Violence in the perception of young university students
As violências na percepção de jovens universitários
Las violencias en la percepción de jóvenes universitarios

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Abstract

Objective: To identify young university students' perception of the processes of protection and depletion related to violence.

Methods: Exploratory qualitative study. Data collected through an electronic questionnaire from June 2017 to April 2018.

Results: Sixty-eight questionnaires were filled out and assessed through Content Analysis with support of the webQDA software. Three categories were highlighted according to the dimensions of Objective Reality: 1) Singular dimension: classification of violence, experience of violence and knowledge of violence – aggressor or assaulted; 2) Particular dimension: perceptions of what protects from violence and understanding of what is a depletion for violence; 3) General dimension: reduction of violence – a look at management. In these categories, the fact that violence against and among university students is a socially determined phenomenon was evidenced.

Conclusion: The implementation of institutional policies and actions beyond the university walls is necessary, aiming, through dialogue with organized society, to make people aware that violence must be denounced and fought.

Resumo

Objetivo: Identificar a percepção de jovens universitários acerca dos processos de proteção e desgaste relacionados às violências.

Métodos: Pesquisa exploratória com abordagem qualitativa. Dados coletados por meio de questionário eletrônico no período de junho de 2017 a abril de 2018.

Resultados: Foram preenchidos 68 questionários, apreciados por meio da Análise de Conteúdo, com apoio do *software* webQDA. Destacaram-se três categorias segundo as dimensões da Realidade Objetiva: 1) Dimensão singular: tipificação das violências, vivência das violências e conhecimento nas violências – agressor ou agredido; 2) Dimensão particular: percepções acerca do que protege das violências e compreensões do que desgasta para as violências; 3) Dimensão geral: redução das violências – um olhar para a gestão. Nestas categorias foi evidenciado que as violências, contra e entre jovens universitários, são fenômenos socialmente determinados.

Conclusão: Faz-se necessário implementação de políticas e ações institucionais para além dos muros da universidade, objetivando, por meio do diálogo com a sociedade organizada, conscientizar as pessoas de que as violências devem ser denunciadas e combatidas.

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Resumen

Objetivo: Identificar la percepción de jóvenes universitarios sobre los procesos de protección y desgaste relacionados con las violencias.

Métodos: Investigación exploratoria con abordaje cualitativa. Datos recopilados a través de un cuestionario electrónico en el período de junio de 2017 a abril de 2018.

Resultados: Se completaron 68 cuestionarios, apreciados por medio del Análisis de Contenido, con apoyo del *software* webQDA. Se destacaron tres categorías según las dimensiones de la Realidad Objetiva: 1) Dimensión singular: tipificación de las violencias, vivencia de las violencias y conocimiento de las violencias – agresor o agredido; 2) Dimensión particular: percepciones sobre lo que los protege de las violencias y entendimientos de lo que consume para las violencias; 3) Dimensión general: reducción de las violencias – una mirada hacia la gestión. En estas categorías se evidenció que las violencias, contra y entre jóvenes universitarios, son fenómenos socialmente determinados.

Conclusión: Se hace necesaria la implementación de políticas y de acciones institucionales más allá de los muros de la universidad, con el objetivo de, a través del diálogo con la sociedad organizada, concienciar a las personas de que las violencias deben ser denunciadas y combatidas.

Introduction

Violence is a way of achieving power by means of force, constraining actions, domination, possession of the other and/or their goods, and is characterized as a multifaceted and socially determined phenomenon. When considering its historicity, we emphasize that in Brazil, indigenous repression, black slavery, political dictatorships and social inequalities are representations of authoritarian, patriarchal and sexist behavior often supported by gender inequities.[1,2]

The greatest expression of violence in Brazil is the homicide rate with its implications for health, demographic aspects and the process of socioeconomic development. Homicides are the biggest cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29 years and in 2018, there were 60.4 homicides for every 100,000 young people, a record in which men were the main victims. In 2019, there was an increase in lethal violence in Brazilian territory. The most frequent victims were specific groups of the LGBTI+ population (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites, transgender, intersex and other gender identities, as well as sexualities not covered in the acronym), black people and women, with an emphasis on the increasing rates of femicide.[2]

