

Domestic Violence in Children and Adolescents: An Analysis with a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

A bibliographic review of studies on domestic violence against children and adolescents from a gender perspective was conducted. The publications were in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, and the observation period spanned the last 20 years. The search for relevant documents was conducted in the following databases: Pubmed, Proquest, Scopus, and Science Direct. Consequently, a total of 411 referents were recovered. Following the completion of the purging process, 174 of the communications were examined for eligibility. Of these, 55 were determined to be relevant. Child violence is a form of interpersonal violence that manifests within the family unit. The prevalence of this type of violence tends to increase with the age of the child or adolescent, exhibiting a notable gender disparity. Women are disproportionately affected by sexual abuse, while men are more susceptible to physical injury and personal harm. Beginning at the age of 15, domestic violence continues to manifest as violence or psychological abuse for both men and women. The extant literature suggests the existence of gender-differentiated profiles of violence. Girls and adolescents may be more exposed to certain forms of abuse, such as psychological and intra-family sexual abuse. In such cases, violence may persist or increase with age. Conversely, men in the same life courses may experience greater physical aggression from father figures.

Keywords: gender, domestic violence, children, adolescents

1 INTRODUCTION

From a linguistic perspective, the term "violence" is associated with contexts involving aggression. According to the source, violence is defined as "threatening behavior by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family or causes the family member to be afraid" (Douglas & Nagesh, 2021). The study of violence as a form of aggression is multifaceted, influenced by a variety of social and cultural factors that shape the aggressor's development (Sanmartín, 2002; Esplugues, 2007; Esplugues, 2008).

The social process of violence encompasses a variety of forms of aggression and manifests in diverse contexts, including familial, societal, and educational settings (Guillén et al., 2020). Gómez (, 2022) defined the family as the "*groups of people united by a relationship of kinship, which arises from a bond by consanguinity or affinity*".

In the context of domestic violence, children are recognized as a particularly vulnerable demographic. Consequently, various protective measures have been implemented through public policies designed to ensure their safety. These policies, which are aimed at safeguarding children and adolescents, have garnered support from both governmental and non-governmental entities. However, it is important to note that many families remain unaware of the rights afforded to children under these policies (Gavilanez et al., 2021). In

intra-family (or domestic) violence there are factors that directly influence the form or method of disciplining children and adolescents, normalized violence arises since it is internalized that children are the property of their parents and that children must be raised as they were raised (i.e., shouting, beating, humiliation, prohibitions). Child abuse has been normalized to such an extent that it is believed that, if children are punished, humiliated, this will be beneficial for them to be good people (Gavilanez et al., 2021). Most abused adolescents did not consider themselves to be victims of abuse (Moya et al., 2017). According to the Paris Children's Center, child abuse "*is any act by action or omission carried out by individuals, institutions or society as a whole and all acts derived from these acts or their absence that deprive children of their liberty or their corresponding rights or that hinder their optimal development*" (Basile, 1999). Violence against children is perpetrated by people close to them, such as parents, caregivers, relatives, in addition to violence perpetrated at school, such as bullying or in the community, by neighbors and strangers (World Health Organization, 2022). Violence in childhood causes trauma that can persist into adulthood, as well as causing physical and mental damage (Malta et al., 2017; Turner et al., 2020).

The social system of patriarchy integrates a clear message that affirms that the most powerful have the right to dominate the less powerful and that violence is seen as a valid and necessary tool for this, culture has legitimized the belief in the superior position of the male, reinforced in turn through socialization (Expósito & Moya, 2011). The 2030 Agenda (Cepal, 2019) sets out a commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against children (Moran, 2025). Violence against children impacts opportunities and affects future generations, families, and the community. Children exposed to violence have a higher risk of dropping out of school, worse job performance, as well as a greater risk of being perpetrators of violence, maintaining the cycle of violence.

