

Adolescent perpetrators of sexual assault: Perceptions about childhood, adolescence and violence

Adolescentes autores de agressão sexual: Percepções sobre infância, adolescência e violências

Adolescentes autores de agresión sexual: Percepciones sobre niñez, adolescencia y violencias

Adolescents auteurs d'agressions sexuelles : Perceptions sur l'enfance, l'adolescence et la violence

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Abstract

The phenomenon of sexual violence is historically present in all societies and different cultural contexts. Its manifestation has crucial implications on the life trajectory of children and adolescents, especially when they are subject to these practices. This study, therefore, investigated the perceptions of adolescents who commit sexual aggression against children and adolescents about childhood, adolescence, sexual violence, and violence in the family. It also consists of research with an empirical-descriptive design and a quantitative-qualitative analysis of the data involving adolescents serving socio-educational measures for an infraction analogous to the rape of a vulnerable person in socio-educational care units in the north of the country. The content of four interviews conducted from 2019 onwards was subjected to textual analysis using Descending Hierarchical Classification (CHD) with the support of Iramuteq Software. From the content analyzed, four classes emerged, namely, Perception of Childhood, Perception of Violence in the Family, Perception of Sexual Aggression, and Perception of Adolescence, which indicated the perceptions of adolescents linked to the experiences of their life trajectories, as well as the violent relationships reproduced in the family environment. Thus, these adolescents present a perception of sexual aggression linked to the use of physical force and other forms of violence. It was concluded, then, that adolescent authors tend to perceive violence as a constituent part of their life trajectory. Finally, the scope of investigations that require attention in scientific research on this population is highlighted.

Keywords: adolescents, perception, childhood, adolescence, sexual violence.

Resumo

O fenômeno da violência sexual está historicamente presente em todas as sociedades e em distintos contextos culturais. Sua manifestação tem sérias implicações na trajetória de vida de crianças e adolescentes, sobretudo quando sujeitos dessas práticas. Este estudo investigou, pois, percepções de adolescentes autores de agressão sexual contra crianças e adolescentes sobre infância, adolescência, violência sexual

e violência na família. Constitui-se, ainda, em uma pesquisa com delineamento de natureza empírico-descritiva e uma análise de caráter quanti-qualitativa dos dados, envolvendo adolescentes em cumprimento de medida socioeducativa, por ato infracional análogo ao estupro de vulnerável, em unidades de atendimento socioeducativo no norte do país. Submeteu-se, à análise textual, o conteúdo de quatro entrevistas realizadas, a partir de 2019, por meio da Classificação Hierárquica Descendente (CHD), com apoio do Software Iramuteq. Do conteúdo analisado, emergiram quatro classes, sendo estas: Percepção da Infância, Percepção da Violência na Família, Percepção da Agressão Sexual e Percepção da Adolescência, que apontaram as percepções dos adolescentes ligadas às experiências de suas trajetórias de vida, bem como das relações violentas reproduzidas no ambiente familiar. Assim, os adolescentes apresentam percepção da agressão sexual ligada ao uso da força física e outras formas de violência. Concluiu-se, então, que autores adolescentes tendem a perceber a violência como parte constituinte da sua trajetória de vida. Por fim, destaca-se a amplitude de investigações que necessitam de atenção nas pesquisas científicas acerca dessa população.

Palavras-chave: adolescentes, percepção, infância, adolescência, violência sexual

Resumen

El fenómeno de la violencia sexual está históricamente presente en todas las sociedades y en distintos contextos culturales. Su manifestación tiene serias implicaciones en la trayectoria de vida de niños y adolescentes, sobre todo cuando sujetos de estas prácticas. Este estudio investigó percepciones de adolescentes autores de agresión sexual contra niños y adolescentes sobre niñez, adolescencia, violencia sexual y violencia en la familia. Se constituyó, aún, en una investigación con enfoque de naturaleza empírico-cualitativo de los datos, involucrando adolescentes en cumplimiento de medida socioeducativa, por acto infraccional análogo al estupro de vulnerable, en unidades de atendimento socioeducativo en el norte del país. Se sometió a análisis textual, el contenido de cuatro entrevistas realizadas a partir de 2019, por medio de la Clasificación Jerárquica Descendente (CJD), con apoyo del software Iramuteq. Del contenido analizad, surgieron cuatro clases, siendo estas: Percepción de la niñez; Percepción de la Violencia en la Familia; Percepción de la Agresión Sexual y Percepción de la Adolescencia que indicaron las percepciones, de los adolescentes, relacionadas a las experiencias de sus trayectorias de vida, como también las relaciones violentas reproducidas estos adolescentes presentan percepción de la agresión sexual relacionadas al uso de fuerza física y otras formas de violencia. Se concluyó, entonces, que autores adolescentes tienen la tendencia de percibir la violencia como parte constituyente de su trayectoria de vida. Por fin se enfoca la amplitud de investigaciones que necesitan de atención en las investigaciones científicas sobre esta población.

Palabras clave: adolescentes; percepción; infancia; adolescencia; violencia sexual.

