

## VIOLENCE AGAINST AMAZON WOMEN

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*This quantitative and exploratory study analyzed violence against Amazon women presented in print media according to type and severity, and whether aggressors fell under the Maria da Penha law. A total of 181 issues of a regional newspaper were consulted. Based on content analysis, 164 items addressing violence against women were selected and 46 were included in the corpus of analysis. Results were gathered in three thematic groups: women killed with cruelty, sexual violence against women regardless of age, and violence against women and the limitations of the Maria da Penha law. Violence against these women varied in terms of form and severity, including up to homicide. Women are submitted to sexual violence from childhood through adulthood. The enforcement of this law shows the community it has a means to cope with this social phenomenon.*

**DESCRIPTORS:** violence; women; communications media

## VIOLENCIA CONTRA MUJERES AMAZÓNICAS

*Este es un estudio exploratorio de naturaleza cualitativa, que se realizó con el objetivo de analizar la violencia contra mujeres amazónicas, presentada en los periódicos, según el tipo y su gravedad, y citación de encuadramiento del agresor en la Ley Maria de la Penha. Fueron consultados 181 ejemplares de un periódico regional. A partir del análisis de contenido, fueron seleccionadas 164 notas sobre violencias contra mujeres, de ellas 46 fueron incluidas como corpus de análisis. Los resultados fueron reunidos en tres grupos temáticos: mujeres asesinadas con crueldad, la violencia sexual contra mujeres no tiene edad y la violencia contra mujeres y el límite de la Ley Maria de la Penha. La violencia contra esas mujeres presentó variación en cuanto a la forma y a la gravedad, ocurriendo inclusive homicidios. Las mujeres son sometidas a violencia sexual desde la infancia hasta la edad adulta. El encuadramiento legal del agresor demuestra a la comunidad un medio para enfrentamiento de ese fenómeno social.*

**DESCRIPTORES:** violencia; mujeres; medios de comunicación

## VIOLÊNCIA CONTRA MULHERES AMAZÔNICAS

*Este é um estudo exploratório de natureza qualitativa, com o objetivo de analisar a violência contra mulheres amazônicas, apresentada na mídia impressa, segundo o tipo e sua gravidade, e citação de enquadramento do agressor na Lei Maria da Penha. Foram consultados 181 exemplares de um jornal regional. A partir da análise de conteúdo, foram selecionadas 164 notas sobre violências contra mulheres e incluídas, como corpus de análise, 46 delas. Os resultados foram reunidos em três grupos temáticos: mulheres assassinadas com crueldade, violência sexual contra mulheres não tem idade e violência contra mulheres e o limite da Lei Maria da Penha. A violência contra essas mulheres apresentou variação quanto à forma e à gravidade, ocorrendo inclusive homicídio. As mulheres são submetidas à violência sexual desde a infância até a idade adulta. O enquadramento legal do agressor demonstra à comunidade um meio para enfrentamento desse fenômeno social.*

**DESCRITORES:** violência; mulheres; meios de comunicação

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence against women elicits clear rejection in the majority of people. In great part, this response is a result of the work performed by women's organizations, which since the 1970s, have denounced gender violence as a severe violation of human rights. The press has currently disseminated the issue, mainly in crime pages, although it is also presented as a health, human rights and public policy issue.

Violence against women presented in the general media highlights social and gender inequity, denounces crime, reveals "characters" from society and highlights the magnitude of the problem when it translates security incidents and social controversies that happen in communities. In this context, gender violence is a problem that should be considered an epidemic, public health and public safety issue due its magnitude, thus, it is a problem of public interest.

Violence is an issue of public interest because it has increased in frequency and in general affects people's lives, especially those who live in big cities. There are different types of violence against women in the domestic and social contexts: physical, psychological and sexual, while all these have increased all over the world.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has invested in a project aimed to analyze the importance of violence and its dissemination in the international media as well as the influence of several experiences of aggression in real life and the several means of communication available to children<sup>(1)</sup>.

Violence includes both the individual and the collective spheres: "physical" violence includes homicides, aggressions, violations and armed robbery; "economic" violence consists of misappropriation of property and goods and "moral and symbolic" violence refers to cultural domination, when one offends and disrespects people's dignity and rights<sup>(2)</sup>.

Brazil's history is marked by violence and many women have had their lives associated with this phenomenon. The law called *Maria da Penha* was enacted after many complaints and is one of the social protection instruments available to women and aims to reduce the occurrence of this phenomenon and punish aggressors. This law (No. 11,340) was enacted on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006 and stipulates, in its article 44, imprisonment of offenders from three months to three years<sup>(3)</sup>.

