



## Domestic violence and school performance of children and adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

#### OBJECTIVE

The current study aimed to establish if there is a relationship between domestic violence and school performance of children and adolescents, through verification of the interpersonal relationships in the family context, the most frequent types of domestic violence, and the school performance of victimized/non-victimized children and adolescents.

#### METHODS

A cross-sectional study was carried out, in which data were collected through a Sociodemographic Characterization Questionnaire and the Inventory of Questions for the Diagnosis of Domestic Violence in Children and Adolescents, which was developed for this study. All ethical principles recommended in research involving human beings were complied with, ensuring the secrecy and confidentiality of the data obtained.

#### RESULTS

The analysis of the data suggests that Domestic Violence is related to the level of school performance of children and adolescents. In addition, the type of domestic violence identified in this population was verbal/psychological. Regarding school performance, the sample attained average and below average results.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Domestic violence can impact the school performance of children and adolescents. The sample of subjects studied enables us to reflect on the silence that plagues society when addressing the issue of domestic violence against children and adolescents in its multiple contexts, especially in the school space and in the family environment.

#### DESCRIPTORS

Violence, Domestic violence. School performance, Children and adolescents.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several researchers have explored the theme of violence in its multiple contexts, and whether physical, sexual, or psychological, or resulting from negligence or abandonment - violence devastates lives<sup>1</sup>. Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that violence has become one of the biggest public health problems faced by society in general<sup>1</sup>.

It is known that violence comes from a network of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that are articulated and materialized in the living conditions of social groups and in specific areas, that is, places where there are poor and peripheral populations<sup>1,2</sup>.

Thus, violence - idealized as a socially constructed phenomenon - is conceived differently between societies and between groups with the same collectivity<sup>2</sup>.

It should be noted that the experience of violence plays an important role in the judgment that children and adolescents make of themselves and others. In this sense, the quality of family life during the development of children and adolescents is the fundamental link for the formation of the individual<sup>3</sup>.

However, the way a child or adolescent sees themselves, their values, skills, and the world around them can be affected by the degree of violence they are subjected to throughout their life<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

To understand the impacts of Domestic Violence (DV) on the social formation of children and adolescents, it is necessary to establish how much family influence is relevant to their development<sup>3</sup>.

For children and adolescents to develop in a healthy way, it is essential that they be provided with an environment that nurtures them and supports them in their natural needs, for example, those specific to the subject and essential to the maintenance of life; in this context, confidence, self-control, and social skills that can help the child face and overcome problems must be permeated<sup>3</sup>.

The family is an interconnected and interdependent conjunction, where each of its elements is a system in itself, or a subsystem of the family system. Thus, the family is like an active group of interactions, which allows the individual to get in touch with their first learning experiences, demonstrating that, much more than just the content to be assimilated, there is the relational example transmitted, about the subjectivity of who learns<sup>4</sup>.

Munhoz<sup>5</sup>, points out that a family environment that is not able to stimulate in the individual the promotion of a personality based on respect, citizenship, ethics, and morals, may be doomed to have to deal with the development of an individual with a strong tendency to live with violence.

Therefore, parents and/or guardians are models for their children and must provide moral norms that will be internalized by them in order to mold and prepare them to face everyday situations<sup>4,5</sup>.

Therefore, whether in the family, in the community, at school, or at work, violence is linked to the fact that parents and/or guardians must be the first to provide skills and competences to their children, in order to reduce or prevent them being exposed to risk factors<sup>5</sup>.

The current study aimed to verify the impact of domestic violence on the school performance of children and adolescents.

## METHODS

### Type of Study

This is a cross-sectional, observational, and analytical study that sought to analyze whether there is an association

between domestic violence and school performance of children and adolescents.

### Study Population

The sample was chosen for convenience and consisted of children and adolescents from the 6th to the 9th grades of a public school in the South Zone of the city of São Paulo. The chosen classes were grouped in the morning shift of the aforementioned Educational Unit.

Initially, the Board of Directors of the Educational Unit was asked to authorize the research. Subsequently, a dialogue was held with pedagogical coordinators, teachers, and students about the research objectives, and the researcher explained the commitment to maintain confidentiality and reliability of all technical and/or research-related information.

Subsequently, the Terms of Free and Informed Consent (FICT) were distributed to the parents and/or guardians of the students and the Terms of Assent to students from the 6th to 9th grades of Elementary School II. This step was carried out during a visit to the Educational Unit in the morning.

The inclusion criterion was agreement to participate in the study, with permission from the parents and/or guardians.

A total of 279 (6th year - 89, 7th year - 68, 8th year - 90, and 9th year - 32) Terms of Free and Informed Consent (FICT) were distributed to parents and/or guardians of students as well as Terms of Assent, however, probably due to the nature of the theme addressed in the research, only 35 (thirty-five) Terms of Free and Informed Consent (FICT) and Terms of Assent were returned. After distributing the terms, five visits were made to the Educational Unit (E.U.) for the application of the Sociodemographic Characterization Questionnaire and the Inventory of Questions for the Diagnosis of Domestic Violence in Children and Adolescents. During the application of the questionnaires, the researcher made herself available for any doubts and clarifications.