The category gender is a creation of fundamentalist and orthodox groups whose express objective is to stop advances in international discussions and agendas that advocate equal opportunities for men and women and respect for women's rights. The category gender tries to distinguish biological sex from socially constructed sex (Ceballos, 2021). The scientific revision of the specificity of the term violence, especially gender-based violence, corresponds to its consolidation in the nineties, within the framework of the development of important meetings such as the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993); the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, (UN, 1993); the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (OAS, 1994); and the World Conference on Women (UN, 1995), manage to consolidate and issue a universal definition of this type of violence (Pérez & Radi, 2018).

What is distinctive about gender relations is that they are power relations. A power relationship refers to the fact that in relationships where there are hierarchies that establish order and authority to exercise domestic violence (also known as intra-family violence), this type of violence is not egalitarian even if the victim counterattacks or instigates other interpersonal violence in her effort to appease a situation, there is always a person who holds the authority and "right" (the main and constant source) to exercise power, control and abuse in the relationship between relatives (González, 2009). The supremacy and dominance of the aggressor over the victim and the repetition of acts of submission and abuse by the provocateur constitute the classic example of the criminalization of domestic violence (Pineda, 2022).

According to different studies, it is estimated that around 60-70% of children and adolescents living in violent homes are direct victims of situations of abuse (Ordoñez et al., 2013). Children's experience of situations of violence and abuse of power takes on crucial significance, since the experiences lived in childhood are a factor of vital importance for the subsequent development and adaptation of the person to his or her environment

(Hernández & Gras, 2005). Gender-based violence can take various forms, depending on the relationship in which it is framed and the exercise of power that it entails, in the following categories: rape and incest, sexual harassment at work and in educational institutions, sexual violence against women in detention or prisoners, acts of violence against uprooted women, trafficking in women and domestic (or intra-family) violence (Rico, 1996).

In the conceptual debate from feminism, gender violence involves using a neutral category that hides male domination, that is, it hides who is the victim and who is the aggressor. Thus, they defend the use of terms such as violence against women or violence by men against women; The use of the term gender implies a differentiation from the term sex. Thus, "sex" is used to refer to the biological basis of the differences between men and women, while "gender" refers to the sociocultural construction on the biological basis, that is, to the roles, functions, behaviors, attitudes, identities, that societies assign to each sex and that human beings learn and internalize (Ruiz & Pérez, 2007).

Domestic violence is a type of interpersonal (and gender-based) violence that mainly affects the most vulnerable, including children and adolescents (NNA), (also the partner and the elderly), it usually happens within the home, although not always and can have consequences on the development of personality and interpersonal relationships (WHO, 2002). Gender-based violence can be direct violence (physical, psychological, sexual, economic or social), or structural and cultural violence, it refers to situations of exploitation, discrimination, marginalization or domination, the general formula behind structural violence is "inequality" and social injustice

In Colombia, domestic violence It is conceptualized by integrating "all forms of abuse between members of the household, which has a significant impact on women, adolescents, boys and girls", in this sense, it has been called to be classified as a social emergency, given the magnitude and consequences of it and with it, to approach a real protection of the fundamental rights of the population groups where this social problem is accentuated (Ministerio de Justicia y del Derecho, 2023). Domestic violence has enormous social repercussions in all strata and distinctively in the priority groups of society such as women, children, adolescents and the elderly (Masa et al., 2019). The global nature of this problem in the modern era has transcended the social order of the actors involved in this event. Hence, the attention of the direct victim, the aggressor and even the witnesses, merit multidisciplinary care or interventions with special delegation to medicine, psychology and law.

The WHO has adopted Resolution 49.25, declaring "violence a priority public health problem and recognizing the serious immediate and future consequences that violence has on the health and psychological and social development of individuals, families, communities and countries" (World Health Organization, 2016). During early childhood, children who experience maltreatment may grow up with a lack or disorganization in attachment; In middle childhood, the problems mainly affect their socio-emotional development; In the preadolescent stage, feelings of frustration and helplessness can translate into violent or antisocial behaviors and poor school behavior and in adolescence, asymmetrical intellectual development is achieved.