Violent behavior among young people from different social classes is often referred to as intergenerational transmission, that is, part of the violence carried out by young people is a form of reproduction of intra- and extra-family violence.[3,4] It is also important to consider the reproduction of violent behavior expressed in the media, especially in music, radio, internet, television and other cultural manifestations.[3] Violence is related to a collective symbolic order that affects the most fragile, whether children, women and the LGBTI+ population. All forms of violence related to processes of social inequalities, illegal drug trafficking and power abuse also stand out.[5]

The thesis that education would be able to build a civilized and peaceful society is a construction of modernity and the Age of Enlightenment. There was confidence that years of studies would make more personal resources available to face aggressive impulses and the dynamics of violence. However, attitudes of inequality are constantly denounced throughout the world, such as discrimination in universities, especially against young women who are harassed and raped.[6-10]

A study conducted in 2019 with 181,752 students from 33 North American universities showed that after entering university, 26.4% of university women, 23.1% of transgender, queer or non-binary gender university students, and 6.9% of university men suffered some type of sexual assault by physical force or inability to consent. In addition, the survey revealed that although 37.1% of respondents claimed to have information about the concept and resources available for assistance in a sexual assault of any kind, only 15% of victims sought some form of support after the violence suffered.[7]

In universities, initiatives promoted mainly by feminist groups are advancing in the creation of mechanisms of resistance and protection for university women. However, it is important to clarify that violence at university centers is perpetrated not only against women, but also against men.[7] In this sense, the movement also discusses gender violence

occurring inside and outside universities, practiced by men against women, women against men, between women and between men, based on the affirmation of gender identities.[11]

In a study performed at a public university in São Paulo, 56.3% of female university students reported having suffered some type of violence after entering the institution. On the other hand, approximately 30% of male university students declared to have become aggressors, committing acts of gender violence or sexual violence.[12]

For women and men who attend universities, violence is a portrait of social dynamics that results from government neglect, a generator of social inequalities, unemployment and lack of policies that meet the population's needs. In university environments, there is no preparation to face violence, neither administrative guidelines for the protection of people exposed to violence, punishment of aggressors or removal from institutional activities after the act committed.[13]

This finding illustrates the need to study the experience of different forms of violence in the university environment. The guiding question of this study was: What are the protection and depletion processes that determine violence against and among university students? The protection processes, understood as beneficial, are those found in the structural dimension of society, which have the ability to promote implications for people's way of life so that they have access, since their insertion in production, culture and in the various social relationships that guarantee them autonomy, freedom and choices to change processes of depletion. These can be understood as harmful and are at the opposite pole of this reality of life in a society, in the sense of promoting inequalities and social exclusion.[14] Thus, the aim of this article was to identify the perception of young people about the processes of protection and depletion related to violence.

Methods

The study was developed through exploratory, qualitative research from the perspective of producing critical-reflective knowledge about concrete problems in society.[15] The reality was understood from the perspective of Critical Epidemiology, which advocates exploring the processes of protection and depletion in the general, particular and singular dimensions involved in the phenomenon in order to propose ways of coping to transform the reality found.[14]

Data collected had as inclusion criteria young university students from undergraduate courses, aged between 18 and 29 years, regularly enrolled in different undergraduate courses at the Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR) in various university centers (Pontal do Paraná, Matinhos, Curitiba, Jandaia do Sul, Palotina and Toledo). The age group was intentional, as it represented the largest number of undergraduates at the UFPR (88%) at the time of the study. We used an electronic questionnaire available on a social network. This choice is justified due to the different locations of the university centers, which would make it difficult to travel for interviews. However, as there was no adherence to this strategy, the questionnaire was sent by electronic message to the coordination of courses and academic centers. Of the 77 replies, 68 questionnaires were used for analysis, as nine were outside the criteria for age group and active enrollment in the undergraduate program.

Students who accepted to participate in the research had access to the Informed Consent form and the questionnaire (online research tool available via the internet). The collection period was from June 2017 to April 2018.

The questionnaire built for application in this study contained two parts. The first was related to the characterization of interviewees and the second had open questions related to the object of the study.