### Study Location

The study was carried out in a public school located in a commercial area in the South zone of the city of São Paulo, in the Sub-district of Santo Amaro. This Educational Unit serves 676 nine-year-old Elementary School students, distributed in 22 classes. In total, 47 employees work in the educational unit.

The school has 21 educational spaces, 16 of which are classrooms. According to the Educational Unit's Political Pedagogical Project (PPP), statistics and characterization of the school community come from questionnaires sent to parents or guardians through students. The difficulty for the management team to receive the completed surveys was highlighted in the PPP. It is also noted that approximately 50% of students regularly enrolled in the Educational Unit live in neighborhoods far from the E.U., such as: Parelheiros, Jardim Ângela, and Jardim São Francisco.

The PPP shows that parents, guardians, and students choose this Educational Unit due to the cultural tradition that the school is the best educational institution in the region and that in Educational Units located in peripheral neighborhoods it is not possible to attend school, due to situations of intra- and extra-school violence.

Students who attend the school come from various socio-economic classes: extremely poor, poor, vulnerable, lower middle class, and middle middle class<sup>22</sup>. Considering professional occupation, it is highlighted that many parents or guardians have informal jobs.

The studied Educational Unit serves a variety of students whose homes range from slums and squats to students who

reside in luxury gated communities in the vicinity of the E.U.

The highlight in the PPP refers to surveys from previous years that claim that parents or guardians support and are in favor of expanding the school day (New More Education Program) and a large portion of the school community seeks this E.U. for believing in this educational policy.

Therefore, the Educational Unit is configured as a school that aims to meet the needs of the school community and, like other public Educational Units, faces problems similar to other educational institutions in the city of São Paulo.

#### Data Collection

Data were collected through a Sociodemographic Characterization Questionnaire and the Inventory of Questions for the Diagnosis of Domestic Violence in Children and Adolescents, which was developed specifically for this research.

1. The Sociodemographic Characterization Questionnaire is composed of 7 (seven) questions designed to gather information about the subject's family dynamics and their School Performance, such as sex, age, and whether the student lives with their parents, among others.
2. The Inventory of Questions for the Diagnosis of Domestic Violence in Children and Adolescents is composed of 13 (thirteen) items, structured in objective sentences and answered on a scale of 2 alternatives: Yes = 1 and 2 = No. For example:

Domestic Violence - Father against Mother

- Have you ever seen your father hit your mother?
- Have you ever seen your father arguing your mother?

Domestic Violence - Mother against Father

- Have you ever seen your mother hit your father?
- Have you ever seen your mother arguing your father?

3. Results of Average School Performance in percentages of correct answers in the Semester Evaluation, carried out with the classes: 6th grade: A, B, and C; 7th grade A and B; 8th grade A, B and C; and 9th grade A, completed by students in the 1st semester of 2017.

The Students' School Performance evaluations aim to evaluate the student in the areas of knowledge and skills established in the Learning Expectations, in order to verify their level of mastery of the students and verify their level of difficulty in understanding the skills. The assessment for the evaluation consisted of 3 (three) question booklets and an answer template to be completed by the student.

For students from the 6th to 9th grades - the test included: Booklet 1 - 10 Portuguese Language questions, 4 Art questions, 3 Physical Education questions, 3 Art Education questions; - Booklet 2 - 10 Mathematics questions; Booklet 3 - 7 Natural Sciences questions, 7 History questions, and 6 Geography questions. For each question booklet, the application time was 1 hour and 30 minutes.

The factors were measured and quantified in tables and graphs for analysis of the collected data.

All ethical principles recommended in research involving human beings were complied with, guaranteeing the secrecy and confidentiality of the data collected. This research was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Santo Amaro University (UNISA).

This work was approved by the CEP according to CAEE 67325617.1,0000.0081 under Opinion Number: 2.036.590.

#### Statistical analysis

For analysis of the results, the following statistical tests were applied:

1. Fisher's exact test to assess possible associations between the studied variables.

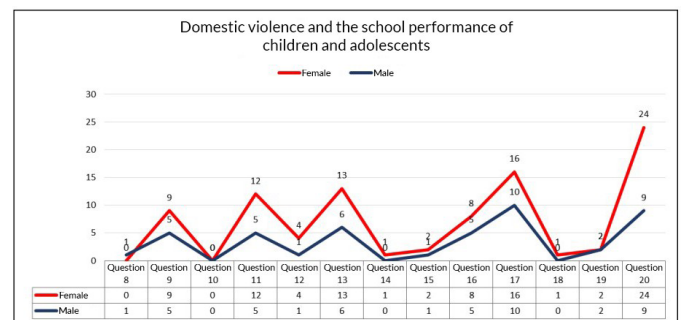
2. Chi-square test, intended to be used for the difference in nominal data, which are plausible to separate by categories, to constitute a measure of the discrepancy between observed and expected frequencies.

The significance level was set at 0.05 or 5%

#### RESULTS

Figure 1 represents Domestic Violence and School Performance of Children and Adolescents by number of affirmative answers per question.