Résumé

Le phénomène de la violence sexuelle est historiquement présent dans toutes les sociétés et dans différents contextes culturels. Sa manifestation a de graves implications sur la trajectoire de vie des enfants et des adolescents, surtout lorsqu'ils sont auteurs de ces pratiques. Cette étude a donc exploré les perceptions des adolescents auteurs d'agressions sexuelles contre des enfants et des adolescents concernant l'enfance, l'adolescence, la violence sexuelle et la violence familiale. Il s'agit également d'une recherche de nature empirique et descriptive, ainsi que d'une analyse quantitative et qualitative des données, portant sur des adolescents soumis à des mesures socio-éducatives pour des infractions similaires au viol de personnes vulnérables, dans des unités de prise en charge situées au nord du Brésil. Le contenu de quatre entretiens menés depuis 2019 a été soumis à une analyse textuelle selon la classification hiérarchique descendante (CHD), avec le support du logiciel Iramuteq. À partir du contenu analysé, quatre classes de perception ont émergé : la perception de l'enfance, de la violence dans la famille, de l'agression sexuelle et de l'adolescence. Celles-ci ont mis en évidence la compréhension des adolescents concernant leurs trajectoires de vie, ainsi que les relations violentes reproduites dans l'environnement familial. Ces adolescents ont ainsi une perception de l'agression sexuelle liée à l'usage de la force physique et à d'autres formes de violence. Il a donc été conclu que les auteurs adolescents tendent à percevoir la violence comme une partie constitutive de leur trajectoire de vie. Enfin, nous soulignons l'ampleur des enquêtes nécessitant une attention particulière dans la recherche scientifique sur cette population.

Mots-clés : adolescents, perception, enfance, adolescence, violence sexuelle.

Sexual violence as a health phenomenon has been studied by various researchers across different fields of knowledge, such as psychology, medicine, nursing, among others (Moraes et al., 2018; Reis & Cavalcante, 2018). These studies have sought to understand this phenomenon, considering its typification, the victim's perception, the modus operandi in which it occurs, and how it manifests in various societal contexts.

According to Minayo (2006), sexual violence is characterized by acts or sexual games that seek to use the victim as a means for the perpetrator to obtain sexual pleasure, whether they are adults or adolescents. In contextual terms, sexual violence has implications for the life and routine of families, especially for children and adolescents (Custódio & Lima, 2023). Beyond these aspects, the perspective of the perpetrators of the aggression, as authors of sexual violence, is also highlighted; these individuals are sometimes part of the intrafamilial context and sometimes the extrafamilial context.

International literature has reported evidence that not only adults but, in recent years, adolescents and young people have also been identified in surveys as authors of sexual aggression against children and adolescents (ASAACA) (McKillop et al., 2020; McKillop et al., 2018; Smallbone & Cale, 2015; Walters, 2016). Studies with adolescent ASAACA found in the literature of the field are still incipient, particularly in national terms (Bastos, 2020; Martins & Jorge, 2010; Tavares, 2020), presenting greater scope in international literature studies (Blokland & Lussier, 2015; McKillop et al., 2020; McKillop et al., 2018; Smallbone & Cale, 2015; Walters, 2016).

In most research on adolescents identified as ASAACA, the sexual offense tends to reflect what authors Loeber and Farrington (2014) define as the age-crime curve, which begins in childhood but peaks between 15-19 years of age. Consequently, investigations have begun to focus on adolescents and young people, emphasizing this developmental stage and seeking to understand this practice in the different contexts and conditions presented (Picolini & Hutz, 2014).

The initiation of sexual aggression practices against children and adolescents during adolescence may be more associated with the presence of other antisocial and aggressive behaviors throughout the life trajectory of these individuals. This is evidenced by the fact that many adolescents already have a history of other offending behaviors prior to those of a sexual nature in their life trajectories (McKillop et al., 2018).

Thus, the stage of adolescence and being an adolescent are marked by a combination of emotional immaturity, direct influence from relationships established with peers who share the same ecological environment as these adolescents, and who end up influencing and being influenced by them (Bronfenbrenner, 2011).

This study uses the conception of adolescence based on Bronfenbrenner's (2011) Bioecological Model of Human Development, which considers not only the individual and their biopsychosocial capacities but also the interactions established in different contexts in which they are embedded over time. These interactions can produce both competencies and dysfunctions in human development, especially during adolescence.

Thus, this developmental stage can also be marked by a reduction in decision-making competencies, as well as other factors that may contribute to the worsening and emergence of behaviors, enabling the stimulation of inappropriate sexual practice in this and subsequent developmental stages (McKillop et al., 2018).

Therefore, the adolescent stage stems from the construction of perceptions about psychological and social phenomena, considering various motivations, which include naive experimentation, sexual aggression experienced as part of the same measure of perpetrated aggression, evidencing the cycle of violence in the life trajectory, impulsivity, sexual compulsivity, and greater influence of group motivations (Smallbone & Cale, 2015).

Thus, these adolescents are directly affected in their perceptions of themselves and the world due to the developmental stage they are in and how it is experienced, through factors and contexts present in their life trajectory. Therefore, considering the diversity of factors experienced by the individual, it can be said that perception can be distorted because of emotional and psychological maladjustments arising from adverse experiences still in childhood, which may reflect in the construction of perceptions in subsequent developmental stages (Carvalho, 2023; Martins & Jorge, 2010).

It is understood that perception, as a construct, assumes its own contours concerning the definitions of childhood, adolescence, sexual violence, and family violence in a given society and era, being directly influenced by the actions, changes, and contradictory elements from one culture to another. These constructs can thus undergo changes from one context or period to another, exercised by each developing person with their particularities, forming different perceptions throughout the life trajectory (Bronfenbrenner, 2011; Teixeira et al., 2020).