To guarantee participants' right to confidentiality and anonymity, the questionnaires answered had sequential codes: the letter S followed by an Arabic number in order of completion.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Content Analysis[16] and organized with the webQDA software. Through the Coding System software, Tree Codes were built, which emerged from the in-depth

reading of responses entered in the questionnaires. This feature allowed greater support for data categorization, as the tool made it possible to check the frequency of texts and issuers in each category, deepening the discussions on the findings in light of the structural, particular and singular dimensions used as the theoretical-methodological framework of the study.[14]

The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) was used as a guide in this study.[17]

Ethical and legal aspects were respected in accordance with CNS Resolution 466/2012. The study proposal was submitted to two Research Ethic Committees and approved under Opinion Numbers 2.048.302 and 2.239.849 (CAAE: 65334116.2.0000.0102).

Results

Among the 68 participants, 59 were female and nine were male. There was greater participation of students aged between 19 and 21 years, with a total of 29 participants in this age group. Regarding self-declared race, the highest concentration was of white individuals with 48 participants.

The content tree was built by analyzing the responses to the questionnaires. Based on the theoretical-methodological framework, the categories were shaped in the dimensions of Objective Reality – structural, particular and singular. Afterwards, content analysis was performed for the identification of processes related to each category learned from the responses to questionnaires, delimiting the subcategories. In these, codifications were related to the processes of social determination of violence, considering the collectivity and the socio-historical character of the violence reported by university students and expressed through dimensions of the reality of the phenomenon, namely: 1) Singular – processes of violence in the individual's daily life, in the immediate reality, the way of living with violence; 2) Particular – violence related to expressions of social class, gender, family, work/study; 3) General – violence perceived from the political-ideological structure of society. In figure 1, the categories are represented with their developments.

In the Singular dimension, the narrative turns to the object/phenomenon under study (violence) according to the individual's way of living, that is, the typical lifestyle of participants. In this perspective, three subcategories emerged:

Classification of violence
Violence was recognized by most students and only two of them left their answers blank. The following are some of the types described by participants:

Singular dimension / way of living
- Classification of violence – 66 (97.06%)
- Experiences of violence - 64 (94.12%)
- Self-recognition in violence: aggressor or assaulted – 60 (88.23%)

Particular dimension / social class, gender, family, work/study
- Perceptions of what protects from violence – 65 (95.59%)
- Understanding of what causes depletion for violence - 65 (95.59%)

General dimension / political-ideological structure of society
- Reduction of violence - a look at government, institutional and public policy management - 65 (95.59%)
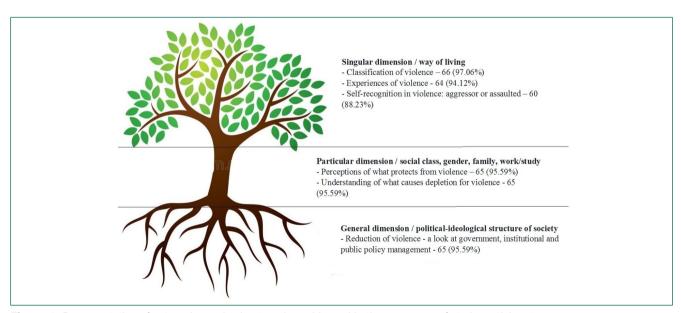
Figure 1. Representation of categories and subcategories evidenced in the responses of study participants.

"More evident when physical, but mainly psychological. There is hardly any place where there is no violence. Domestic, sexual, bar fights, verbal assault, etc". (S7)

"Verbal, physical, psychological, humiliation, segregation, omission. All that is violence because it hurts someone in some way". (S28)

Experiences of violence

From the recognition of violence, the forms of violence present in the daily lives of young people and the most affected populations were identified. At this time, young people addressed violence inside and outside the university: racial, institutional, sexual, gender, psychological, economic and social, which occur in particular, against women, black people, the LBGTI+ population, poor people and children. Four participants did not complete this information. The following answers are examples:

"[...] those around me and working suffer a lot of psychological violence for having to accept everything imposed on them just to be able to eat in the end of the month. At the University, the pressure imposed on us is often violence. Those who suffer most are always part of minorities. Women, blacks, lgbts, poor people [...]". (S26)