This law will contribute to change the notification of violence in Belém, PA, Brazil, where approximately 23,746 women, victims of violence, sought help at the women's police station<sup>(4)</sup> from January 2004 to September 2006<sup>(4)</sup>.

Beginning in the 1980s, the issue acquired increased space in the media. Violence has been presented as an issue related to power struggle and as a phenomenon that emerges with a chance to negotiate, redefine understanding of reality and construct new concepts<sup>(5)</sup>.

Generally speaking, the media represent the means of communication and are composed of vehicles to disseminate matters of interest to society. Mass communication is essential to form opinions in terms of cultural orientation, different views about the world, and global dissemination of values and images. Due to the importance of violence, this study was guided by the following question: Is violence against Amazon women and its outcomes presented by the print press? Based on this question, the study's objective was to analyze violence against Amazon women presented in the media in the state of Pará, Brazil<sup>(6)</sup> identifying the types of violence, its severity and where aggressors fit in the context of the law Maria da Penha<sup>(3)</sup>.

## METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory and qualitative study. A total of 181 issues of a regional newspaper, published from January to June 2007 were consulted and 164 reports were selected from sections concerning current news and crime addressing violence against Amazon women. Of these, 46 were included in the corpus of analysis because they met the following inclusion criteria: narrated violence against Amazon women, that is, women living in the following Brazilian states: Acre, Rondônia, Amapá, Roraima, Amazonas and Pará, regardless of place of birth and age. One hundred and eighteen items were excluded because they addressed violence that happened in regions other than the Brazilian Amazon region and other countries, violence related to health, robbery and accident due to external causes.

The search of the newspaper's items was carried out using the content analysis technique, which represents "a set of techniques of analysis of communication aiming to obtain, through systematic

procedures and objectives of description of the messages' content, indicators (quantitative or not) that permit the inference of knowledge related to conditions of the production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages<sup>(7)</sup>.

Content analysis followed the pre-analysis of searching for items in the newspapers' daily issues, which sought to identify items addressing violence against Amazon women, in order to proceed to the organization and reading of these items. Afterwards, the exhaustiveness rule was applied, which consisted of reading the newspaper's published items so as to understand them as a whole, not giving priority or discarding any data. Homogeneity was also sought so as to identify the relevance and adherence of the newspaper's items to the occurrence of violence against women as pre-established in the study's objective.

In this way, we could observe repetition of words and phrases that emerged and group them into emergent thematic categories of the reports presented in the published items. Then, the items were sorted into three thematic groups: a) women killed with cruelty; b) sexual violence against women regardless of age and c) violence against women, and the limitations of the Maria da Penha law, which are presented in the study's results.

## RESULTS

Twenty (43.4%) out of 46 analyzed items were included in the category *women killed with cruelty*, while the content presented several forms of violence, whether with the use of gun, knife, or beating.

[...] MNP, 33 years old was killed with three shots in the middle of the night [...]. There were three bullet holes in her body, in the head, chest and abdomen, as described by the police officer. Ananindeua, PA, Brazil (published on January 4<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.3, Police Section).

[...] housewife, CLGG, 39 years old. She was killed with one shot, possibly from a pistol, which went through her chest [...](published on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.4, Police Section).

[...] She was shot but still had strength to walk several meters to where her husband was drinking with some friends, she held him and said "R., they killed me" and collapsed [...]. Apeú-Castanhal, PA (published on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.4, Police Section).

A woman, nearly four months pregnant, was found dead, almost naked, with contusions on her nose and suspected

of having a broken neck, on the seashore Guajará [...]. Belém, PA (published on January 19<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.4, Police Section).

A woman was killed with a heavy blow to her neck and almost had her head severed from her body [...]. Ananindeua, PA (published on February 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.3, Police Section)

[...] A woman had her legs severed from her body and had a piece of wood inside her genitals. Dom Eliseu, PA (published on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.11, Current Section)

[...] The rural worker ASE, 26 years old was four months pregnant. On Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup>, the fourth suspect identified only as "Chico", after discovering that AS was having an affair with one of the group members, got a rifle and shot the victim, who died instantly. Afterwards, the four got a knife that was used in the kitchen of the shack where they were housed, opened up her abdomen and took out the fetus and the victim's viscera. Then the defendants tied her body and threw her in the Capim River, doing the same with the fetus and her viscera [...]. Ipixuna, PA (published on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, p.4, Police Section).

[...] EPS, 36 years old was killed on Tuesday night, stabbed seven times while she was sleeping in a hammock [...]. Altamira, PA (published on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.4, Police Section)

Sixteen (34,8%) items revealing that sexual violence against women affect them regardless of their age were found. These referred to occurrences that happened in different stages of life.