Therefore, the life trajectory of these adolescents, marked by different forms of violence experienced and witnessed within the family environment, is highlighted, as well as the perception of violence linked to the use of physical force and power that are constructed and naturalized based on established parental relationships. These, in turn, may somehow contribute to the construction of perceptions about childhood, adolescence, and violence (Teixeira et al., 2020).

Thus, it is evident that it is in the family environment that the developing child and/or adolescent cultivates their first interpersonal interactions, which will allow the construction of subsequent relationships. In childhood and adolescence, the family environment should be the place of greatest protection and security for children and adolescents; however, for those who experience different situations of violence within the family, this environment becomes a place of helplessness and rights violation (Dias, 2013; Reis et al., 2018).

In this sense, experiencing situations of violence within the family can impact the life of the developing person, potentially establishing a model for subsequent relationships, sometimes legitimizing the violence suffered and/or practiced, and constructing distorted perceptions of the experienced phenomena (Dias, 2013; Reis et al., 2018).

Thus, the present study was anchored in the theoretical assumptions of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2011) Bioecological Model of Human Development, emphasizing that what is perceived, desired, feared, thought, or acquired as knowledge reflects the nature of this change in perception. For the author, this change occurs as a function of the exposure and interaction of people with the environment in which they are inserted, in addition to the experiences lived throughout the life trajectory.

For Bronfenbrenner (2011), to understand the dynamics existing in the developing person, it is necessary to consider both the objective and subjective elements, evidenced in their most immediate environments of insertion, considered the main components responsible for guiding the course of human development and modifying the perception of lived experiences. Therefore, the objective of this article was to investigate the perceptions of adolescent perpetrators of sexual aggression against children and adolescents regarding childhood, adolescence, and sexual violence.

Method

Research Design

This research has an empirical-descriptive design, as well as a retrospective character. The research proceeded with a qualitative approach to the collected data.

Participants

Four adolescents participated, selected based on the inclusion criteria: being between 12 and 18 years of age, being male, and having an ongoing judicial process for an offense analogous to the rape of a vulnerable person in socio-educational service units. The adolescents were: 1 aged 15, 2 others aged 16 and 17, and 1 more aged 18, all being mixed-race and black.

Instruments and Materials

The instrument used was a semi-structured interview script, addressing axes such as the adolescent's identification, life cycles characterized by aspects of childhood and adolescence, in addition to questions related to violence, among others. Finally, questions regarding the adolescent's life cycles and their perceptions about issues such as sexual aggression against children and adolescents were analyzed.

Data Collection Procedures

To conduct the research, authorization was requested by the institution to access the adolescents, especially in three units, with interviews conducted starting in 2019. The interviews took place primarily at the Icoaraci District Forum – State of Pará, where the Icoaraci District Child and Youth Court is located; and at the Court of Justice of the State of Pará – Belém District, where the 2nd Child and Youth Court of Belém is located, in addition to units of the Pará Foundation for Socio-Educational Services (FASEPA). This allowed access to detention centers for adolescents serving socio-educational measures for being accused or convicted of an offense analogous to the rape of a vulnerable person in the North of the country.

Each interview lasted an average of 120 minutes per participant. For audio recording of these interviews, the Mp3 recording mode was used, via a Sony audio recorder (IC Record, ICD-PX 240), which were later transcribed.

The ethical precautions of research involving human beings, as provided for in Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council, were respected. The research was conducted with the consent of the institution responsible for the adolescents and with their own consent through the completion and signing of the Free and Informed Assent Term (TALE). The research was submitted and approved according to the opinion of the Ethics Committee of the Tropical Medicine Center of the Federal University of Pará, registered under protocol CAAE: 63236422.0.0000.5172.

Analysis Procedure

For the analysis procedures, the Iramuteq 0.7 alpha 2 Software was used, a tool that performs textual analysis, enabling similarity analysis, descending hierarchical classification, word clouds, as well as other different forms of analysis (Camargo & Justo, 2018). From these procedures, the approximations or distances of the categories analyzed by the researcher and targeted in the excerpts extracted from the transcribed interviews were considered to systematize the results, emphasizing the frequency of words in each class and the chi-square index (X^2) of class belonging.

