, during and at the end of the game. In the second session, they shared their perceptions

about the structure and content of *Violetas* for confronting violence against women, during individual and group moments. In the individual moment, each participant described their participation in the game with a single word and explained it to the group. In the group moment, the participants were divided into two groups to list what was easy and difficult about the game. Each group presented their report, and then a round of conversation was conducted to discuss aspects related to the structure (characters, cards, and dynamics) and content (questions) of *Violetas*.

The CEWs were carried out according to the availability of the participants and in the CMB's units, in an adequate and easily accessible physical space. The statements were recorded with the authorization of the participants.

After the transcription of the statements, the data was processed using thematic content analysis,<sup>(10)</sup> with the support of the webQDA software.<sup>(11)</sup> In the webQDA, the internal sources were organized according to each CMB unit. After the reading, the tree codes corresponding to the empirical categories were constructed. At this stage, the analytical categories gender, gender violence and critical-emancipatory education were considered. Descriptive codes were used for the characterization of the participants.

The Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) were used to verify the stages of the method. The study met the criteria of Resolution 466, of December 12, 2012, of the National Health Council, which states the standards and guidelines for research involving human beings.<sup>(12)</sup>

As in this study most of the professionals were female, in the subsequent sections the feminine grammatical gender will be adopted to refer to the statements of the participants. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed by replacing the name of the participants with the letter "P", followed by an Arabic numeral.

This study is part of the thesis called "*Potencialidades e limites do jogo Violetas para o enfrentamento da violência de gênero*", which was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the

University of São Paulo School of Nursing, protocol #2.026.647 (CAAE: 66467517.2.0000.5392).

## Results

Twenty-seven female professionals and three male professionals participated in the study. Most participants were between 30 and 39 years old (n=13), self-identified as white (n=20), were single (n=13), had children (n=19) and were Catholic (n=15). Most had completed higher education (n=28), and the most common areas of training were social work (n=11) and psychology (n=11). It is worth noting that 19 professionals had more than 10 years of professional practice, 16 got the job through a municipal public contest and 10 had less than 12 months of experience in the CMB. From the data analysis, three empirical categories emerged: Violence against women: the game asks and the professionals answer; Action and omission recreated on the board; and Cooperative work as a tool to combat violence against women.

### Violence against women: the game asks and the professionals answer

In this category, the questions of the game were validated. *Violetas* has 35 questions, of which 12 are open-ended and 23 are closed-ended. Regardless of the type of question, it was observed that, during the matches, the topics that required the longest time for discussion before coming to a decision were: sexual harassment, intra-gender and intra-family violence, Law Maria da Penha and assistance in health services.

The questions of the game are introduced by scenes from movies that portray stories of women who, at some point in their lives, experienced situations of violence. It was found that the fact of having watched the movies or not did not influence the construction and assertiveness of the answers. The participants considered that the description of the scenes associated with the question made it possible to develop different perspectives for identifying and comprehending the types of violence.

*The game stimulates us to look at this phenomenon of violence according to the movies and the different forms of gender violence. The issue of psychological violence in the movie Black Swan, the physical violence in the movie Sleeping with the Enemy and the empowerment of women in the movie Chocolat (P10).*

The participants associated the questions with situations they dealt with when helping women in their concrete reality. The answers allowed reflection on the power relationships between men and women, gender stereotypes and different expressions of violence against women.

*The scenes from the movies address stereotypes. So, we can visualize the gender stereotypes, the same ones we identify in the reports of the women we see here (...). The movie scenes allow us to reflect on gender roles, especially those related to the cases we have here (P16).*

Participation in the game was considered challenging for the participants, as they believed that the process of formulating the answers challenged the knowledge and skills built in their professional practice, when applied to the fictional reality of the game.

### Action and omission recreated on the board

In this category, the characters and cards of the game were validated. *Violetas* is a board with cities named after women and distributed by the five Brazilian geopolitical regions, by four characters (law operator, educator/researcher, citizen of the women's movement and public policy/health professional), by four types of cards (movie-cities, violets x violence, omissions, and citizen-violets), by violence and citizenship pieces, by citizen network stations and by four tokens (voice, light, networks and welcoming).

The participants considered that the characters were responsible for promoting actions to combat violence. Each character had a special ability that guaranteed the active participation of the players and valued different areas of knowl-

edge such as health, education, justice, and social assistance.

*The game has four characters, but it's not just four people, the role of the characters was only because they were playing, each one had its function, each one saved a life. It was the collaborative work of the characters (P1).*

On the other hand, the participants reported that the omission cards were responsible for the negligence when dealing with violence. These cards caused feelings of tension and passivity, as they reiterated the sexist culture through popular sayings and songs. They were also associated with the revictimization of women who seek care, when they are judged and blamed for the abuse they experienced.

*[The omission cards] bring bad luck to the game, but also bring very important discussions. I even mentioned that, in relation to the omissions in cultural practices, we hear everyday funk songs playing on the radios, which somehow offend the image of women. All of this leads to the perpetration of violence, even if it is unconscious (P20).*

The participants recognized that the omission directly influenced the increase in violence on the board and caused them to be held responsible for dealing with the problem. However, they considered that the fight against violence is not restricted to the actions of professionals, as it involves the deconstruction of sexist patterns historically produced and reproduced in society.

### **Cooperative work as a tool to combat violence against women**

In this category, there was the validation of the game's dynamics. In *Violetas*, the players work together to fight a common enemy: violence against women. Participants reported that cooperative work was developed from the beginning, when understanding the rules of the game, until the end. Greater engagement of the participants was observed in the elaboration of the answers to the questions and in

the understanding about the movement of the pieces on the board.

