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SUMMARY

Child sexual abuse is a serious crime that involves sexual acts committed against children, violating their physical and emotional integrity. According to the Brazilian Penal Code, this type of abuse is characterized by any sexual act with minors under the age of 14, ranging from inappropriate touching to sexual intercourse. Legislation, such as Law No. 12,015 and the Child and Adolescent Statute, seeks to protect victims, punish perpetrators and prevent future abuse. The impact of abuse on a child's life is profound, manifesting itself in emotional and behavioral trauma. Awareness and education about rights are essential to create a safe environment and promote reporting. In addition, public policies must address social inequalities that increase children's vulnerability to these crimes.

KEYWORDS: Abuse; Vulnerability; Protection

INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is a human rights violation that affects millions of children around the world. This crime, which manifests itself in many forms, from inappropriate touching to sexual exploitation, causes deep and lasting harm to victims. Society often underestimates the severity of this problem, which is rooted in sociocultural contexts that normalize violence and inequality. Therefore, discussing child sexual abuse is essential to promote awareness and protect children.

Brazilian law, through various laws such as the Penal Code and the Statute of Children and Adolescents (ECA), establishes clear guidelines for the protection of minors. Article 217-A of the Penal Code, for example, defines sexual abuse and provides for severe punishments for perpetrators. These laws aim not only to punish, but also to prevent future cases of abuse, recognizing the vulnerability of children and the need for an effective support system.

1

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The consequences of child sexual abuse go beyond physical injuries; they often result in deep emotional trauma that can affect a child's development throughout their life. Problems such as anxiety, depression and relationship difficulties are common among victims. Therefore, it is essential that the health and education system is prepared to offer support to affected children, promoting appropriate interventions aimed at their recovery.

In addition to legal and health issues, social awareness plays a crucial role in preventing child sexual abuse. Too often, silence and stigma surround these crimes, making it difficult to report and seek help. Awareness campaigns are essential to inform society about how to identify signs of abuse and how to respond appropriately. Education on sexuality and consent should be incorporated into schools, enabling children and adolescents to understand their rights and feel safe reporting abuse.

Finally, it is important to understand that combating child sexual abuse requires a multidimensional approach that takes into account social, economic and cultural factors. Social inequality, for example, can increase children's vulnerability, making them more likely to be victims. Therefore, developing public policies that promote equality and access to education and health is essential to ensure effective protection for children at risk.

1 CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse is a serious crime that involves any sexual act committed against a child, characterizing actions that violate both the physical and emotional integrity of the minor. According to Article 217-A of the Brazilian Penal Code (Law No. 2,848, of December 7, 1940), abuse is defined as having sexual intercourse or practicing another lewd act with a minor under the age of 14. This definition encompasses a wide range of behaviors, ranging from inappropriate touching to full sexual intercourse, all considered abusive when performed without the child's consent. The legislation reflects a deep understanding of the vulnerability of children and the need to protect them from such practices.

In addition to physical interactions, sexual abuse can include sexual exploitation, where the child is used for the production of pornographic content or subjected to prostitution. Law No. 12,015, of August 7, 2009, reinforces the seriousness of these crimes, highlighting that the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is a violation

of human rights that must be rigorously combated by the authorities. This legal framework aims not only to punish those responsible, but also to prevent future occurrences through educational and awareness-raising measures.

The impact of sexual abuse on a child's life is profound and long-lasting. The consequences can manifest in emotional, behavioral and developmental problems. Federal Law No. 13,431, of April 4, 2017, establishes the Child and Adolescent Rights Guarantee System, recognizing that victims of abuse often face traumas that impact their lives and require appropriate interventions for recovery. This recognition of the seriousness of the problem is fundamental for the development of public policies that meet the needs of victims.

The definition of sexual abuse also extends to actions involving psychological manipulation. Often, the abuser uses his or her position of authority or trust to coerce the child into participating in sexual activities. The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA - Law No. 8,069, of July 13, 1990), through Article 17, emphasizes that children and adolescents have the right to protection against all forms of violence, including sexual abuse. This legal protection is vital, as many cases of abuse occur in family or other close contexts, where the child may feel pressured not to report the abuse.

Brazilian law provides for severe punishments for perpetrators of child sexual abuse, with penalties varying according to the severity of the act committed. The Penal Code, in its Article 218, mentions that the penalty may be increased if the crime involves violence or if the victim is in a vulnerable situation, demonstrating the seriousness with which the legal system treats these issues. This legal framework aims to discourage abuse and ensure that those responsible are held accountable for their actions.