PASN, 24 years old is suspected of having kidnapped and sexually abused a woman [...]. The suspect would have forced her to get into his black car and taken her to an uninhabited area, where he would have committed sexual acts with her [...]. Belém, PA (published on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, p.3, Police Section).

A three-year old girl was sexually abused on Saturday late at night, two days before New Year after her mother left her at home by herself [...]. The main suspect is the watchman JRP. R, known as "Rambo", 37 years old [...]. As soon as she got back home, 15 minutes after going out, she found the front door wide open and saw her daughter bleeding in her private parts and in a dreadful state. The girl told her what happened, reported that she was victim of several sexual acts and sexual intercourse, accusing JR as the perpetrator of the barbarism [...]. Belém, PA (published on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, p.3, Police Section).

A 13-year-old victim says she has been subjected to violence by a relative since she was 11 [...]. COPS, 55 years old, suspected of having molested the teenager since she was 11 [...] when the girl became 11 years old, CO started to attack her, perpetrating sexual acts with her niece. When she became 12 years old, the suspect raped her, according to the complaint. Several subpoenas were issued and in case C does appear at the police station, the delegate will request his preventive custody. (published on February 16<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.5, Police Section).

[...] AHAS, known as "Boi" was arrested on charges of having raped a 14-year old teenager on Saturday late afternoon in Icoaraci. [...] the victim was dragged to a commercial site [...] The rapist threatened to cut the victim's throat with a knife. "Boi" raped the girl and then violently punched her face. After the sexual violence, he threatened her saying he was going to break her head with a brick. "Boi" was apprehended in the act of indecent assault and jailed in the regional police station. Belém, PA (published on February 19<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.5, Police Section).

[...] A Young woman was bitten and raped by two unknown men when she was relaxing in a bar on the Água Cristal canal in Bengui [...]. Ananindeua, PA (published on February 19<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.5, Police Section).

A 17-year old teenager was brutally raped and beaten in the middle of last night in an abandoned area [...]. Ulianópolis, PA (published on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.1, Police Section).

Ten (21.8%) newspaper notes indicated that the *Maria da Penha* law was enforced when violence against women occurred.

A woman expecting triplets accuses her boyfriend of aggression, PS. S. 29 years old called the police saying her boyfriend would have punched her belly and arm on the street [...] "I expect him to stay in jail because now the law is more severe", said the victim. Belém, PA (published on January 11<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.3, Police Section).

[...] the seaman JQM, 60 years old who had been for some time using a wire to beat his partner SS, 25 years old, is in custody in the Provisional Detention Center of Coqueiro. He was arrested red-handed with the "whip" in the pocket and charged under the law 11,304 2006, the so-called "Maria da Penha law". [...] He beat her several times with the "whip". The last beating took place three days ago, when the seaman whipped her several times and kicked and punched her [...].Ananindeua, PA (published on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, p.2, Police Section).

[...] MNSS, 41 years old reported to the Police that ACS attacked her with a piece of clapboard [...]. The painter confirmed he assaulted the woman when he was arrested. "We fought and I hit her some" he said. Marituba, PA (published on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2007, p.3, Police Section).

## DISCUSSION

Violence against women is acknowledged as a public health problem and a violation of human rights all over the world. It represents a risk for the health of women given its consequences on their development and also on their effective social participation.

The newspaper items reveal that Amazon women are victims of violence with cruelty in the most diverse situations. The media explicitly and clearly describe the events to the whole population and it influences society's opinions and contributes to its education. This is somewhat indicative of the fact that the perspective of world is more important than words, that is, social facts need to be transformed into information with accessible language to the population and reach diverse places<sup>(8)</sup>. The reports' contents indicate that many times women had no chance to defend themselves and were at the mercy of their aggressors, who attacked the most vital body parts, that is, head, chest and abdomen. These aggressions are reported in the newspaper as violence that, depending on its intensity, ended in homicide. It is thus essential to disseminate social problems and rights and the print press is a vehicle that can form public opinion.

Physical violence is classified as moderate and severe<sup>(9)</sup>. The newspaper reports revealed that victims were subjected to severe violence through several means, which shows that aggressiveness against women is exposed in the press. Violence is aggravated as a complex phenomenon. One has also to consider that aggressors may be victims, since violence may reflect mental suffering, misuse of legal and illegal drugs and other social phenomena.

Sexual violence against women occurred to different ages. The items described this type of violence perpetrated by the aggressor in adult women, adolescents and children of different ages.