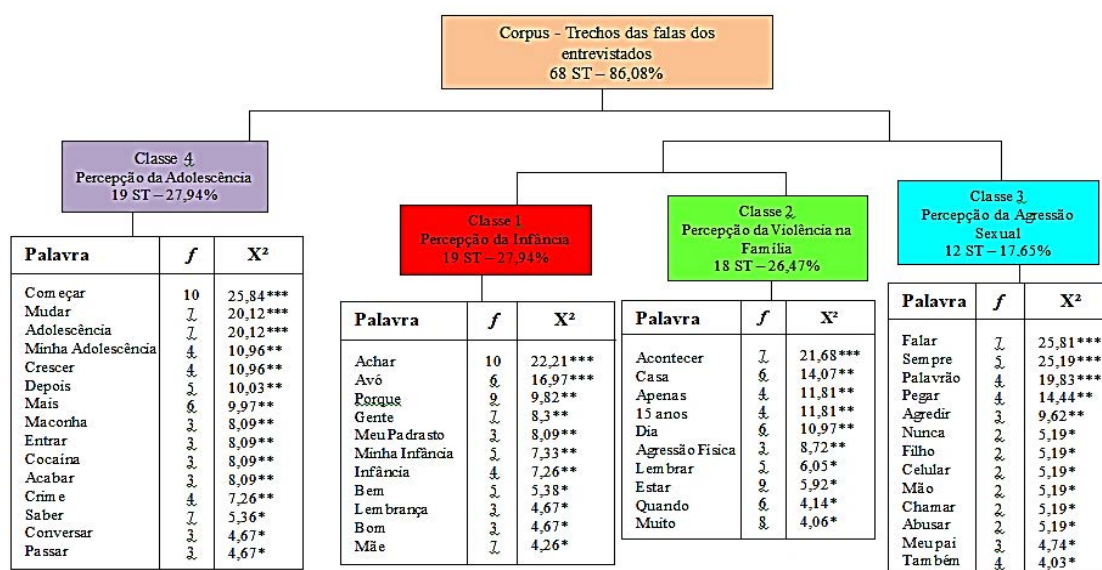
Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) analysis was chosen because it is one of the most used procedures by Iramuteq and because it performs a cluster analysis where text segments (TS) are partitioned based on the co-occurrence of lexical forms in the submitted statements (Camargo & Justo, 2018).

Results and Discussion

A Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) was generated, and 68 text segments (TS) were analyzed, obtaining 86.08% of the total TS submitted to the software. Firstly, the software divided the corpus into two subcorpora: the first is called Perception of Adolescence – designated by class 4, which includes the perception of adolescence. The second subcorpus encompasses classes 1, 2, and 3, referring to Perception of Childhood, Perception of Family Violence, and Perception of Sexual Aggression, respectively, classes that mention the perceptions of the mentioned categories. Finally, the Iramuteq Software performed another division of this subcorpus, where class 3 opposes classes 1 and 2, thus considering the existing approximations and distances between the classes and the categories into which they were divided, as presented through the Dendrogram in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Analysis of the reports of adolescent perpetrators of sexual aggression against children and adolescents using the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) method.



Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.0001$, Chi-Square test, IRAMUTEQ software.

Class 1, called Perception of Childhood, accounts for 27.94% of the text segments used in the analysis. The main elements (words) presented and related to this class were: think, grandmother, because, people, my stepfather, my childhood, childhood, well, memory, good, and mother. The content of the words grouped in class 1 refers mainly to the perceptions of ASAACA adolescents about the childhood category. The excerpts presented below illustrate these elements in context.

My childhood wasn't like any other boy's, it was very complicated since I was born because it was very difficult for my mother to support me, that's why she gave me to my grandmother. After a while, I thought nobody liked me, the bad memories were my father not wanting to know about me anymore, in childhood it was like being an orphan, it wasn't a real family, I didn't have a good childhood, I didn't have friends, I didn't have anything. (P2)

Because my mother had to work, she would leave me with my grandmother, there was no structure, we were very poor, and as a child, I didn't receive adequate treatment, I don't judge, I don't blame, because my grandmother did everything to put food on the table. (P3)

From the analysis of class 1, it was possible to identify the perception of childhood as a phase that requires attention, care, protection, and affection. However, it directly clashes with the childhood lived daily in the context where children and adolescents are inserted, in which they are not protected, making the perception of childhood a bad developmental phase.

Thus, different aspects contribute to the commission of offensive acts by ASAACA adolescents, especially traumatic experiences experienced within the family environment, a space that should be a place of protection for them. Experiences

of maltreatment and family environments marked by aggressiveness and transgression – associated with fragile parent-child relationships and a lack of affective support – favor the development, in adolescents, of fantasies of domination and assertion of power over others. Such factors also contribute to making childhood a phase of intense changes and challenges in the emotional and social development of individuals (Ward & Beech, 2016).

Thus, a series of family aspects experienced in childhood may be directly associated with subsequent actions practiced by ASAACA adolescents, as well as with the construction of the perception they come to have about childhood. These factors can be reflected through severe and inconsistent discipline, physical violence, neglect, low parental involvement with children, experience of parental conflicts, and the representation of family disruptions present in childhood (Martins & Jorge, 2010).

Therefore, it is valid to consider that ASAACA adolescents may start their trajectory in violence early as a result of the emotional and psychological maladjustments that were experienced in childhood and that reflect in subsequent developmental stages. This condition, therefore, becomes evident through the experience of maltreatment and multiple forms of victimization throughout childhood, within the family environment itself (Martins & Jorge, 2010).

Then, adolescents who consider themselves abandoned by their parents are observed, at the moment when their upbringing becomes the responsibility of the grandmother or third parties. This aspect is marked by the lack of time and dedication from parents in raising their children, who end up transferring this responsibility to the grandparents (especially the grandmother), who, despite difficulties, become the main responsible for the protection, upbringing, care of the grandchildren, and sustenance of the household.

This type of occurrence within the family context highlights evidence of dysfunctional family relationships, with failures in the effective performance of parental functions related to protection, care, and necessary affection. The roles end up being exercised in a confused and inverted manner in some contexts, where grandparents act as the main protectors, while parents do not effectively exercise this role. In these contexts, children occupy, from an early age, a place of responsibility also for younger siblings, and sometimes even protect the mother from the violent and alcoholic father, defocusing their true place and role within the family aspect in childhood (Barra et al., 2017).