Figure 1. Domestic violence and school performance in children and adolescents



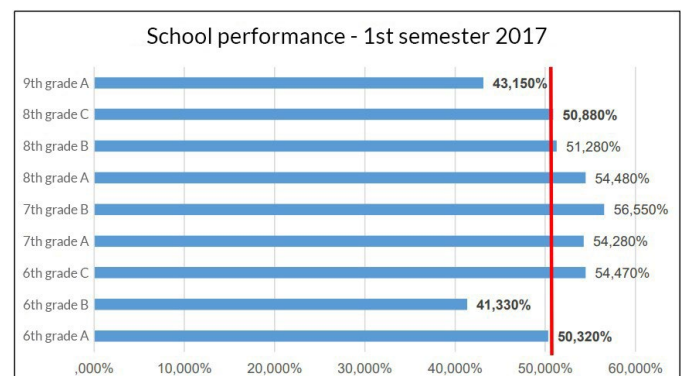
It is noted that violence is present in both educational spheres and in the intra-family environment and to deny its existence is to allow more children and adolescents to suffer from the neglect of society in general.

It is necessary to highlight that identifying the impact of domestic violence on the school performance of children and adolescents was an arduous task. This study addressed the topic of Domestic Violence against Children and Adolescents (DVCA), starting from the authorization through a Term of Free and Informed Consent, signed by possible aggressors of the students, which leads to a feeling of estrangement.

The interpersonal relationships in the family context of the group in which the adults consented to the participation of students are good. The most frequent DVCA in the home environment is verbal/psychological aggression, carried out more often by the mother, as well as which, the mother figure, for the researched group, most commonly physically attacks girls and boys, the latter being aware that they are hit because they deserve it.

Figure 2 shows the School Performance of Children and Adolescents in the 1st Semester Evaluation, carried out at the end of the 1st semester of 2017.

Figure 2. School performance of children and adolescents.



Regarding school performance, both sexes consider themselves to have an average learning level and demonstrate some satisfaction with their level of learning. This suggests an appreciation for the culture of conformism. However, students regardless of sex are unanimous in stating that DVCA harms the School Performance of children and adolescents.

The sample of subjects studied enables us to reflect on the silence that plagues the population when addressing the theme of DVCA in its multiple contexts, especially in the school space and in the family environment.

## DISCUSSION

Domestic Violence, characterized by physical, sexual, and psychological attitudes and by neglect and abandonment, against children and adolescents is a problem for society, especially for Public Health and Education. After all, it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that cuts across the numerous variables that surround it.

According to the current study, it was evident that violence was present in the educational environment and impacted the school performance of these subjects. This finding was confirmed by a study which sought to investigate whether physical abuse and exposure to community violence were associated with the academic performance of children. The authors identified that violence has a negative impact on the performance of children and added information on the identification of the effects of interpersonal violence suffered<sup>31</sup>. In addition, another study carried out with around thirty-three thousand children and adolescents with the objective of verifying the relationship between violence and low academic/educational performance, concluded that this population, when victims of abuse and other violence that encompasses this treatment, are at risk of low educational outcomes, thus requiring additional support<sup>32</sup>. This finding also arises from other studies that claim that children who have had experience with abuse, here you can also consider violence, will probably not suffer only one type of violence, thus generating possible combined side effects<sup>33</sup>, one of these being the negative impact at the educational/school level.

In addition to the findings on violence in the social environment of the young person, violence within the home was also evidenced, affecting children and adolescents academically. In order to complement the findings that corroborate the results found in the current study, a literature review study evidenced a high prevalence of child neglect, which in turn may be associated with impacts on the development of this individual, as well as negative impacts on their health<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, this neglect increases the likelihood of impacts, not only on health, but at social, emotional, and cognitive levels, the latter increasing the likelihood of academic consequences for this young person.

To conclude, in the current situation, young people and children at home, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, are increasingly highlighted as targets for domestic violence, especially if they already lived with this dynamic and are currently required to be inside the home full-time, without being able to go to the place where they could have some refuge, their school environment<sup>35</sup>. Finally, perhaps in this sense, the school impact was the smallest of the impacts evidenced on these subjects.

The silence of violence persists and has been one of the big issues that devastates lives. Through this research, it is possible to show the interpersonal relationships in the family context; the types of frequent violence in the home environment; and, especially, the school performance of children and adolescents, victimized and restricted from their rights.

In the present study, the most frequent DVCA in the home

environment was verbal/psychological aggression, which is most frequently carried out by the mother.

## CONCLUSION

The hypothesis formulated in this work was to evidence the association between domestic violence and school performance of children and adolescents. The findings showed that violence impacted the school performance of this population.

In addition, it was possible to verify that among the studied sample, the most common form of violence was verbal/psychological.

Regarding school performance, it was also possible to show that the sample presented average and below average results.

It is urgent and necessary to establish public policies and effective inter-secretariat actions, to raise awareness and consciousness about the expressions of violence.

These interventions can arise from open and frank dialogues, booklets, lectures, and, above all, from joint actions between parents, guardians, teachers, psychologists, social workers, members of civil society, and other promoters who work to strengthen the Protection Networks of territories, with a view to transformation and a culture of peace.

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