

The educator and violent situations experience by student: Coping strategies

O educador e as situações de violência vividas por seu aluno: modos de tratamento

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a dilemma for educators, and child protective services do not always effectively contribute to addressing violent situations in school or outside of school. By analyzing 721 field diaries written by psychologists working in public schools, this study seeks to identify the actions taken by educators to address situations of domestic violence experienced by their students. This study is a constructive and interpretive analysis, drawing on the investigated categories in the field diaries. The results showed seven coping strategies: (1) notification and a search for networking, (2) referrals or sharing the suspected cases with other professionals, (3) focused interventions with the family and the child in the school context, (4) reluctance to seek information regarding the child's life, (5) resistance to contacting the family, (6) anonymous accusations, and (7) the welfare perspective. We concluded that violence and the strategies with which to address this phenomenon should be considered from social, political and economic perspectives.

Keywords: Coping behavior; Domestic violence; School psychologist.

Resumo

A violência doméstica é um dilema para educadores, pois as redes de proteção à criança nem sempre contribuem para que a situação seja resolvida quer na escola, quer fora dela. Este estudo analisou 721 diários de campo de psicólogos inseridos em instituições públicas de educação, identificando as ações tomadas pelos educadores diante de situações de violência doméstica vividas pelos estudantes. Adotou-se como metodologia a análise construtiva e interpretativa, extraindo dos diários de campos as categorias investigadas. Os resultados apontaram sete estratégias de enfrentamento: (1) notificação e busca do trabalho em rede; (2) encaminhamento ou compartilhamento com outros profissionais; (3) intervenções focais com a família e a criança; (4) relutância em buscar informações sobre a criança; (5) resistência em conversar com a família; (6) denúncia anônima, e (7) postura assistencialista. Conclui-se que a violência e as formas de lidar com o fenômeno devem ser consideradas sob as dimensões social, política e econômica.

Palavras-chave: Enfrentamento; Violência doméstica; Psicologia escolar.

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Violence is a phenomenon that causes serious concerns in society, and addressing this problem is challenging, especially when considering the various manners in which health and education professionals intervene in such situations. Before reflecting on the manners in which educational professionals address situations of violence, we focus on understanding this phenomenon culturally and historically. According to Martín-Baró (2003), finding the psychosocial meaning of various forms of violence in every culture or social group requires a study of the history of this phenomenon in each society.

The increase in violence must be analyzed from the perspective of the interests and concrete values that characterize each society. An act of violence may be perceived as positive or negative according to the social valuation of a particular society. Thus, identifying the rationale attributed to violent acts is essential to understanding this phenomenon in a particular community (Martín-Baró, 2003).

Guzzo, Lacerda, and Euzébios (2006) presented an important summary of violence in Brazilian schools based on Martín-Baró's psychosocial foundations, considering actions in different contexts (community, education, families, students, and management and technical staff), demonstrating that the outputs for coping with this issue are collectively constructed and adjusted to each social context.

Understanding violence as a phenomenon that encompasses many meanings and forms linked to the social context in which it occurs has led us to examine some Brazilian studies that have reflected on how educational professionals have addressed sexual, psychological and physical violence experienced by their students. In a brief survey of Brazilian studies conducted on this topic, contributions were identified by Brino and Williams (2003), Inoue and Ristum (2008), Landini (2011), Vagostello, Oliveira, Silva, Donofrio, and Moreno (2003, 2006), Weber (2005), and Weber and Guzzo (2006). These authors investigated such topics as (a) the primary responses of educators facing a case of violence, (b) identifying cases of violence, (c) the

most observed modality of violence and (d) the relation between the school and outside organizations for the protection of children and adolescents.

With respect to the primary response of the school facing a case of violence (topic "a"), the procedures most often cited in the study of Brino and Williams (2003) were examining the attitudes of the school, denouncing the case, conversations with parents, talking with the child and offering help in the classroom. Vagostello et al. (2006) emphasized the following actions: calling the parents, guidance, referral to the *Conselho Tutelar* (CT, Child Protection Council) referral to a psychologist, and not reporting the violence.