"Psychological and institutional violence. At the university, there is a lot of prejudice of professors, colleagues and the institution itself that exempts from the responsibility of looking at the difficulties and diversities of students and professors and does not consider the existing particularities, contexts and plural experiences. The most affected public are homeless people in the place where I live and young students". (S77)

Self-recognition in violence: aggressor or assaulted

Violence is present in the daily lives of young people. We questioned which of them see themselves as aggressors or assaulted, or both, associated with descriptions of situations of violence experienced. In this regard, some university students did not answer. Of those who responded, more than half recognized themselves as assaulted, some as aggressors and assaulted, others answered affirmatively although without identifying if they were aggressors or assaulted, few denied acts of violence and one saw himself only as aggressor. Note that young people did not mention university hazing and/or parties at academic centers/course as a time when acts of violence occur.

Among the violence reported by participants in the face of the aggression perpetrated or received, more than one type of violence was presented in the same report in the narratives, highlighting: sixteen psychological; seven of gender; six patrimonial; six institutional; five bullying; five racial; four sexual; four verbal; four physical; two harassment; one domestic; one moral; and a regional violence, which referred to social prejudice for the person not being from the city of current residence. Below are some examples:

"Yes, assaulted. [...] The psychological pressure to be a good student for being at a public university is constant. [...] This does not only come from the faculty, but from society and the weight of being a federal university". (S50)

"I was raped by men as a child and when I was 21 years old. I have been threatened a few times and suffered psychological violence on-campus inflicted by teachers [...] ultra-conservative teachers who were against strikes and occupation. I suffered physical and psychological sexual abuse on the street". (S77)

"[...] I've recognized myself as an aggressor and assaulted several times, lost count. Neither is good, but being an aggressor is something that hurts me a lot too, because recognizing myself as such makes me suffer, which is not cool". (S56)

The Particular dimension deals with the way of life, values and culture of certain groups or collectives: social class, gender, family, work/study, which are determined by structural processes, mainly by the mode of production that defines the insertion of

individuals into work. Such processes are represented by the groups' typical way of living, historical limits of life, political conditions, as well as their patterns of exposure and vulnerability. In order to involve the perception and understanding of protection and depletion, participants were asked what aggravated the situations of violence and what could protect them so that it did not occur in their daily lives. Most participants identified both protection and depletion processes in relation to the experiences of situations of violence at the university; only three participants did not respond. These data were grouped into two subcategories, as follows:

Perceptions of what protects from violence

For participants, the main way to protect themselves from a situation of violence would be to avoid socializing with some people, or going out at times of the day that concentrate occurrences in the territories (they mentioned the nighttime given the less circulation of people and lack of lighting on the streets). Women also highlighted they should walk in groups and avoid clothes that show their bodies.

"I avoid walking on the street at late hours, I get off at the closest point possible to my house, I walk fast, I hide my cell phone in my pants and carry one that they can take. If I go out at night and see some kind of violence taking place, I try to tell someone who can help and get as far away as I can. And inside the university, I have the same habit of walking fast and keeping my cell phone in a hidden place". (S11)

"[...] protection against robbery, always walk with the least amount of valuable belongings possible and always keep it out of sight. Abuse, wearing clothes that do not show the body, or short clothes to avoid harassment, etc". (S65)

Understanding of what causes depletion for violence

For interviewees, different issues could aggravate violent processes, such as the social context, economic condition, power relations, psychological pressure, gender issues, impunity and the use of illicit drugs.

"Power relationships are aggravating, especially when those with the power are higher in the hierarchy or have greater physical strength". (S10)

"Socioeconomic fragilities, very critical social and political situation in the country, scenario of wrecked public education". (S35)

One of the interviewees highlighted contradictions in Brazilian society, in which there is a veiled coexistence with violence; aggressors are often accepted in collective environments without enforcement of penalties, which, in one's view, reinforces the culture of violence.