Currently, and almost invariably, domestic violence is active in all societies, as a form of aggression, characterized by devaluation on the physical, psychological, economic and sexual level and can even occur due to the omission or negligence suffered by a member of a family, outside or inside their physical space of coexistence (Saúde, 2002). A causal agent of domestic violence is linked to culture, even though it contributes directly to the formation of the individual's character and personality. Patterns have also been generated around culture that end up favoring and even validating violent acts of submission; in Latin

America, and in the world, as has been mentioned, this is a real social and public health problem (Zhicay, 2018).

Domestic or family violence, which includes child violence (Gavilánez, et al. 2021), is the one in which parents or caregivers use abuse as a way to discipline and educate their children or protégés, since they think that it is the way to prevent them from refusing to obey or with the false belief that parents are the ones who rule in the house And violence against children is connected to another type of violence, which is the gender (Merchan).' gender violence', we mean that violence that arises from the very fact of being a woman or a man and that is directed from one gender to the other (Ceballos), in a broad context involves gender violence either against women, against men or against diverse sex-gender people (Araujo, 2021). The article analyzes the way in which intra-family or domestic violence specifically affects as a form of violence with a gender-differentiated profile, an aspect for which little scientific evidence has been found.

2 METHODS

In this article, a bibliographic review of studies on domestic violence on children and adolescents (NNA) with a gender focus has been carried out; the publications were in English, Portuguese and Spanish, having an observation window of the last 20 years. The documentary search was carried out through the databases Pubmed, Proquest, Scopus, Science Direct. In this way, a total of 411 referents were recovered. Of these, 174 were examined for eligibility, at the end of the purging process 55 communications were relevant to the manuscript; 26 are cited as results in this review as they are the most related to the issue of child violence against children and adolescents according to gender (Figure 1).

The inclusion criteria used in the selection were original articles, literature reviews, theoretical reflections, and book chapters published within the specified databases using the following keywords: Domestic violence, domestic violence, child maltreatment or abuse, child violence, adolescent violence. To broaden or narrow the searches, Boolean operators (or, or any; and, and, e) were used to search for publications in Spanish, English and Portuguese respectively.

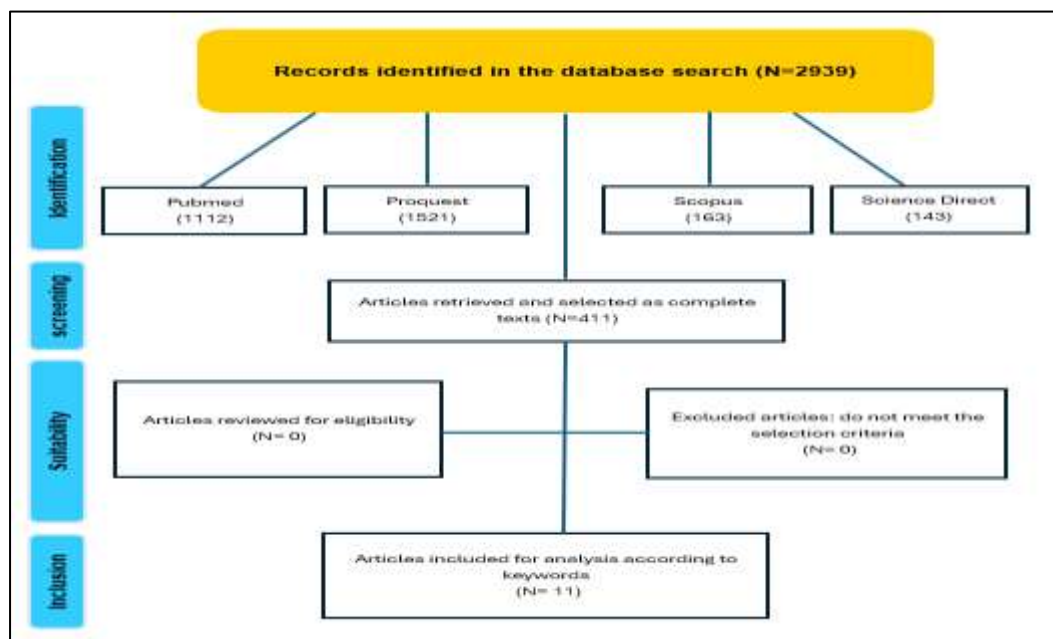


Figure 1. Prisma Flowchart for the selection of sources in the bibliographic review.