Raising awareness about child sexual abuse is essential to preventing and combating this crime. Brazilian laws, such as Law No. 13,431/2017, guide society on the importance of reporting and protecting victims, encouraging a culture of acceptance and support for children who suffer abuse. Education and awareness campaigns are essential to inform citizens on how to identify signs of abuse and how to act appropriately, creating a safer environment for children.

It is essential that all segments of society are involved in protecting children and promoting a safe environment. Education and awareness about

Children's rights, as set out in the ECA, are crucial tools for preventing sexual abuse and ensuring that children can grow up in an environment free from violence. Institutions such as schools and community organizations have a vital role to play in implementing programs that promote awareness and education about sexuality and consent.

Child sexual abuse is a complex phenomenon that occurs in sociocultural contexts where children's vulnerability is exacerbated by factors such as social inequality and the normalization of violence. Cultural silence often covers up these crimes, making it difficult to report them. According to the ECA, "every child and adolescent has the right to protection against all forms of violence" (BRAZIL, 1990). This statement highlights the need for a family environment that promotes open dialogue about sexuality and consent, which is crucial to preventing abuse.

In addition to the family, educational institutions play a vital role in protecting children. Awareness-raising programs that teach children about their rights and how to identify inappropriate behavior should be implemented from an early age. Article 4 of Law No. 13,431/2017 highlights the importance of education as a protection tool, ensuring that children and adolescents are informed about their rights. Authorities and the justice system need to be prepared to deal with complaints in a sensitive and effective manner, ensuring that victims receive the necessary support.

The psychological impacts of abuse are profound and long-lasting. Victims often face problems such as anxiety, depression and relationship difficulties in adulthood. The literature indicates that early intervention and psychological support are essential for recovery. The creation of support networks, including non-governmental organizations and community groups, becomes essential to provide emotional assistance and ensure the social reintegration of victims. Strengthening these networks is a fundamental guideline established in Law No. 13,431/2017.

An important aspect to consider is the relationship between sexual abuse and social inequalities. Children living in contexts of economic and social vulnerability are more exposed to the risk of abuse. Factors such as lack of access to education, poverty and unstable family environments can increase the likelihood that these children will become victims. Therefore, the approach to the problem must be multidimensional, involving public policies that promote social equality and the protection of children at risk.

Community engagement is another crucial element in combating child sexual abuse. Community support groups, non-governmental organizations and local initiatives can play a vital role in raising awareness and preventing abuse. By creating a support network that includes educators, health professionals, social workers and the community itself, it is possible to build a more robust and effective protection system. Community engagement also helps break the cycle of silence and fear that often surrounds abuse cases.

Reporting is a crucial step in combating child sexual abuse. Brazilian law ensures that victims can report abuse anonymously and without fear of reprisals. Law No. 13,431/2017 establishes measures to ensure the safety of children during the investigation process, encouraging a culture of acceptance and support. Combating child sexual abuse requires the mobilization of all of society to establish a safe and welcoming environment where children can grow up free from violence.

Finally, including topics on sexuality and human rights in school curricula is essential for the formation of a new generation of more aware and informed citizens. When addressed appropriately, sexual education can empower children to recognize their rights and defend themselves against abuse. This training must be ongoing and adapted to local realities, taking into account the cultural and social specificities of each community. In this way, we will not only be protecting children, but also promoting a more just and respectful society.

The fight against child sexual abuse is therefore a collective challenge. Collaboration between governments, civil society, families and communities is essential to ensure that children are protected and have their rights respected. Everyone's commitment is essential to building a future where child sexual abuse is not only prevented, but eradicated. Education, awareness and the willingness to act in defense of children's rights are fundamental pillars in this fight.

In addition to the legal and social aspects, it is essential to consider the role of mental health in the context of child sexual abuse. Victims often face severe psychological consequences that can persist throughout their lives. Studies indicate that children who experience sexual abuse are significantly more likely to develop disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety. Access to mental health services is therefore a necessity.

urgent. Specialized therapy programs that meet the needs of victims are essential to aid emotional recovery and social reintegration. Psychological support should be approached in a sensitive manner, recognizing that each child has a unique history and may react to trauma in different ways.