For Ward and Beech (2016), the immediate environment refers to a set of social and cultural circumstances in which individuals are inserted, as well as the objective and subjective way they respond to these factors. These circumstances can be personal or related to physical environments, which confront each individual in a unique way, influencing their development and their responses to situations that are sometimes considered potentially adverse.

Thus, from the perception of childhood, situations of violence witnessed by the adolescents are also identified, pointing to the occurrence of intrafamily violence. Intrafamily violence originates in dysfunctional contexts where adolescents grow and develop, learning to be in the world in a violent way (Dias, 2013). Similarly, the reality of ASAACA adolescents in this childhood phase, marked by poverty and vulnerability conditions to which they were exposed throughout this developmental stage, is also highlighted.

However, it is reiterated that the possibility of long exposure to adverse experiences in childhood, or having been a victim of sexual aggression, are not necessarily reasons for the transformation of the developing person into a potential reproducer of different forms of violence. However, it is understood that, given the vulnerabilities experienced and the way the individual absorbs – objectively and subjectively – these experiences, a possible increase in susceptibility to the reproduction of the sexual aggression suffered and practiced can be observed.

This vulnerability concerns the susceptibility of the developing person when exposed to some degree of risk throughout their life trajectory. For these adolescents, this risk was represented in different dimensions, from conditions that contributed to vulnerability and the scarcity of economic resources, through survival factors regarding the adverse circumstances imposed in childhood (Custódio & Lima, 2023; Silveira, 2018).

It is evident that the perception of childhood presents a common base, probably constructed and modulated from these experiences and the way they were absorbed – objectively and subjectively – by these adolescents, directly influencing the perception of themselves and others in childhood. For Bronfenbrenner (2011), it is important to obtain information about the developmental trajectory of individuals, becoming essential for understanding the characteristics developed by these people, as well as their interactions with the various environments they actively participate in, influencing and being influenced through relationships.

Thus, the Bioecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2011) understands that human beings are in constant interaction with the multiple environments in which they act directly or indirectly. Therefore, all actions, interactions, and networks established in these environments can reflect on others, forming or not connections between the systems and the way relationships and the development process unfold.

Class 2 of the dendrogram, called Perception of Family Violence, accounts for 26.47% of the text segments submitted for analysis. The main elements grouped and related to this class were highlighted by the words: happen, house, just, 15 years, day, physical aggression, remember, be, when, and a lot. The content of this class refers primarily to the adolescents'

perception of family violence. These aspects were composed of elements of the coexistence established within the family environment, as well as experiences of violence. The highlighted excerpts below demonstrate these elements in context.

My father beating me, assaulting me, with a belt, stick, knife. I suffered physical aggression from classmates, my father gave me a stab wound in the forehead, he was drunk. I suffered verbal abuse. My father verbally abused me, he swore at me, said I was no good, that I was useless, that I should die, that I only served to mess up life. (P2)

My mother beat me with a belt, broom handle, with a stick, to the point of injury. Swearing, verbal aggression, those swear words, by my own relatives, humiliate, swear, call me a brat, that I was fit to be a thief, that I would never succeed in life. In my childhood I saw my mother being beaten by my stepfather, that caused me some anger, affected me a lot. (P4)

This class brings discussion about different forms of violence experienced and witnessed by adolescents, turning them into victims of their respective parental figures. In this sense, the landmark of violent events was experienced and witnessed within the family environments, demarcating the house as the place of highest incidence of these types of violence.

In childhood and/or adolescence, the house should be considered the safest and most welcoming place for children and adolescents. However, for those who experience situations of violence within the family environment, the house becomes a place of great helplessness and violation. Experiencing dysfunctional parenting styles or ineffective support networks can be considered risk factors, presenting harmful consequences for school performance and the development of social relationships in the short and long term (Dias, 2013).

According to Habigzang and Schneider (2015), intrafamily violence is frequent in families whose interpersonal relationships are asymmetric and hierarchical, this environment being marked by inequality, subordination, drawing attention to risk factors such as: parents with a history of violence or family neglect, excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs, violent forms in relationships, use of force and power, parental absence, among others.

In this sense, it is important to point out that it is within the family that the developing person cultivates their first interpersonal relationships, performing significant exchanges for the affective support necessary for subsequent developmental stages. Thus, experiences of violence in the family impact the individual's life in their affective relationships. They originate as a model for the establishment of subsequent relationships, legitimizing violence in a naturalized way and as the main mechanism for conflict resolution in the most diverse situations (Reis et al., 2018).

The context of adolescents who have committed offenses may present a direct link between the presence of family conflicts, as well as sexual victimization or the perpetuation of violent behaviors in subsequent developmental stages (Barra et al., 2017; McCuish et al., 2015). For Seto et al. (2015), regarding ASAACA adolescents, a greater history of sexual victimization, maltreatment, and neglect in the family can be observed. In these adolescents, greater naturalization of violence is also observed compared to adolescents who committed offenses of another nature, in addition to greater difficulty in the relationship with parents (McCuish et al., 2015).

These violent and traumatic experiences experienced by these adolescents may be directly interconnected with parents (especially the figures of the father, mother, and stepfather), as representatives of violent figures who directly neglect protection. The mother is perceived as a violent person, who usually expresses the use of physical force and power through beating, assaulting. She can also be seen as a victim when beaten in front of the children by her husband, the children's stepfather. Thus, violent relationships reproduced within the family environment are perceived, which integrate all family members, sometimes as victims, sometimes as perpetrators of violent acts.