Source: Own elaboration

Presentation of results. In the discussion and analysis, the hermeneutics of the article written with the IMRDC approach (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusions) has been developed; through the comparative approach in the writing of the results, the identification of coincidences or similarities is encouraged, as well as differences or disparities in terms of the subject of study in relation to public health.

3 RESULTS

The type of intra-family violence is always traumatic because it is linked to the relationship with the other (social, family) that violates the mental, family and bodily areas. In this way, family groups present conditions, circumstances, beliefs and experiences that determine individual and family action, creating the appropriate context for violent behavior to occur, this being a relational imbalance between intra-family concordances. From the systemic model, manifestations of neglect, physical violence or sexual abuse are considered to be the sign of a pathology that affects the overall functioning of the family; The topographic analysis of domestic violence seems to indicate that disagreements and aggressiveness that occur among the members of the family group lead to the belief that physical attack on other people is the way out (Rubiano et al., 2003).

The concept of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) considers a child to be "every human being from birth (...) until you have reached the age of majority (Morlachetti, 2014).

UNICEF (2024), six out of 10 children under the age of 5 (around 400 million) regularly suffer corporal punishment or psychological violence perpetrated by their parents or caregivers. Domestic or intra-family violence is that which occurs between people who have or had a close parental or filial relationship, to speak of family violence, this abusive relationship must be chronic, permanent or periodic (Gil, 2004).

In Mexico, this type of violence is categorized, it is called "equated family violence" consisting of acts of violence carried out by the aggressor against the person who is subject to his or her custody, protection, education, instruction or care (Guerrero, 2022), which coincides with the WHO postulates that "violence against children" includes all forms of violence against persons under 18 years of age, inflicted by their parents or other caregivers, their partners, their partners or other persons. Child abuse, child abuse and domestic violence are three concepts united by the same principle; Child abuse is presented as a multifactorial problem because it brings together factors of an individual, personality, family, interaction or mutual influence, socioeconomic and cultural factors (Aguancha et al., 2020).

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) the "*Violence against children includes physical, sexual and emotional violence, as well as neglect and exploitation of children under the age of 18, and can occur at home and in the community, and can be practiced by caregivers, peers or strangers*". Worldwide, one in two children between childhood and adolescence has suffered some type of violence each year; it also states that 58% of children in Latin America and 61% in North America suffered physical, sexual or emotional abuse (Orellana, 2024).

In Colombia, the National Institute of Legal Medicine, in the topographic analysis of injuries, indicates that in many of the cases when punishing the minor, injuries are produced mainly in the extremities with 3,013 cases (28.2%), it is the site of the body with the greatest access for the aggressor. In other cases evaluated and ruled, 2,870 cases of limb trauma (26.8%) were found as polytraumas and 2,058 (19.2%) cases reported as facial trauma.

The mechanisms with which violence is exercised against minor victims are blows with the hands, or with some other instrument that is available, causing damage such as broken

bones, burns, cuts, abandonment, deprivation, disregard for their abilities and their own image; there are also the whippings that are inflicted with ropes and/or belts. The mechanism most frequently used to inflict physical harm is blunt with 7,272 cases (68.1%); it was found that there are other mechanisms to determine 2,047 cases (19.1%); it is followed by the blunt short 811 (7.6%) and the figure reported for burns by hot solids also stands out, 148 cases (1.4%), (Gutiérrez, 2003).

Intra-family Sexual Abuse (CSA) is also more frequent in girls, and the age of onset is set at 7-8 years. Extrafamilial CSA, on the other hand, is more prevalent in children, and begins at a later age, at 11-12 years. According to the life cycle, early childhood represents 59% of cases with 46,288 cases of child abuse, followed by childhood (population group from 0 to 6 years old) which represents 23% with 17,742 cases, and they are victims of abuse, abandonment and neglect, physical, mental and sexual violence more frequently when compared to other age groups. and finally, adolescence, which represents 18%, with 13,750 cases of child abuse reported to the ICBF; girls are more exposed to child abuse than boys, in the last three years there has been a percentage decrease of 28.2% for both boys and girls, cases of abuse in girls was 5,258 (ICBF, 2015).

