

# OVERVIEW OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN MUNICIPALITIES IN CEARÁ

## *Panorama da violência sexual contra crianças e adolescentes em municípios cearenses*

## *Panorama de la violencia sexual contra niños y adolescentes de municipios de Ceará*

Original Article

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe the overview of sexual violence against children and adolescents in coastal municipalities and backlands in Ceará, Brazil. **Methods:** This is a descriptive study conducted in 2014 with the analysis of secondary data from the “100 Call Service” related to cases of sexual violence against children and adolescents in the municipalities of the state of Ceará, Brazil, for the triennium 2011-2013. **Results:** A total of 210 municipalities in the backlands of Ceará were analyzed, including the municipality of Acopiara with 18 (10.8%) cases, which stood out for the number cases of sexual abuse against children and adolescents. Among the coastal municipalities, Caucaia has the highest number of cases, with 112 (35.07%) cases of sexual abuse. **Conclusion:** The study warns government authorities and the community to draw attention to the cases of sexual violence (exploitation and abuse) that are taking place in several municipalities in Ceará, particularly in the coastal region.

**Descriptors:** Sexual Violence; Child Abuse; Child Advocacy.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Descrever o panorama da violência sexual contra crianças e adolescentes em municípios do litoral e do sertão do estado do Ceará, Brasil. **Métodos:** Trata-se de um estudo descritivo realizado em 2014 com análise de dados secundários do “Disque 100” relacionados aos casos de violência sexual contra crianças e adolescentes nos municípios do estado do Ceará, Brasil, referentes ao triênio 2011-2013. **Resultados:** Foram analisados 210 municípios do sertão cearense, dentre eles o município de Acopiara com 18 (10,8%) denúncias, sendo destaque para casos de denúncias por abuso sexual contra crianças e adolescentes. Dentre os municípios litorâneos, Caucaia representa o maior número de denúncias, com 112 (35,07%) casos de abuso sexual. **Conclusão:** O estudo é uma alerta às autoridades e à comunidade para atentarem aos casos de violência sexual (exploração e abuso) contra crianças e adolescentes que estão ocorrendo nos diversos municípios cearenses, principalmente na região litorânea.

**Descritores:** Violência Sexual; Maus-Tratos Infantis; Defesa da Criança e do Adolescente.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Describir el panorama de la violencia sexual contra niños y adolescentes en municipios de la costa y de la región agreste del estado de Ceará, Brasil. **Métodos:** Se trata de un estudio descriptivo realizado en 2014 con análisis de datos secundarios de la “Llamada 100” relacionados con los casos de violencia sexual contra niños y adolescentes en los municipios del estado de Ceará, Brasil, referentes al trienio 2011-2013. **Resultados:** Fueron analizados 210 municipios de la región agreste de Ceará. De estos, el municipio que recibió más casos de denuncias de abuso sexual contra niños y adolescentes fue Acopiara con 18 casos (10,8%). De los municipios de la costa, Caucaia presentó el mayor número de denuncias con 112 (35,07%) casos de abuso sexual. **Conclusión:** El estudio es un alerta para las autoridades y la comunidad para poner atención a los casos de violencia sexual (explotación y abuso) contra niños y adolescentes que ocurren en los diversos municipios de Ceará, principalmente en la región de la costa.

**Descriptor:** Violencia Sexual; Maltrato a los Niños; Defensa del Niño.

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence is a complex – and sometimes controversial and problematic – phenomenon<sup>(1)</sup>. It causes deaths, injuries, physical trauma, and mental, emotional, and spiritual harms. It highlights the need for interdisciplinary, multi-professional and intersectorial action aimed to meet the needs of citizens<sup>(2)</sup>.

Brazil's Ministry of Health, following the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1996, stated that violence constitutes a major public health problem. Thus, it published the Policy for Reducing Accident- and Violence-related Morbidity and Mortality<sup>(3)</sup>.

Violence is an issue that is constantly addressed in the literature because it is a historical problem that accompanies humanity and is embedded within social, political and economic structures, as well as within individual thoughts and social relationships. Understanding violence implies addressing it and acknowledging it as a public health problem<sup>(4-6)</sup> of growing magnitude and that has an impact on morbidity and mortality of populations, on daily experiences and on the reorientation of attitudes and behaviors<sup>(7, 8)</sup>.

In Brazil, children and adolescents are among the groups that are most vulnerable to violence, which is the main cause of morbidity and mortality<sup>(9)</sup>. The first manifestations of the Brazilian State to protect children and adolescents from events of violence occurred in 1923 with the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child. However, it was only in 1990 that the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente – ECA*) was promulgated by Law 8069 of July 13, 1990<sup>(10)</sup>.