"In my view, society is an aggravating factor and also a protective resource, because, at the same time it protects, it culturally structures [...] we live in fear". (S50)

The General dimension refers to the political-ideological structure of society, the current mode of production, economic model and macro-structural policies in a composition with the singularities of the study participants. This dimension of data formed a subcategory:

Reduction of violence - a look at government, institutional and public policy management

At this stage, young people were asked to give their opinion on how violence could be reduced. Three participants abstained from answering and the others referred to public policies, education, health, safety, quality of transport, leisure and culture. They mentioned care in the various spaces of the university, awareness-raising strategies with more humane training in undergraduate courses, addressing issues such as respect, empathy and non-violence. In addition, the need to adopt a university policy that would curb situations of power abuse from teachers with students, violence related to homophobia and racism in university spaces. Here are some examples:

"Physical violence can be reduced with public policies. Men's awareness. But psychological violence is more complex and I have no idea on how to con-

front it, as it is everywhere and, in my opinion, is directly related to the country's culture and inequality that has only increased". (S5).

"Public policies for student inclusion and retention, in addition to large, well-planned, well-structured investments in public education and in the teaching-research-extension tripod. Investments in public safety and progressive policies such as demilitarization of the State Police, legalization of drugs, more humane training for police officers and better financing". (E35).

Discussion

In the Singular dimension, with regard to the Classification of Violence, all participants reported having knowledge about the subject, pointing out impacts on their ways of life. This knowledge is often in the daily lives of young people, who experience the phenomenon in their intergenerational and affective relationships, or even observe violent behavior as something natural, since these behaviors are reproduced in the media.[3]

Violence is expressed among young people in different social classes, as a result of affective relationships and/or through intergenerational transmission, through psychological, physical and sexual violence, as well as the reproduction of behavior observed in the media.[3]

As for the Experience of Violence, interviewees identified the following types of violence as more present in their daily lives: social, psychological and institutional. The first two with an emphasis on violence against women, blacks and the LGBTI+ population, and the last one expressed in the relationships between teachers and students. A 2016 Brazilian study of 1823 university students identified the university as a space of fear, especially for women.[12] The feeling of risk reported by women in university spaces was also identified in a study of 873 female university students in the USA.[18]

The phenomenon of violence affects individuals, regardless of their age, social class, culture and academic level, whether in public or private educational institutions. A study conducted in cities in the hinterland of northeastern Brazil indicates that violence is transmitted through opinions that prevent or mistreat diversity in collective spaces, disregarding races, cultures, genders and sexualities, which compromises the right to diversity.[8]

Gender violence is a problem in patriarchal societies, in which the family is subject to the power of the patriarch in private and public spheres. This submission, naturalized throughout history, culminated in various situations of symbolic and physical violence, which often resulted in bodily harm and death, especially among women. However, violence against women must be understood as a violation of human rights, as well as a violation of equality - legal, social, political, and economic - which, according to a study conducted in Mexican universities, prevents strategies for the development of a society based on peace.[9] It is possible to relate gender violence to the hegemony of male power and female subordination, as well as to images that reproduce the social roles defining the being a woman and being a man.[11]

As for self-recognition as an aggressor or assaulted, a study conducted in 2015 found that students were afraid of sexual violence at the universities they attended. Most (70%) study participants had already suffered some type of violence, especially violence of sexual, psychological, physical or moral nature. Students' complaints referred to the lack of security at the universities with poorly lit access places, and gender-based violence in university spaces. The students recognized their peers and teachers as aggressors, in acts ranging from intellectual disqualification to rape. Among young males, 38% claimed to have committed acts of violence against women, but only 2% of them confirmed that the acts committed took place at the university, or in environments dedicated to academic parties.[12]

In the North American context, in a study of young university students, 35% of participants said they would commit violence if they could and 51% of university women suffered sexual violence during adolescence. These women also said they had been victims of other situations of violence after admission to university, with aggressors being men they

know and these situations happened inside and outside university institutions. Among the aggressors were the fiancé, friends or men they met on the day of the assault. Among 246 students interviewed, only four reported having gone to the police to denounce cases of gender-based violence, because they did not recognize an act of violence in the event. [7] A study conducted in Spanish universities differs from this finding, showing that women have broken the silence and denounced situations of gender violence. [19]

As evidenced in the results of the present study in the Particular dimension, young people addressed issues such as: circulating accompanied in public spaces, observing times and places considered safer on the way between their residence and the university, and avoiding the use of valuable objects such as cell phones. These issues concern the structural violence to which they are subjected, as it arises in the social system and affects the population's life possibilities based on historical-economic conditions. [1] It is an expression of social inequality and the scarcity of public safety in the territory that can make this population group even more vulnerable.