These results reveal that reporting violence to child and adolescent protective services, as mandated by the *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* (ECA, Child and Adolescent Statute) as the first response to suspected domestic violence, has not occurred. The authors previously cited (Vagostello et al., 2006) believe that these results provide evidence of educators' lack of preparedness and a lack of information on the subject in addition to possible difficulties in implementing legislation that requires all children to be treated equally, regardless of their economic or social levels.

Regarding the identification of violence (item "b"), most cases were identified by the victim reporting verbally. Other identification factors were also noted in the research, such as the presence of bodily marks, student behavior, school absences, and reporting by the family. An important fact evidenced by surveys is that the primary figure identifying violence in the school environment is the teacher (Inoue & Ristum, 2008).

Regarding the most observed modalities of violence (topic "c"), educators identified the following processes: physical violence (73.9%), neglect (46.4%), sexual abuse (43.5%) and verbal aggression (33.3%). A finding that merits emphasis in the study of Vagostello et al. (2006) is that in all cases of sexual violence, reporting resulted primarily from the victim's statement.

That only the victim reported sexual abuse suggests that educational professionals are not

adequately trained to recognize indicators of such violence. Identifying an incident of violence only from a child's account, however, is tenuous because children may not be able to directly express what they have experienced in relation to the suffered violence. Conversely, the teacher, often unprepared, does not know how to address the revelation of the abuse and does not take appropriate action. For this reason, the teacher's omissive behavior may cause the child to believe that the abuse is not something serious or that the teacher does not believe his account (Brino & Williams, 2003). This is one of the main reasons for preparing educational professionals in procedures to address this type of situation because in addition to sexual violence causing trauma to the child and the adolescent, inappropriate intervention or non-intervention can also be traumatic (Landini, 2011).

With regard to the relation between the school and the systems for child and adolescent protection (topic "d"), the studies by Weber (2005) and Weber and Guzzo (2006) argue that there is no integrated preventive system linking schools and the CT and therefore there is no awareness of cohesion or integrated practices focused on the protection of the child or the adolescent. The existing cohesion between different systems is fragmented, and thus these systems must work cooperatively, making referrals together to ensure that what is legally mandated is actually accomplished. The work by Sant'Ana, Costa, and Guzzo (2008) shows how this integration between the school and life contexts can change the trajectory of suffering that many children live with.

One of the hypotheses developed to justify the difficulty of integrating these systems, at least within the school and the CT, is the reduced number of counselors available to visit schools and communities to clarify the school's and community's roles. Because of this lack of information, schools are uncertain as to how to proceed before referring

the child to CT. *Conselho Tutelar* requests that documents from the school accompany the child or the adolescent, even when reporting abuse (Weber, 2005; Weber & Guzzo, 2006).

The results of the studies presented here help to clarify why schools do not regularly address cases of domestic violence to protect children and adolescents. Given this information and enhance the understanding this situation, the present study identifies actions by educators facing situations of domestic violence involving students that were identified by observation or recorded in the Field Diaries of a group of psychologists working in normal public schools in early childhood education and elementary education between 2004 and 2010. This is an analysis of documents produced in the school context by school psychologists on the issue of domestic violence.

Method

This study is based on document research, which according to Sá-Silva, Almeida, and Guindane (2009), "is a procedure that uses methods and techniques for capturing, understanding and analyzing documents of various types" (p.5). Given this definition, this study uses as sources of information field diaries of psychologists who participated in the extension project called "Voo da águia" ("Flight of the Eagle")³. These field diaries are part of the collection of the *Laboratório de Avaliação e Medidas Psicológicas* (LAMP, Laboratory of Psychological Evaluation and Measures) of *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas*.

According to Montero (2006), field diaries present extensive and detailed written descriptions prepared in a careful and occasionally spontaneous manner detailing what was observed in the field. Thus, in the visits to two local educational institutions - one for early childhood education and one for elementary education - psychologists who

³ This refers to an extension project coordinated by the PhD. Profa. Raquel Souza Lobo Guzzo, whose objective was the promotion and monitoring of the social and emotional development of children by discussion with families and teachers regarding education processes in different contexts and situations of everyday life.