Given that, it is necessary to emphasize that the criminalization of behaviors towards these vulnerable groups, who are victims of abuse, violence or exploitations of sexual nature, is not restricted to the Penal Code. Since its promulgation, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent has, in its continued reformulations, addressed the issue<sup>(11)</sup>.

Public policies in Brazil, through the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS*), receive the specific mandate from the ECA to promote children's and adolescents' right to life and health through comprehensive health care, which presupposes universal and egalitarian access to services at the three levels of care. This task requires the development of actions aimed at health promotion, violence prevention, absolute care to victims and networked care<sup>(12)</sup>.

From 1993, Brazil started to establish some historical frameworks for fighting sexual abuse against children and adolescents. During the same period, the report of the first Parliamentary Joint Committee (*Comissão Parlamentar Mista de Inquérito – CPMI*) was prepared to investigate

organizations for the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, bringing to light many cases of violations of children's rights and highlighting the lack of basic social policies and policies targeted at victims<sup>(13,14)</sup>.

With the support from the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), Centers for the Defense of Children and Adolescents (Cedeca) are set up in several cities in the country to expand the protection, prevention and care of children, adolescents and their families in the event of sexual violence<sup>(15)</sup>.

Brazil invests in this field with the promulgation of public policies aimed at protecting children and adolescents and fighting violence, especially sexual violence, in order to guarantee the rights of this group. Above all, in the last decades, it is not possible to speak about children and adolescents without speaking about violence, which indicates that these two groups are mostly exposed and vulnerable to violations of their rights, directly and indirectly affecting their physical, mental and emotional health<sup>(16)</sup>.

In 2003, the Special Secretariat for Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic created a specific body to combat sexual violence against children and adolescents. With the establishment of the National Program to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents (*Programa Nacional de Enfrentamento da Violência Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes – PNEVSCA*), important initiatives have been implemented, such as the 100 Call Service or National Report Abuse Contact, a hotline through which society can communicate with the public power that is available for all Brazilian states and is coordinated and run by the Special Secretariat for Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic (*Secretaria de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República – SDH-PR*). Its main objective is to receive reports of violations of the rights of children and adolescents and refer them to the competent bodies, as well as to provide guidance on services and care and protection networks for states and municipalities<sup>(12)</sup>.

The service also works as an epidemiological tool for violence in the country, contributing to the definition of policies and priority areas that should receive care. Despite its focus on fighting sexual violence, the 100 Call Service is now hotline for Human Rights of Children and Adolescents that receives reports of different types of violence involving girls and boys<sup>(12)</sup>.

The context of big cities and its relation to the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents presents a scenario that violates human rights, which generates profound consequences and detrimental outcomes to these subjects; in addition, it is recognized throughout the world as one of the most extreme forms of violation of the rights of children and adolescents<sup>(17,18)</sup>.

Brazil has undertaken strategies to address and prevent sexual violence against children and adolescents. Advances have been recognized with the National Plan and the implementation of the Sentinel Program. However, mismatches minimize their effectiveness in terms of specialized care, especially with regard to flawed indicators that monitor and evaluate the actions undertaken in municipalities<sup>(19)</sup>. The education sector is part of a specific form of world order that begins with modernity. Its roots are deeply intertwined with the changes that occur from this period. The way of organizing the process, the reconfiguration of the family and of the roles of its members, the redefinition and expansion of school education were some of these changes<sup>(20)</sup>.

This research aims to contribute to improve the responses of services that fight sexual violence through action strategies, as a tool of municipal public management. The proposed analysis will serve to provide an overview of the advances and challenges that exist in education sectors in relation to their users in order to guarantee the rights of this group in situations of sexual violence.

Thus, the present article aims to describe the overview of sexual violence against children and adolescents in coastal municipalities and backlands in Ceará, Brazil.

## METHODS

This is a quantitative descriptive study with analysis of secondary data related to cases of sexual violence against children and adolescents. Data were requested from the “100 Call Service” by registering into the system through the electronic page “Access to Information” in January 2014. Information on the cases reported to this system was directed to and requested from the Secretariat for Human Rights of the State of Ceará.

The National Report Abuse Contact, or 100 Call Service, is service for the protection of children and adolescents with a focus on sexual violence linked to the National Program to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents. It is a hotline through which society can communicate with the public power and that allows to know and evaluate the dimension of violence and the protection system, in addition to providing guidance on the development of public policies<sup>(21)</sup>.