Sexual violence against women is the most common type of violence practiced by an intimate partner. It is understood as an action or behavior in which one controls and subordinates a woman's sexuality and is also a way men have to demonstrate their power and physical strength. It triggers several social situations of conflict to which women are subjected when violence is committed by family members, boyfriends or acquaintances. Women are generally emotionally involved with those who victimize them and most of them have a financial dependency on those who torture them, except in cases where rapes are committed on the streets. This violence occurs in all counties around the world, regardless of social, economic, religious or cultural group<sup>(10-11)</sup>.

Such types of violence occur in a large range of situations such as rape, forced sex in marriage,

child sexual abuse, incestuous abuse and sexual harassment. Thus, sexual violence, of which women are the most victimized, includes, among others: rape, obscene acts, non-consensual caresses, forced sex during marital relationship and impeding the partner's use of contraceptives, which harms women's reproductive rights<sup>(12)</sup>. Rape and violent assault, considered hideous crimes, whether they were accomplished or not, are characterized as non-consensual sexual contact<sup>(13)</sup>.

It is also important to highlight that health professionals need to be informed about phenomena emerging in society and their effects and associated consequences that generally result in healthcare delivery. Violence against children generate mental suffering that can accompany them for the rest of their lives and constitutes a hideous crime.

Violence was also perpetrated against women during the pregnancy period and led to severe consequences such as bleeding and abortion. The consulted literature notes that physical violence against pregnant women increases the risk of prematurity, fetal suffering or death since it affects the woman, fetus and society.

The newspaper items report the enforcement of the *Maria da Penha* Law. The Law and its enforcement constitute an instrument to reduce violence against women. This Law is also a legal instrument useful for society coming to understand that violence against women is a crime because it hurts human rights. Violence against women is a social pathology that involves men and women in Brazil and is the object of several police guidelines to reduce it and this law indicates that rights should be protected by the force of the law.

Violence against women, as a social phenomenon, has been studied and results have been published in scientific journals of acknowledged quality, as is the case of this nursing periodical, and has been associated with the use of drugs, which leads to problems in the family and work contexts<sup>(16)</sup>. The use of legal and illegal drugs by college students is also presented as an element that triggers violence<sup>(17)</sup>. The maternal role in the context of women with small children and who are or had been under treatment for alcohol or drug dependency is also highlighted<sup>(18)</sup>. Sexual violence against women is also analyzed in relation to the risk of HIV and chemoprophylaxis<sup>(19)</sup>. Additionally, there are some analyses about the self-esteem of women who were sexually assaulted and

the support health professionals represent in the process of overcoming harm that results from these experiences<sup>(20)</sup>. These publications provide scientific rationales that reaffirm that violence against women is a social phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

Violence is an issue included in the agenda of various countries in the world. The main cause of discussion is the increased number and severity of cases. Therefore, health professionals need to be informed about phenomena that emerge in the society and how they happen, since it is a public health problem that oftentimes ends up in health care services.

Violence that occurred in the Amazon context and registered in the newspaper presented varied type and degrees of severity. Even though we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women are still subject to punches and kicks, beatings with wires, clapboards, scalpels and also to sexual violence.

Violence of all kinds and degrees of severity affect women of different ages. The outcome of violence is also associated with homicide through guns, weapons and other means. The means and ways homicides are committed against women denote barbarian crimes such as cutting, deep cuts in the neck, opening of the abdomen, exposing viscera and removal of fetus and the introduction of wood into the genitals.

Sexual violence occurs against women of different ages and sometimes culminates in homicide. We observed that sexual violence is also associated with physical violence and other threats.

The newspaper reports reveal that aggressors are included in the *Maria da Penha* law and one of the women sought this resource when she survived the violence.

This study's results reveal that violence is a social reality portrayed by the media in Para, Brazil with language accessible to the population in general, especially those who know how to read and have access to the journal.

When the media highlights subjects of social relevance, it influences society's behavior and directly collaborates in the construction of public policies. Therefore, the media, in addition to being considered one that incites violent behavior of citizens, should

be understood as an instrument that enables people to exert social control, which contributes (or not) to the State to assume its role in face of these issues. In the Brazilian case, it is essential to disseminate awareness of the *Maria da Penha* law, which ensures women's rights, protection from the state and sanctions against the aggressor.

The contribution of this study to literature refers to the adoption of a data source that is currently used by a large part of the population (newspaper)

and the transformation of its data in the public domain into information that portrays a Brazilian context (Amazon). Reading a newspaper as a component of a study's methodology is also a differential. This reading results in arguments that can help nurses and other health professionals to understand how violence against women is seen by society. This approximation with daily life provides these professionals support so they can encourage women during nursing care to know problems and find strategies to overcome them.

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