*P26 was the first to answer the question, that's when we said: no, we can share and help each other when answering the questions. (...) I think that this is what sorority is all about, it's looking beyond yourself, beyond your individualism, looking at the other and really being together with the other. This opportunity for us to interact is extremely rich. The fact that it was not individual, it was about the group, that was what made it much easier (P24).*

Collaborative work was made possible by the interaction between the participants. According to the professionals, the exchange of information, ideas and experiences were essential to think of strategies to reduce the number of cases of violence in the cities of the game.

*We knew we had an objective, but the coolest part was being able to share and help. I think I had fun doing that, cheering for the group, helping everyone to reach the same goal. For me it was valid for that. We can embrace the work, but not for the company, for the things we believe in. The funny thing was that we started to work in such a collective way that we got to our goal faster (P25).*

Although the decisions taken by the team were not always correct, there was mutual support in moments of joy and tension. This support revealed the importance of the presence of each professional, who shared and articulated knowledge and, consequently, expanded the possibilities of intervention in the game, with a view to winning the war against violence.

## **Discussion**

The CEW allowed the qualitative validation of the game *Violetas* for combating violence against women, as they allowed the participants to express their perceptions about the game and its relationship with their professional practice. The interpretation

of their perceptions demonstrated the validation of the questions, characters, cards, and cooperative dynamics of the game.

Participation was important for the construction of bonds between the professionals who, despite working in the same institution, reported they did not know the work of other specialties. The affinity with the theme also enabled involvement and engagement in the match, making the learning process constructive and emancipatory.

The movie scenes presented in the questions were highlighted by the participants, as they illustrated visible and invisible violations against women in public and private spaces of society. Movies produce images, meanings and interpretations that can hide or reveal social phenomena.<sup>(13)</sup> A study on the representation of women in Brazilian soap operas identified two conceptions: the first represented women as good, heroine, loyal and passionate, and the second as bad, villain, liar and criminal.<sup>(14)</sup>

These conceptions of femininity reinforce moral values that assign specific social roles to women and sometimes legitimize situations of violence. The critical analysis of the movie scenes allowed identifying gender stereotypes and socially constructed power relations, manifested through the characters, in intragender (man-man, woman-woman) and intergender (man-woman) relationships.

The participation of professionals in the game was centered on their desire to win the match and validate their knowledge and skills to tackle violence. This desire motivated the interaction and cooperation of the participants in decision-making processes. At times, the discussion was so fruitful that the participants would temporarily forget that it was a fictional reality.

The games make the learning process attractive, participative, engaging, shared, interactive, and collaborative.<sup>(15)</sup> In the game *Violetas*, the participants showed interest in giving assertive answers to the questions about violence presented during the match. Faced with the impossibility of avoiding the problem, they reported feelings of impotence, especially when they got the omission card.

The sense of impotence of these professionals is unfortunately not restricted to the fictional reality

of the game. A Brazilian research carried out with 30 professionals from an intersectoral network also found this expression in the answers to questions about the assistance provided to women in situations of violence.<sup>(16)</sup>

The impotence reported by the professionals is associated with the complexity of the phenomenon. The difficulty to break with social standards that disqualify women is associated with male domination that, through oppression, normalizes and legitimizes the subalternity of women in different spaces of society.<sup>(17)</sup>

It is believed that the deconstruction of male domination in society involves recognition, problematization and confrontation of gender roles and stereotypes that characterize women as inferior to men. *Violetas* revealed to the participants that gender violence is not restricted to the experience of women that seek care, but is expressed daily in the media, social networks and even in conversations between friends.

*Violetas* also highlighted the importance of each professional in the coping network. Individual knowledge and cooperation between the participants were important factors for the consolidation of collectively constructed learning. A systematic review on potentialities and obstacles for the care of women in situations of violence in the context of Primary Health Care found that teamwork was pointed as essential to approach the problem. However, part of the studies selected in the review revealed that the cooperative work of professionals was presented as a difficulty in the care of these cases.<sup>(18)</sup>

The professionals considered that the participation in *Violetas* was an exercise of mobilization and collective responsibility for the elaboration of coordinated strategies aimed at combating violence against women, involving different areas of knowledge. Although the study results are related to the qualification of the participants, it is believed that they have the potential to generate positive impacts for users and for the implementation of specific public policies to overcome the problem.

The limitations of the study were the participation of professionals in only one match of *Violetas* and the absence of professionals from healthcare

services, as they are not part of the group of workers of the CMB. However, these limitations do not invalidate the relevance of the results, on the contrary, they reiterate the need for further studies using the game in different settings.

## Conclusion

*Violetas* promoted the construction and sharing of knowledge to combat violence against women in the fictional reality of the game and in the concrete reality of the professionals. It also stimulated qualification through the active participation of players to formulate responses and strategies to reduce the incidence of violence. Thus, it is understood that the game has the potential to motivate professionals to overcome obstacles in the care of women in situations of violence. It is considered that the main element that made it possible to qualitatively validate *Violetas* was allowing the participants to resort to their concrete experiences working with violence against women. Therefore, it can be concluded that the game was appropriate for the processes of reflection, training and emancipation of professionals in relation to the theme.

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## Collaborations

Fornari LF and Fonseca RMGS collaborated with the project design, writing of the article, relevant critical review of the intellectual content, interpre-

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