Twenty days after the request, the authors received the data in tables and graphs containing information on sexual violence in the State of Ceará in the period from 2011 to 2013. These data were requested from Federal Government in order to carry out a diagnosis of the epidemiological situation of sexual violence because in the year 2014 the country (Brazil) would have an atypical period due to the World Cup (Soccer), experiencing a different reality from

previous years and suffering – in the following years – consequences of violent acts occurred in the period of 2014. The analysis of this period avoided bias.

After obtaining the data, the present research, which is the result of a larger project that covers the management of the health sector and the provision of care in coastal municipalities of the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil, analyzed the elements relating to the overview of the municipalities of Ceará (coastal and backlands) with regard to reports of sexual violence (exploitation and abuse).

The data from this research were tabulated and submitted to simple statistical analysis using absolute frequency and later discussed using relative frequency.

## RESULTS

The State of Ceará is located in Northeastern Brazil. The Illiteracy rate in the State decreased 29.1% during the period 2000/2010 – from 26.5% in 2000 to 18.8% in 2010<sup>(22)</sup>.

According to data from the State Secretariat for Tourism (*Secretaria de Turismo do Estado – SETUR*), Ceará received 2,995,024 tourists via the capital city Fortaleza in 2012, an increase of 11.27% when compared to 2010. The months of January, July and December are historically the ones with highest number of tourists in the state. For the year 2012, these months together accounted for approximately 34.6% of the total number of tourists. A total of 92% of the people who visited Ceará in the year 2012 came from the so-called domestic tourism, that is, 2,761,413 visitors came from the different Brazilian states<sup>(22)</sup>.

A total of 210 municipalities in the backlands of Ceará were analyzed. Of these, the ones that stood out for the number of reports of cases of sexual abuse against children and adolescents were Acopiara – 18 (10.8%), Pedra Branca – 17 (10.2%) and Crateús – 15 (9.3%). As for cases of sexual exploitation, Quixadá and Crateús stand out with 07 (18.4%) and 05 (13.1%) cases, respectively (Table I).

It is emphasized that some municipalities were not informed in the tables because the “100 Call Service” did not provide information about them. Possibly, they have not had any reports of sexual violence against children and adolescents.

According to Table II, the municipality of Caucaia represents the municipality with the highest number of reports, with 112 cases of sexual abuse, followed by Jijoca de Jericoacoara, with 47 (15.1%) and São Gonçalo do Amarante, with 28 (8.9%). With regard to cases of sexual exploitation, the municipalities of Caucaia stands out with 28 (26.9%) reports of cases, followed by Trairi – 16 (5.1%) and São Gonçalo do Amarante – 11 (3.5 %).

Table I - Characterization of municipalities in the backlands with reports of violence against children and adolescents through the 100 Call Service\* in the 2011-2012-2013 triennium. Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil, 2014 (n=210).

<b>Municipalities</b>	<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Sexual Exploitation</b>	<b>%</b>
Acopiara	18	10.8	-	-
Pedra Branca	17	10.2	01	2.6
Crateús	15	9.3	05	13.1
Tauá	14	8.4	04	10.5
Quixadá	12	7.2	07	18.4
Quixeramobim	11	6.6	01	2.6
Monsenhor Tabosa	10	6.2	01	2.6
Mombaça	10	6.2	01	2.6
Parambu	09	5.4	01	2.6
Senador Pompeu	08	4.8	02	5.2
Boa Viagem	05	3.1	01	2.6
Banabuiú	05	3.1	-	-
Solonópole	05	3.1	-	-
Milhã	04	2.4	04	10.5
Novo Oriente	04	2.4	-	-
Aiuaba	03	1.8	01	2.6
Ararendá	03	1.8	-	-
Catarina	03	1.8	-	-
Choró	02	1.2	03	7.8
Nova Russas	02	1.2	01	2.6
Ipaporanga	02	1.2	-	-
Independência	01	0.6	-	-
Quiterianópolis	01	0.6	01	2.6
Madalena	01	0.6	05	13.1
Deputado Irapuan Pinheiro	01	0.6	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>-</b>

\*According to data from the Government of the State of Ceará - [www.ceara.gov.br](http://www.ceara.gov.br)

Table II - Characterization of municipalities in the East and West Coasts with reports of violence against children and adolescents through the 100 Call Service\* in the 2011-2012-2013 triennium. Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil, 2014 (n=417).