Child sexual abuse prevention must also include a critical approach to technology. With the rise in internet and social media use, children are increasingly exposed to the risks of online sexual exploitation. Predators often use digital platforms to target children, exploiting their lack of supervision and emotional vulnerability. It is vital that parents, educators, and caregivers are aware of these risks and promote open conversations about digital safety. In addition, schools can implement programs that teach children how to spot suspicious behavior and the importance of reporting uncomfortable situations. Raising awareness of online dangers can be a powerful tool in preventing child sexual abuse.

Another important point to consider is the need for ongoing training for professionals who work with children, including educators, social workers, and health professionals. Training should include not only identifying signs of abuse, but also the appropriate approach to dealing with victims. Children often have difficulty communicating what they have experienced, and the way adults respond can significantly influence a child's willingness to seek help. Regular awareness-raising courses and training can prepare these professionals to create safe and supportive environments where children feel comfortable opening up about their experiences.

Finally, family involvement in the prevention process is crucial. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to educate themselves on children's rights and ways to protect themselves. This includes understanding the importance of promoting open communication and establishing a safe family environment. Families can also get involved in community initiatives that seek to strengthen the child protection network. Raising awareness about the issue of sexual abuse should be a joint effort, involving not only institutions but also society itself, ensuring that everyone is prepared to act and protect children effectively.

Education about child sexual abuse should be an integral part of school curricula, addressing not only children's rights but also the promotion of

emotional and sexual health. According to UNICEF (2021), "education is one of the most powerful keys to protecting children." When children learn about consent, mutual respect, and boundaries from an early age, they are better able to identify inappropriate behavior and stand up for themselves. Educational programs that include these topics can create a safer environment and empower children to feel safe reporting abuse.

Legislation also plays a key role in protecting children. According to Article 70 of the ECA, "bodies responsible for defending the rights of children and adolescents must act in a coordinated manner". This means that collaboration between different sectors, such as education, health and social assistance, is essential for comprehensive care for victims. Coordination between institutions ensures that children receive the support they need and that cases of abuse are treated with the seriousness they deserve, preventing re-victimization during the reporting and investigation process.

It is equally important to recognize that supporting the victim's family is a crucial part of recovery. Family members are often also emotionally affected by the trauma and need appropriate support. Programs that provide assistance to families, helping them understand and cope with the situation, can facilitate the child's recovery. As the World Health Organization (2020) points out, "social support is a critical factor in trauma recovery." Including families in the healing process can strengthen emotional bonds and create a safer environment for the child.

Furthermore, it is essential that civil society mobilizes around the cause. Awareness campaigns, such as "Orange May" in Brazil, aim to inform the population about the importance of reporting child sexual abuse. These initiatives help to break the silence that often surrounds this issue, encouraging a culture of acceptance and protection. As stated by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP, 2022), "social mobilization is essential to promote significant changes in social norms and behaviors related to violence against children."

Finally, the role of the media cannot be underestimated. The way in which cases of child sexual abuse are portrayed in the media can influence public perception of the problem and victims' willingness to report it. Responsible coverage that respects victims' privacy and emphasizes the need for protection and support is crucial. The Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (ABRAJI) highlights that "an ethical approach to the media can contribute to

destigmatizing and encouraging victims to seek help." It is therefore vital that journalists and communicators receive guidance on how to approach these issues in a sensitive and constructive manner.

1.1 TYPES OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Child abuse is a serious problem that affects millions of children around the world and manifests itself in many different ways. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) defines child abuse as "all types of violence and neglect resulting in physical, emotional or psychological harm or suffering". Understanding the different forms of abuse is essential to ensuring the protection and well-being of children. Raising awareness on this topic is essential so that parents, educators and society in general can identify signs of abuse and take preventive action. In addition, creating informative and educational campaigns can help raise awareness among the population, promoting an environment in which children feel safe and protected. This collective responsibility is vital to building a more just and supportive society, where children's rights are respected and guaranteed.

Physical abuse is one of the most recognized forms of violence against children. This type of abuse involves the intentional use of physical force that causes injuries, such as bruises, burns or fractures. The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) states that "every child has the right to protection against all forms of violence" (BRAZIL, 1990). The consequences of physical abuse can be severe, leaving marks not only on the body, but also on the mental health of the victim. Children who suffer physical abuse can often develop behavioral problems, learning difficulties and impaired social relationships. Therefore, it is essential that health professionals and educators are alert to these signs and promote appropriate interventions. Training professionals capable of identifying and dealing with cases of abuse is an important step in ensuring the safety of children.