These data corroborate the results of research that point to the predominance of sexual violence committed by relatives of the perpetrators of sexual aggression (Martins & Jorge, 2010; Ministério da Mulher, da Família e dos Direitos Humanos, 2019; Pincolini & Hutz, 2014; Seto et al., 2015). Thus, the dynamics established in the family environment allow the various forms of violence to permeate this context, making it favorable for the act of sexual aggression, through a transgenerational inversion of roles, absence of parental supervision, and affection. In this dynamic, it is understood that there are multiple victims in the family, in a pattern of functioning that can directly interfere in this context of violence, disorganization, and family instability (Tavares, 2020).

These adolescents were also – at some point throughout their life trajectory – victims to a greater or lesser extent (Conceição et al., 2020; Tavares, 2020). In many of these moments of victimization, by parental figures, these adolescents did not perceive the violence suffered within the family as a form of violence, coming to learn to relate violently with other individuals (Penso et al., 2019; Said & Costa, 2019). Thus, violence in the family is perceived as an educational measure, which, for these adolescents, is not configured as a form of violence until they reach greater maturity (Magalhães et al., 2017).

The expression of violence constituted in the family therefore derives from the constant exposure of these adolescents to different forms of violence. From this perspective, the risk of victimization and perpetration of violence in their subsequent relationships and developmental stages increases, prolonging the cycle of violence as an experienced and naturalized model (McCuish et al., 2015; Tavares, 2020).

According to Bronfenbrenner's (2011) assumptions, the ecological environment (in this case, the family) can be

conceived as an extension beyond the immediate situation to this context, directly affecting the developing person – the objects to which they respond or the people with whom they interact face to face. Thus, the content of the established relationships is evidenced, from what is perceived, feared, thought, or acquired as knowledge, and in how the nature of this perception changes as a function of a person's exposure and interaction with the environment in which they are inserted.

For Bronfenbrenner (2011), the family constitutes a microsystem composed of a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships experienced by the developing person in a given environment with specific physical and material characteristics. Likewise, from these microsystems in which these adolescents are inserted, the developmental change that occurs in the domain of perception is highlighted, where the extent of the developing person's worldview goes beyond the immediate situation but also interacts with the relationships of these environments.

Class 3, entitled Perception of Sexual Aggression, obtained a total of 17.65% of the text segments. The main elements grouped in this class were: talk, always, swear word, grab, aggress, never, son, cell phone, hand, call, abuse, my father, and also. The contents of the elements grouped in this class refer to the perception of sexual violence by ASAACA adolescents. These elements are demonstrated below.

I knew that this was a crime, sexual violence, rape was a crime. If the child is very young, it will lead to rape, accusation, sexual abuse. Sexual aggression is when you are angry, start fighting, start hitting other people. Killing, stabbing. Sexual aggression is trying to abuse a person, wanting to do something to a child, motivated by drugs. (P1)

Verbally and physically for me is bringing the person to an area of discomfort, with verbal aggression, physically aggressing them, causing some emotional, psychological, bodily, or emotional damage to them. Sexual Aggression is rape, I consider it rape, being with someone by force and without their will. (P4)

The content of class 3 strongly represents the association of the perception of sexual violence with the use of physical force and power. This is evidenced from the perception of sexual violence highlighted by grabbing by force, aggressing, and the use of the hand in sexual practice, highlighted by the elements grab, aggress, hand, and abuse. This may be associated with the *modus operandi* highlighted in this work, termed as hands on, where different forms of victim restraint are used to obtain sexual intercourse.

According to Grimaldi (2018), ASAACA adolescents tend to perpetrate more frequently against younger children and adolescents, that is, more vulnerable victims, where they express the reproduction of the adult perpetrator of sexual aggression model, making use of physical force. Thus, the perception of sexual violence is evidenced, based on the established power relations, by the authority and hierarchy arising from the age and experience difference between the victim and the perpetrator.

According to Costa et al. (2020), in a study with 132 adolescents in Rio de Janeiro about the perceptions of sexual aggression, it was highlighted that for the research participants, sexual aggression and the recognition of vulnerabilities to this type of violence are only evidenced with physical force. Furthermore, it is stated that all study participants agreed that violence only occurs when sex is not consensual.

Consequently, the emphasis on the perception of sexual violence, also linked to other forms of violence, is demonstrated, such as verbal and psychological violence experienced, which they suffered or witnessed on the part of parents and/or stepfathers. From the different violent behaviors experienced, the construction of the perception of sexual violence is evidenced, through distortions that may foster the practice of sexual aggression, influencing the very perception obtained of this phenomenon. Thus, adolescents who experienced or witnessed different forms of violence within the family environment and who do not receive appropriate feedback from parental figures tend to develop a distorted perception of sexual violence (Weijer et al., 2015).

To the extent that these distorted feedbacks are transmitted in the family environment and outside it, these adolescent individuals may perceive sexual aggression and deviant sexual behaviors as normative, leading to an increased risk of becoming perpetrators of sexual aggression in the future (Weijer et al., 2015). Therefore, during adolescence, certain biological aspects of development, ecological and situational factors – that permeate the life trajectory of these individuals – may converge towards a significant increase in sexual aggression and the construction and transformation of the perception of sexual violence (Blokland & Lussier, 2015; Smallbone & Cale, 2015).