<b>Municipalities</b>	<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Sexual Exploitation</b>	<b>%</b>
Caucaia	112	35.07	28	26.9
Jijoca de Jericoacoara	47	15.1	01	0.9
São Gonçalo do Amarante	28	8.9	11	3.5
Itapipoca	21	6.7	07	6.7
Aquiraz	19	6.7	08	2.5
Trairi	18	5.7	16	5.1
Aracati	17	5.4	02	1.9
Cascavel	12	3.8	09	8.6
Beberibe	11	3.5	02	1.9
Camocim	9	2.8	06	5.7
Paraipaba	7	2.2	03	2.8
Paracuru	6	1.9	09	8.6
Icapuí	3	0.9	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>-</b>

\*According to data from the Government of the State of Ceará - [www.ceara.gov.br](http://www.ceara.gov.br)

The data show that in the backlands of Ceará the cases of sexual violence (abuse and exploitation) occur less frequently (204 cases, 33.1%) than in the coastal municipalities (412 cases, 66.9%). Among the five municipalities with the main cases of sexual violence are Caucaia, São Gonçalo do Amarante and Aquiraz, which are close to the capital, favoring access of tourists. In addition, Jijoca de Jericoacoara, an internationally known municipality, stands out for its coastal beauty, that is, all this facilitates the development of sex tourism.

## DISCUSSION

The increase in the number of reports is due to the recent mandatory reporting of cases of sexual abuse of children and adolescents in Brazil established by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente – ECA*), Law 8069 of 1990<sup>(10)</sup>. At the local level, the Health Secretariat of the State of Ceará determined the mandatory reporting of cases of abuse against child and adolescents and implemented a specific form to be used throughout the state<sup>(23)</sup>. There is an increase in reports to specialized institutions in Brazil, such as the Brazilian Multiprofessional Association for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (*Associação Brasileira Multiprofissional de Proteção à Infância e à Adolescência – ABRAPIA*), the Regional Centers for Child Abuse Care (*Centros Regionais de Atenção aos Maus-Tratos na Infância – CRAMI*) and the Brazilian Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (*Associação Brasileira de Prevenção aos Abusos e Negligências na Infância – ABPANI*)<sup>(24)</sup>.

After analyzing the data from the present research, it was possible to observe that the number of reports in coastal municipalities (402) is almost the double of that of backlands (204), although there is a larger number of municipalities in the backlands than in the coastal area.

In Brazil, one of the representations of sexual violence is produced through tourism and pornography, most frequently in Northeastern capitals and other centers<sup>(25)</sup>. The production of tourism invites users of this sector to enjoy multiple options, which benefits the production and reproduction of services. In addition, travel itineraries programmed by global companies hinder surveillance in this sector as package tours have a compact organization of services and are usually finalized in a real or virtual way<sup>(25,26)</sup>.

However, it should be noted that coastal municipalities in the state of Ceará are more populous – for instance, those in the Metropolitan Region, such as Caucaia (large municipality). According to data from the IBGE<sup>(27)</sup>, the population of children and adolescents living in Caucaia in 2010 was 122,956, accounting for 37.7% of the total

population (325,411). In addition, it has two Guardianship Councils.

For many years, Brazil and the world have been facing problems related to sexual abuse and exploitation of minors. Unfortunately, Brazil has several factors contributing to such a problem in society, such as: lack of quality education to inform and educate these children and adolescents, as well as their families; poverty; misery; violence; and unequal distribution of income. All these factors raise the degree of possibility for this act to be carried out. Despite the high rates related to the current issue, sexual abuse and exploitation has received greater attention from public policies and society in general<sup>(28)</sup>.

Sexual violence (exploitation and abuse) in the context of tourism, as a violation of rights, cannot be understood as the visit of foreigners to Brazil/Ceará with the objective of having sexual relationships with Brazilians; it is rather the visit of these people with intent to engage in some activity that constitutes sexual tourism, which is often facilitated by travel agencies, restaurants, bars and hotels. This reality is present in the different Brazilian regions, particularly in the Northeast due to its tourist character<sup>(24,29)</sup>.

Cases involving images of children or adolescents are configured as abuse or exploitation since they are not images of pornography, but a crime/violence perpetrated. The ECA also provides for crimes of sexual exploitation in articles 240 through 243<sup>(10)</sup>.

In the context of governmental public policies specifically targeted at sexual abuse and exploitation of minors, the following should be highlighted: the Sentinel Program and the Program of Integrated and Reference Actions to Combat Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents (*Programa de Ações Integradas e Referenciais de Enfrentamento à Violência Sexual Infanto-Juvenil – PAIR*), which are currently being implemented in Imperatriz. These programs are run by the Federal Government in partnership with states and municipalities<sup>(30)</sup>.