Child sexual abuse refers to any sexual act involving a child who does not have the legal capacity to consent. According to the Brazilian Penal Code, "having sexual intercourse or practicing another lewd act with a minor under 14 years of age" is a crime (BRAZIL, 1940). The consequences of this type of abuse are devastating, often affecting the emotional and psychological development of the child throughout his or her life. In addition, social stigma and fear of reprisals can prevent victims from seeking help, perpetuating a cycle of pain and suffering. Therefore, it is crucial to create a

A safe environment where children feel comfortable reporting abuse. Sexuality and consent education should be a fundamental part of the school curriculum, enabling children to understand their rights and know how to protect themselves.

Emotional abuse, although less visible, is equally harmful. It involves behaviors that harm a child's psychological development, such as humiliation, contempt, and manipulation. Studies show that emotional abuse can result in problems such as anxiety and depression in adulthood (MALONE, 2019). The ECA emphasizes that "every child should be treated with respect and dignity," which reflects the importance of a healthy family environment (BRASIL, 1990). It is essential that parents and educators promote an environment of emotional support, helping children develop their self-esteem and confidence. Awareness campaigns about the importance of emotional support in families can help prevent this form of abuse, promoting positive and respectful parenting practices.

Neglect is a form of abuse that occurs when a child's basic needs, such as food, shelter, and education, are not met. The WHO warns that neglect can have long-term detrimental effects on a child's physical and mental development (WHO, 2020). The ECA establishes that "it is the duty of the family to ensure the child's right to life, health, and education." Identifying signs of neglect is essential to ensuring that children have access to what they need to grow up healthy. In addition, it is important that society develops public policies that offer support to families in vulnerable situations, thus preventing neglect. Social assistance and psychological support programs can make a difference in the lives of many children and families, creating a safer and more welcoming environment.

Child sexual exploitation refers to the use of children for sexual purposes, often in exchange for money or other benefits. The ECA prohibits this practice, considering it a crime to expose children to prostitution (BRASIL, 1990). This type of abuse is particularly worrying in contexts of vulnerability, where children can be easily manipulated. Sexual exploitation not only harms children physically and emotionally, but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality. To combat this practice, it is necessary to implement effective public policies and strengthen social protection networks. Education and awareness about children's rights must be promoted at all levels in order to ensure that communities are alert and ready to act when necessary.

Institutional abuse occurs when institutions that are supposed to protect children fail in their responsibilities. This can include foster homes, schools, or care centers. The Report of the National Human Rights Commission (BRAZIL, 2018) highlights that “institutions can perpetuate cycles of abuse and neglect.” When children are abused in environments that should be safe, trust in institutions is undermined. Therefore, it is essential that oversight and accountability mechanisms are in place to protect children in these settings. Training programs for staff in foster care institutions are essential to ensure that they are prepared to identify and prevent abuse. The creation of accessible and confidential reporting channels is also crucial so that children and adolescents can report abuse without fear of reprisal.

With the advent of technology, cyberbullying and online abuse have become prevalent forms of child abuse. This includes harassment, threats, and sexual exploitation through the internet. According to SaferNet Brasil, “cyberbullying can have devastating impacts on children's mental health” (SAFERNET, 2021). Protecting children in virtual environments is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Awareness campaigns and digital education are essential to equip children with tools to protect themselves online. In addition, parents need to be involved in their children's digital lives, guiding them about the risks and encouraging healthy use of technology. Schools also play an important role by including online safety education in the curriculum.

Abuse can occur by caregivers or close family members, which often makes it difficult to identify. This abuse is often silenced by bonds of trust and fear of reprisals. Article 5 of Law No. 13,431/2017 emphasizes the importance of protecting children and adolescents from any form of violence (BRAZIL, 2017). To ensure children's safety, it is vital to promote reporting and support for victims, in addition to educating the population about the signs of family abuse. Strengthening support networks, such as social and health services, is essential to provide support to victims and their families. Creating safe spaces where children can talk about their experiences is crucial to breaking the cycle of silence and allowing them to receive the help they need.