Likewise, the analysis of the construction of the perception of sexual violence is highlighted, through the environment in which the adolescent perpetrator of sexual aggression is inserted, making it possible to situate sexual aggression in the social context in which the development of these adolescents unfolds, as well as the very occurrence of sexual offenses (Blokland & Lussier, 2015; Weijer et al., 2015). These factors, which permeate the construction of the perception of sexual violence for ASAACA adolescents, may be located at various levels of the ecological system (including family, peers, organizations, neighborhood, sociocultural), in which the potential perpetrator of sexual aggression is inserted and which, at times, also suffers different violations.

Thus, having been a victim of sexual aggression to a greater or lesser extent throughout the life trajectory, and having supportive attitudes regarding the practice performed, reinforced in relationships with parental figures, are considered significant in this developmental stage, increasing the possibility of changing the perception of sexual violence and possible perpetration of the act in subsequent stages (Conceição et al., 2020; Smallbone & Cale, 2015).

The assertion that having been a victim of sexual aggression cannot be seen as a determining factor for turning the developing person (victim of this violation) into a potential reproducer of this phenomenon is therefore reiterated. But, given the vulnerabilities experienced and the way they absorb objectively and subjectively their experiences considered, at times, adverse, these can act to increase the probability of reproduction of the sexual aggression suffered and practiced as part of the same measure, throughout the life trajectory of these ASAACA adolescents.

Thus, the construction of the perception of sexual violence for these adolescents is formed based on the experiences of these developmental stages. For them, the violence practiced and the violence suffered come to be perceived as parts of the same form, not distinguished from the life trajectory of these adolescents, but as a result of the experiences lived (Mckillop et al., 2018; Mckillop et al., 2020).

Therefore, adolescents who committed this type of violence, in this developmental stage, tend to manifest a direct relationship with the issues experienced throughout their previous developmental stages. The psychological experiences lived in childhood and adolescence are highlighted as possible causes of these perpetrators' perceptions about this phenomenon throughout their life trajectories (Mckillop et al., 2018; Mckillop et al., 2020; Smallbone & Cale, 2015).

In this sense, the changes involving the development of ASAACA adolescents interact with a range of biological, psychological, ecological, and situational factors, such as: behaviors and practices that result in an abusive relationship, threats, intimidation, neglect, different types of violence, physical and psychological harm, affective and sexual isolation, weakening of family bonds, use and/or abuse of alcohol and other drugs. These factors are considered relevant for the motivations and opportunities and are associated with the practices of sexual aggression and the change in the perception of sexual violence (Smallbone & Cale, 2015).

From the first years of life, the individual relates to the world around them and knows it through sensations and perceptions, identifying people and the world around them. However, this interaction with the world occurs not only through sensations and perceptions but through their interactions with objects and people. From these experiences, then, they may experience physical, sensory, and psychological changes, influencing the construction of the adolescent's identity and the way they perceive, understand, and construct the perception of sexual violence (Bronfenbrenner, 2011). This process enables the analysis of how each person gives meaning to their experiences and lived experiences, based on the interpretation of the environment in which they are inserted.

Class 4, entitled Perception of Adolescence, had 27.94% of the analyzed text segments. The main elements that stood out in this class grouping were: start, change, adolescence, my adolescence, grow, after, more, marijuana, enter, cocaine, end, crime, know, talk, and pass. The elements grouped in this class refer to content linked to the perception of adolescence. The following excerpts express this context.

In adolescence I got involved in a life of crime, I was 13 years old. I changed a lot in adolescence. After I went to the 'camaradagem' [slang for gang/criminal group] I got into wrong things, I started smoking marijuana, cigarettes, cocaine, I started snorting, I liked that, I started stealing, went to parties, because we smoked to go steal, for us to make money, buy clothes, buy drugs, buy weapons. It was all fast. (P1)

In adolescence, it was at school that I started using drugs, initially I started with marijuana, I stopped studying, and I started getting involved with other things and heavier drugs. In adolescence I started using marijuana and ended up knowing cocaine, I trafficked. Being a teenager is very different. Being a teenager, we must have certain responsibilities, manners, but I think it's different. In adolescence, a lot of nonsense we do cannot be justified. I didn't have a peaceful adolescence because I think at that time, I didn't know how to manage my adolescence, I didn't know how to enjoy it. Drugs took away my balance a lot, took away my focus a lot. (P3)

Adolescence is defined as a period of human development marked by many changes of a biological nature, cognitive development, organization of personality, and formation of these adolescents' perceptions. This developmental stage is characterized as a period of socialization, where the adolescent begins to prepare to adopt certain positions in society and within the family (Grimaldi, 2018).

Adolescence is constituted as a biopsychosocial stage of development and corresponds to the transition between childhood and adult life. Therefore, the transformations of perceptions occur in parallel with the physical and behavioral transformations of these adolescents, related, above all, to the search for identity affirmation, the beginning of exploratory activities, acceleration of psychosocial development and their own sexuality (Arnett, 2008; Grimaldi, 2018).

Within these aspects that constitute the transformation of the perception of adolescence, the class demonstrates that, as

adolescents grow and develop, it is expected that these adolescents grow and come to obtain more knowledge, responsibilities, maturity, formed perceptions about themselves and the world. Furthermore, and over time, it is also expected that they perform different roles within established relationships (Arnett, 2008; Bastos, 2020; Becker, 2017). However, this process does not occur proportionally for all adolescents.