The Sentinel Program was designed to fulfill the requirements of the Federal Constitution, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, the Organic Law of Social Assistance and the National Program to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents. It provides services aimed at care, mobilization and articulation, prevention, defense, and accountability<sup>(10,30)</sup>.

The Sentinel Program is an action of the Ministry of Social Development and Fight against Hunger (*Ministério do Desenvolvimento Social e Combate à Fome – MDS*) that is part of the program to combat the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Adolescents coordinated by the Special Secretariat for Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic and that is currently present in all states

of the federation and the Federal District. In 2006, with the implementation of the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde – SUS*), the Sentinel Program was included as a service of the Social Assistance Reference Center (*Centro de Referência de Assistência Social – CAS*), complying with the basic operational norms of the public policy on Social Assistance, covering a range of 1104 Brazilian municipalities<sup>(31)</sup>.

“Sexual abuse” often leaves no trace, that is, it leaves no marks of physical violence, which is also because it is perpetrated within the home and by people who have kin relationships with the victim. Thus, it becomes more difficult to detect the problem because when the mother or family member discovers the situation, it may have been happening for a long time; therefore, the “psychological harm” in the child is most often irremediable<sup>(32)</sup>.

Sexual violence in Brazil is alarming. Given that, such phenomenon was included in the civil society agenda for the national and international fight for the human rights of children and adolescents established in the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent, and in the Law 8069/90<sup>(10)</sup>. The PAIR<sup>(33)</sup> is a program run by the Federal Government in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

It is worth mentioning that the aforementioned institutions – Sentinel and PAIR – work in partnership with: the Guardianship Council, a municipal body whose function is to deal with cases of violence and violation of the rights of children and adolescents; the temporary shelter, a municipal government institution that provides shelter to minors whose rights have been violated; the women’s police station, due to the lack of a police station specialized in protection of children and youth in the city of Imperatriz; and the Public Prosecutor’s Office, which also defends the rights of children and adolescents<sup>(33)</sup>.

In this context, the Aquarelle Network (*Rede Aquarella*) should be highlighted. It is a program that implements and coordinates actions to combat sexual violence against children and adolescents in the city of Fortaleza. It is linked to the Child and Adolescent Coordination Office (*Coordenadoria da Criança e do Adolescente*) and the Secretariat for Citizenship and Human Rights (*Secretaria de Cidadania dos Direitos Humanos/FUNCI*) and its initial objective was the development of broader actions based on an effective joint work to minimize cases of sexual violence<sup>(30)</sup>.

Thus, confronting sexual violence requires a series of actions articulated in several sectors. The Aquarelle Network carries out these actions in various instances in the city of Fortaleza, where public power and civil society work together in carrying out intersectoral actions of

mobilization, promotion of rights and social control. The network establishes a mobilization agenda based mainly on campaigns and training courses. For the consolidation of this policy, the joint work is performed in partnership with the Government of the State of Ceará; the Public Prosecutor’s Office; the Police Department for Combating the Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (*Delegacia de Combate à Exploração de Crianças e Adolescentes – DECECA*); the Health sector; Schools; Guardianship and Rights Councils; Non-Governmental Organizations; Community associations and churches; among others<sup>(6)</sup>.

The Violence and Accidents Surveillance System in Sentinel Services (*Sistema de Vigilância de Violências e Acidentes em Serviços Sentinelas – VIVA*) shows that children and adolescents are, regardless of gender, equally vulnerable to violence, although they are affected by different types and expressions of violent situations<sup>(33)</sup>.

Children’s rights rest in the Brazilian legal system and are sometimes warned by the violence rooted in the social context, which affects notably the most vulnerable. Violence not only results in high economic and social costs to society, but also has profound emotional implications due to its impact on health and quality of life<sup>(12)</sup>.

Given the data analyzed and made available by the 100 Call Service, the present study was only able to analyze the frequency of sexual violence (exploitation and abuse) in the period from 2011 to 2013. Therefore, the results could not be correlated with other factors due to the lack of access to data, which limited inferences about these violent acts. However, it raises questions on the way these municipalities may be carrying out activities to combat these cases, for the violation of a child/adolescent often involves their relatives and requires support from the various services that guarantee the rights of this group.

## CONCLUSION

The study warns government authorities and the community about the need to address the cases of sexual violence (exploitation and abuse) that are occurring in several municipalities of Ceará, particularly in the coastal region, where the majority of the population ends up having more access to it. This region is in turn publicized as a ‘must-see place’ in order to attract tourists and improve tourism and the management of the municipality. Therefore, several strategies should be carried out to combat such a problem and minimize cases.

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