Emotional neglect is a specific form of abuse that involves a lack of emotional support and attention. This neglect can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem in a child. Research suggests that a lack of affection can be as

harmful as physical abuse (PERRY, 2018). The ECA states that "every child has the right to be heard and considered". Creating an emotionally healthy environment is crucial to children's development, and everyone has a role to play in this process. Community programs that promote strengthening family bonds and psychological support can help prevent emotional neglect. Raising awareness of the importance of affection and communication in the family is essential to ensuring that all children have their emotional needs met.

Bullying, although often associated with adolescents, can also affect young children. This aggressive and repeated behavior can cause serious emotional and psychological harm. Article 32 of the ECA recognizes the need for safe school environments, stating that "every child has the right to education in an environment free from violence" (BRAZIL, 1990). Combating bullying is essential to ensuring the well-being of children and promoting a healthy school environment. The creation of anti-bullying programs can be an effective strategy, involving the entire school community in building a more respectful environment. Education on empathy and conflict resolution should be part of the curriculum, helping to prevent aggressive behavior from an early age.

Sexual abuse by strangers, although less frequent than abuse by acquaintances, is a significant concern. This type of abuse can occur in public places or through seemingly harmless online contacts. The Federal Police recommends that parents educate their children about safety and identify dangerous situations (POLÍCIA FEDERAL, 2020). Raising awareness of risks is vital to protecting children, allowing them to develop skills to recognize and avoid dangerous situations. Including topics about personal safety in schools can equip children with the knowledge they need to protect themselves. In addition, it is essential that adults also be alert to suspicious behavior and encourage children to talk about their concerns.

Child trafficking for exploitation is one of the most serious forms of child abuse. Children are often kidnapped or sold for sexual exploitation or forced labor. The International Labor Organization (ILO) highlights that "child trafficking is a gross violation of human rights" (ILO, 2019). Combating this practice requires joint efforts between governments and non-governmental organizations, promoting policies that protect children and hold perpetrators accountable. Strengthening laws to combat human trafficking and implementing

Prevention programs are essential. In addition, it is important to raise awareness about children's rights so that society can mobilize against this horrendous practice.

The consequences of child abuse can be profound and long-lasting, affecting not only childhood but the entire life of the victim. Studies show that victims of abuse are more likely to develop mental health problems, addictions, and relationship difficulties in adulthood (FELITTI et al., 1998). Early identification and intervention are essential to mitigate these effects and provide support to victims. Investing in recovery programs and psychological support is essential to help children overcome their traumatic experiences. In addition, creating support networks and community involvement are crucial to the recovery process. A concerted effort is needed to ensure that children can rebuild their lives after experiencing abuse.

Understanding the different types of child abuse is vital to the protection and well-being of children. Society, including families, schools and institutions, must be alert to signs of abuse and act proactively to ensure safe and healthy environments. The Statute of Children and Adolescents emphasizes that "it is the duty of all to ensure the rights of children and adolescents" (BRAZIL, 1990). Child protection must be a collective priority, and everyone has a role to play in creating a safer future for children. It is essential that efforts to prevent and combat abuse are continuous and that education about children's rights is present in all spheres of society. Only then can we ensure that all children have the chance to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In short, child sexual abuse is a complex problem that demands the attention of society as a whole. The combination of legal, social and emotional factors makes the discussion of the issue even more urgent. Existing laws, while an important step in protecting children, must be constantly improved and accompanied by prevention and support policies. Strengthening legislation is vital, but awareness and education are equally essential to creating a safe environment for children.

Furthermore, the role of educational and health institutions is crucial in identifying and treating victims. Training professionals to deal with reports of abuse and implementing educational programs can contribute significantly to protecting children. It is essential that these professionals act in a sensitive and effective manner, ensuring that victims receive the necessary support.

Creating support networks involving the community, NGOs and families is also an important strategy for preventing child sexual abuse. These networks can provide a safe environment where children feel comfortable sharing their experiences and seeking help. It is crucial that society as a whole engages in this fight, promoting an open dialogue about sexuality, consent and children's rights.

Furthermore, it is essential to address the social inequalities that increase children's vulnerability to abuse. Public policies that guarantee access to education, health care and social security can help create a safer environment for all children. Reducing inequality not only protects children, but also strengthens society as a whole, promoting a fairer and safer future.

Finally, the collective commitment of all segments of society is essential to eradicate child sexual abuse. Only through collaboration between governments, schools, families and communities will it be possible to build a culture of protection that values and respects children's rights. The fight against child sexual abuse is therefore a call to action, which requires determination and solidarity to ensure that all children can grow up in an environment free from violence.

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