Specifically among female students, wearing clothes not considered provocative was highlighted as protection, according to common sense, a condition that further reaffirms the facet of gender violence. A Portuguese study expresses that women are subject to the standardization of clothing based on imposed social roles, with a dichotomy between the public and the private. [11]

In this dimension, other protective behaviors were also reported, such as: avoiding confrontations, especially with teachers, performing therapy to know how to act in the face of academic pressures, and using medication to reduce levels of anxiety. This last behavior is in line with results of a study from São Paulo that evaluated 430 university students; most participants were female (84.8%). Of the total number of respondents, 40% used psychotropic drugs, mainly antidepressants and anxiolytics, with a higher search for medication during their university period. [20] Another study highlighted the need for young people's adaptation to university life (academic, social, emotional and institutional life),

so that new friendships and institutional bonds can happen without the presence of stress and/or anxiety, with a teacher-student relationship based on empathy, dialogue, active listening, focused on a light relationship in which trust, reciprocity and exchange of experiences can be established. [21]

Participants understood the depletion processes for violence through the following: lack of flexibility of teachers; disrespect for the socioeconomic conditions of some students; power abuse in personal relationships; lack of empathy and dialogue between professors and students; intolerance to differences (gender, sexuality, race, etc.); drug consumption and sale; difficulties in accessing health actions and employment, little or no policing inside and outside the university.

Researchers have stated that cases of violence often have power asymmetries as their aggressors. This phenomenon occurs due to the established and endorsed power relations, and conform scenarios in which gender relationships are reproduced, which can mean disastrous learning perpetuated in future generations, such as: psychological violence, physical aggression, sexual abuse, sexual, racial and gender discrimination. [8]

Although relationships between teachers and students can be exhausting, they can also take on protective characteristics, as the establishment of an affective relationship enhances an experience favorable to learning. Embracement and attention provide understanding, acceptance and appreciation of the other and enable students' greater appreciation of the course and values attributed to the chosen graduation and consequently, to the future profession. [21]

In the subcategory that makes up the General dimension, the highlights were the implementation of educational activities, campaigns against violence, legitimization of public policies, as well as the implementation of institutional policies: investment in safety and transport, enhancement of education, implementation of leisure options, active participation of students in the political life of the university and integration activities between classes and courses.

Students from a university in the hinterland of São Paulo considered the academic environment as

a privileged place for transformation and development, and mentioned that the appreciation of education would reduce violence and favor human development.[13]

Research in Spanish universities highlighted the urgency to encourage reports of violence, organize discussion groups, guide the detection of violent situations and improve care services for people in situations of violence with the implementation of educational, preventive and investigative programs.[19]

It is possible to see that young university students produce ideas, horizons and projections with the potential to change objective reality, that is, they produce the 'philosophy of praxis', a link between philosophy and reality, in which practical activities can change realities and transform matters or situations in the sense of overcoming them.[22] For example, in the collective proposal produced by a Public University to face violence and gender discrimination.[13]

Considering the number of students with active enrollments in the institution that would be in the age group delimited for the study, the small number of participants stands out as a study limitation in relation to the violence experienced. It is also relevant to highlight the participation of a markedly female and white expression.

Conclusion

Violence against and among young university students was perceived as a socially determined phenomenon with expression in the dimensions of objective reality. The discussion of the subject was seen as relevant by those investigated, as well as demanding broad participation from the university community, inside and outside institutional spaces. With regard to the implications of this study for nursing, the category can contribute to stimulate activities of investigation and confrontation of violence at university institutions in order to support the implementation of institutional policies, as well as teaching, research and extension actions that make violence visible

and confront it by promoting coordinated protective actions between organized society and the State, rethinking gender relations, femininities, masculinities and prejudices.

Collaborations

Fialla MRPM, Larocca LM, Chaves MMN and Lourenço RG declare that they contributed to the study design, data analysis and interpretation, article writing, relevant critical review of the intellectual content and approval of the final version to be published.

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