Gutiérrez (2003) reports in his report on Legal Medicine that the age at which there is a greater risk of suffering physical abuse is between 10 and 14 years old. It is important to remember that many children also register high levels of physical abuse. At the ages of 5 to 9 years, 1,280 cases (22%) were evaluated in girls and 1,540 cases (31.1%) in boys of the same age.

Table 1. Child abuse according to age and sex, Colombia, 2006

Age	Woman	Man	Total	Female %	Male %	Total %
00-04	842	1.103	1.945	14,68	22,31	18,21
05-09	1.280	1.540	2.820	22,31	31,15	26,40
10-14	1.922	1.582	3.504	33,50	32,00	32,81
15-17	1.686	718	2.404	29,39	14,52	22,51
No data	7	1	8	0,12	0,02	0,07
Total	5.737	4.944	10.681	100,00	100,00	100,00

Source: National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences – DRIP. In: Gutiérrez M., et al. (2003) Conflict Domestic Violence. Universidad Externado de Colombia. Bogota. 2006

Gutiérrez (2003) reports figures of maltreatment of children and adolescents due to domestic violence in an increasing trend as age increases, with apparent gender independence (increase between 8 and 9 percentage points), achieving a decrease in the ages of 15 to 17 years. The same study presents the figures on the behavior of physical violence in relation to the sex of the aggressor; it is identified that children are attacked, in greater proportion and number, by the father with 3,567 cases and by the mother 3,135 cases. When making an associative review between the aggressor and the gender of the victim, a homogeneity is found in the statistical figures (for girls, the mother assaults the girl in 54% and the father in 52%; boys are assaulted in 46% by the mother and by the father in 48%) determining the relationships of subordination of children and adolescents in the face of the hierarchy or superiority of adults (Sanabria et al., 2019; Perez, 2013).

The main injuries in physical abuse are soft tissue laceration, tooth avulsion, contusions, bruises from strangulation and cigarette burns; Physical and sexual abuse are easily

diagnosed when they manifest in the orofacial region (Lira et al., 2022), the presence of erythema and petechiae on the soft and hard palate or on the floor of the mouth can be a strong indication of the practice of forced oral sex (Arora et al., 2013), the various manifestations of domestic violence, child abuse and sexual abuse are a global problem recently made visible, the sequelae are related to disability, negative impact on the immune system and negative perception of health (Gómez, & González, 2015). As for the psychological and emotional sequelae, there is emotional distress with symptoms such as easy crying, inability to enjoy life and fatigue, distress, post-traumatic stress (OMS, 2005). Ordoñez et al. (2013) state that adolescents who live in violent families and who have witnessed violence from their fathers or stepfathers towards their mothers since they were children are more likely to accept violence when they are adults. This affects psychological development and leaves sequelae that can appear in adulthood. Suárez and Menkes (2006) believe that adolescent girls are more susceptible to being victims of violence because their parents interfere more with their autonomy as a form of overprotection. In addition, men are more difficult to violate due to their physical complexion.

Muro et al. (2008) found that 58.3% of victims of domestic violence were between 13 and 15 years old. They also affirm that most people have been victims of violence - either directly or indirectly - during some stage of their lives (García et al., 2012), the research was quantitative, analytical-correlational, retrospective; Design cases and controls. It had a population of 154 adolescents, being the sampling non-probabilistic and the participants were organized into two groups; The adolescents surveyed were between 12 and 17 years old, where 65.9% were female and 34.1% male. Domestic violence in its physical expression did not occur among adolescents; 73.2% adolescents present psychological violence (4.9% in controls) (Cabanillas et al., 2012). Cáceres (2011) concludes that adolescents have learned to normalize violence as a natural and even necessary behavior within the home, since they only listen or obey when there is some type of violence such as yelling or physical punishment, a relationship has been found between beaten child and abusive father (Barcelata and Alvarez, 2005).