The redefinition of the life cycle phase, the resizing of parental authority, the imposed educational norms, the expectations placed on adolescents, intergenerational changes, and the configuration of families also influence the social conditions in which adolescents experience this life cycle stage, as well as perceive the phenomena and adolescence (Bastos, 2020; Ministério da Saúde, 2018).

The perception of adolescence for adolescents emerges from a period that is sometimes troubled and critical. It constitutes a developmental stage marked by the development of self-knowledge and difficulties in the psychological, social, and maturation process. Influencing, thus, directly on the adolescents' maturation time, in taking attitudes and decisions (Grimaldi, 2018).

Consequently, the class also highlights the perception of adolescence conceived by these adolescents, demarcated, at age 13, by early and indiscriminate insertion into a life of crime, through: practices of theft, drug trafficking, assaults, and other offenses, as well as a history of drug use and institutionalization in institutional care shelters and detention units for serving socio-educational measures.

The perception of adolescence was also directly interconnected with the use of alcohol and other drugs, this use sometimes starting still in childhood and peaking in adolescence. According to Coscioni et al. (2021), in research conducted with 80 adolescents who were serving socio-educational detention measures in a Provisional Detention Unit in Greater Vitória (ES), in 2016, the violence experienced throughout the development of these adolescents tends to reflect on the prevalence of the practice of offenses mediated by the use of violence.

The data from the present research align with the investigations of authors Coscioni et al. (2021), presenting, mostly in their research, participants with a history of prior offense and early involvement in crime, demonstrating the maintenance of the delinquent trajectory throughout adolescence. Thus, it was evidenced that more than half of the sample experienced problems with the justice system, death of family members, parental separation, a drop in socioeconomic level, living on the street, and institutionalization in a shelter or orphanage still in adolescence. A history of exposure to different risk and vulnerability factors in this developmental stage was then demonstrated (Bastos et al., 2021; Coscioni et al., 2021).

Regarding the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, the prevalence of these substances in the contexts in which these adolescents were inserted was observed. The data from the present study also corroborates the results of the research by Coscioni et al. (2021), where the use of marijuana was observed as the most used drug by adolescents serving socio-educational measures, information also evidenced in the class. In the research by Coscioni et al. (2021), adolescents had their first use and contact with drugs at an average age of 13.6 years ($SD= 1.45$), with marijuana being the first drug consumed by 74% of the research participants before detention, followed by alcohol, preceded by tobacco and other drugs.

Thus, it is perceived that the high rate of drug consumption seems to configure, in general, as a characteristic of adolescents deprived of liberty serving socio-educational measures, sometimes permeated in their immediate environments and which, as a consequence of their involvement with peers associated with drug trafficking, also favors their contact with the drugs used (Bastos et al., 2021; Coscioni et al., 2021).

Therefore, adverse contexts and experiences throughout the life trajectory of adolescents tend to compromise their emotional and social formation, providing vulnerability to other health issues, including the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. This context, marked by multiple forms of violence and instability throughout the life trajectory of these adolescents, especially during adolescence, exposes them to risk behaviors, transforms their perceptions of themselves and the world around them, and furthermore stimulates their participation in illicit activities (Bastos et al., 2021; Magalhães et al., 2017).

According to Bronfenbrenner's (2011) assumptions, attention is drawn to the cultural environment that the developing person experiences during the maturation process, in addition to the way in which the levels of the environment interact with the person. Thus, adolescents are active participants in their development, and not merely passive recipients of internal and external influences within the environment in which they are embedded.

That stated, according to Bronfenbrenner (2011), the adolescent, as a developing person, presents characteristics that are unique, individual, psychological, and biological, stemming from their own way of dealing with their life experiences, becoming an active subject, both a product and producer of their development (Bronfenbrenner, 2011), as well as a shaper of their perceptions through the experiences lived throughout their life trajectories.

Final Considerations

This article identified the perceptions of adolescent perpetrators of sexual aggression against children and adolescents regarding childhood, adolescence, sexual violence, and family violence, organized according to the analysis of their contents.

However, the difficulty in accessing the adolescents during the period when social distancing and isolation measures were adopted to contain the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to continue data collection and, consequently, to increase the number of participants.

Thus, the need for further studies and data on the perception of perpetrators of sexual aggression regarding this phenomenon is demonstrated, especially concerning adolescents, which are still incipient in the national literature. This arises from the need to increase the explanatory power of the construction of these individuals' perceptions across different developmental stages.

In this way, the data allow us to infer how adolescent perpetrators of sexual aggression perceive the phenomenon of violence, associated with the events experienced throughout their life trajectories, through the psychological experiences in which their contexts were immersed. These experiences evidently became the center of the construction of these perpetrators' perceptions regarding their lived experiences, the world around them, themselves, and the phenomena present in this trajectory. Thus, the adolescents refer to the offending act as a constituent part of their trajectory, through a continuous process, not detached from what was also experienced during the childhood and adolescence stages.

Finally, it is understood and suggested that new research should aim for a greater concentration of investigations and research strategies, focusing on perceptions with other populations: adult men and women, adolescent females, adolescents not serving socio-educational measures, and university students. An increase in the possibilities for measuring the construction of these perceptions is therefore expected, enabling the evaluation of the phenomena, relating them to other categories, and understanding them in terms of cause and effect.

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