4 DISCUSSION

It must be recognized that child violence is a type of interpersonal violence that is exercised in the family environment, the WHO recognizes it as a public health problem that requires the attention of the entire population and the creation of social, economic, political, legal and physical measures. that seek the care of child victims of aggression and their families. By differentiating the behavior of domestic violence according to the gender and age of the victims (Huerta et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2020). A directly proportional relationship is identified for women that is expressed in the sense that as the age of women increases, violence is maintained, while for men this relationship is inversely proportional, since the data have made it possible to identify that as age increases, the frequency of violence against this gender decreases.

This is in line with the studies presented by the World Health Organization, which indicate that the younger the age of men, the greater the risk of violence and in the case of women the older the risk, as well as the findings of the Institute of Legal Medicine of Colombia in its forensic reports of 2006 and 2011 (Torres et al., 2020).

Pérez Contreras has reported that the so-called ill-treatment in the family is explained as the expression of family violence of which a child or adolescent is a victim when it is carried out on his or her person, by a member of the family and intentionally, carried out as an act of power or recurrent omission that harms his or her physical integrity. psychological, emotional or sexual; this regardless of whether the relationship between the minor and the

aggressor arises from marriage, concubinage or adoption; between members of the nuclear or extended family (Chura, 2023). The level of mental health of children is constantly affected by violence, physical, sexual, emotional and by the neglect to which they are exposed within their families, as it is a daily threat to their mental health. which poses a daily threat to their stability, development and future family experiences (García, & Pretell, 2024; Lima et al., 2023; Segura et al., 2022).

5 CONCLUSIONS

This review shows that Intra-Family Violence (IVF) against children and adolescents (NNA) is a complex and multifactorial social phenomenon, deeply rooted in social and cultural structures, and visible as a serious public health problem worldwide. The analysis underlines the relationship between different forms of physical, psychological, sexual violence and neglect, which often coexist and are perpetuated within the family nucleus, generating devastating consequences in the short and long term.

The incorporation of the gender approach is essential to understand the underlying dynamics in terms of the criterion of power, usually linked to patriarchal systems, that legitimize domination and normalize the use of violence as a disciplinary or control method. Although FIV affects children and adolescents of one gender or another, the evidence suggests differentiated profiles: women in girls and adolescents may be more exposed to certain forms of abuse (such as psychological abuse, intra-family sexual abuse) and in them violence may persist or increase with age, while men in the same life courses may experience greater physical aggression by father figures; however, the effect or consequences of this violence is the same for one gender or the other. The normalization of these behaviors, both by the aggressors and, sometimes, by the adolescent victims themselves, represents a significant barrier to detection and intervention.

The repercussions of exposure to FIV on children and adolescents are independent of gender, leaving deep emotional scars that interfere with the multiple dimensions of development; The repercussions also include physical damage (specific injuries, including orofacial), compromise of the immune system, and severe effects on mental health (anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, behavioral disorders, low self-esteem, self-destructive behaviors). These traumatic experiences in early stages compromise emotional stability, integral well-being and can perpetuate cycles of violence in future generations.

Consequently, it is imperative to address IPV against children and adolescents from a multidisciplinary approach (health, psychology, law, social work) and with gender sensitivity. Robust and effective public policies, prevention programs that challenge the cultural normalization of violence, accessible protection mechanisms for victims and their families, and intervention strategies that consider the particularities of gender and age are required to mitigate the impact and promote the comprehensive recovery of affected children. Continuous visibility and rigorous study of this problem are essential to move towards the eradication of all forms of violence against children and adolescents.

Statements and Declarations section

Author contributions statement

C.A., N.E., and A.S. designed the study. C.A., N.E., and A.S collected data. N.E., and A.S curated and analyzed the dataset. C.A., and N.E. wrote the first version of the manuscript. A.S. supervised the project. All authors read, reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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