



CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE INTRAFAMILY ENVIRONMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF CASES DURING THE PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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SOUZA, Tiffany Neves de. SILVA, Luciane Lima Costa e. **Child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment: an analysis of cases during the pandemic in Brazil.** Revista Científica Multidisciplinar Núcleo do Conhecimento. Year. 07, Ed. 08, Vol. 02, pp. 141-156. August 2022. ISSN: 2448-0959, Access link: <https://www.nucleodoconhecimento.com.br/law/intrafamily-environment>, DOI: 10.32749/nucleodoconhecimento.com.br/law/intrafamily-environment

ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse, being a social phenomenon, originates several causes, leaving vulnerable exposed to injustices, moral and social damages and prejudices. This, when called intrafamilial, is related to the fact that it originates within the family, considering that, in most cases, the abusers are close relatives of the victim, such as father, mother, siblings, stepfather, stepmother, uncles, cousins, grandparents, guardians or the partners who live together with the mother or father. Thus, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it appears that there has been a considerable decrease in the reports of these cases, raising the guiding question: what is the relationship between COVID-19 and the decrease in cases of child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment? Therefore, this article aims to analyze child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment, verifying the cases reported during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This is a descriptive research with a qualitative approach, which had as its procedure the bibliographic research. Therefore, as a result, it was verified the underreporting of cases and that some factors, such as social isolation, made it more conducive to the practice of child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment. After this study, it can be concluded that child sexual abuse needs to be in the discussions of public policies as a globalized phenomenon within society, because its eradication and prevention is a constant challenge for professionals in the social, health and education areas, as well as for all those involved and interested about the problem.

Keywords: Child abuse, Intrafamilial, Pandemic.



1. INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse is any form of sexual violence that involves a child or adolescent who does not understand such a situation, becoming unable to inform their consent (MADURO AND BRITO, 2021). In this context, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA)[3], considers child the person who has up to 12 years of age incomplete and adolescent the one who is aged between 12 and 18 years (BRASIL, 1990b).

That said, it is known that cases of sexual abuse against children and adolescents correspond to a process that ignores economic boundaries between social classes and has been assuming epidemic proportions, since it covers the physical, sexual, social and psychological modalities (VICINGUERA, 2019).

Thus, although people who practice sexual abuse are in all social classes and, many of them, are carriers of professional and social prestige, data from the Ministry of Health show that in 37% of cases of child sexual abuse, the criminal is from the family and, in 81.6% of situations, they are men (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

Given this, Souza (2021) points out that "more than 70% of cases of sexual violence against children occur in the victims' own homes. That is, many children are vulnerable inside their own homes."

However, in this regard, in Brazil, Law 8,069/90, known as the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), provides for the full protection of these minors, giving absolute priorities with regard to the safeguarding of their fundamental rights.

That said, considering that the family is the main protection network for children and adolescents and analyzing the cases of child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment reported during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, the following question was raised: what is the relationship between COVID-19 and the decrease in cases of child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment? Faced with this problem, the



objective was to analyze child sexual abuse in the intra-family environment, verifying the cases reported during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The work was carried out through a bibliographic research and preliminary analysis on the subject, focusing on the objectives, composition and social relevance of the research carried out. Therefore, firstly, a brief conceptual approach to child abuse in Brazil was presented, evidencing characteristics related to the problem in question, as well as the consequences for the victims and the penalties for the possible aggressors. Next, it addressed the context of the pandemic and its relationship with the worsening scenario of rape and child abuse. And finally, we detailed the relationship of cases of child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment during the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil.

2. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2003), child sexual abuse can be understood as the act of involving a child in a sexual activity that the child does not understand, and is therefore unable to consent to such practice.

In this context:

O abuso sexual infantil é evidenciado pela atividade entre uma criança com um adulto ou entre uma criança com outra criança ou adolescente que pela idade ou nível de desenvolvimento está em uma relação de responsabilidade, confiança ou poder com a criança abusada. É qualquer ato que pretende gratificar ou satisfazer as necessidades sexuais de outra pessoa, incluindo indução ou coerção de uma criança para engarja-se em qualquer atividade sexual ilegal. Pode incluir também práticas com caráter de exploração, como uso de crianças em prostituição, o uso de crianças em atividades e materiais pornográficos, assim como quaisquer outras práticas sexuais (OMS, 2003).

Therefore, it appears that the definition of the WHO (2003) has a broad meaning, since it does not define the specific acts of touching, exhibitionism or sexual



intercourse, as abuse. Not clarifying, therefore, whether these practices or only some of them can be considered as sexual abuse. This allows even practices considered less serious, such as sexual display in the presence of children, to be considered sexual abuse.

In consonance, the Public Ministry of the Federal District and Territories (2019) portrays that any situation in which the child or adolescent has his sexuality invaded to satisfy the sexual desires of an adult or older adolescent, which includes the practice of acts of "caresses, manipulation of the genitals, breast or anus, voyeurism, exhibitionism or even sexual act with or without penetration" is considered child sexual abuse.

Also, sexual abuse is considered the acts in which children and adolescents are imposed on physical and/or sexual violence generated from threats, physical and sexual aggressions or inducements of their will. In this respect, this abuse varies from acts with sexual contact, with or without penetration, and from acts without sexual contacts. Sexual abuse can also involve a situation of sexual exploitation through books.

Given this, intrafamily child sexual abuse, in turn, can be defined as that practiced by a subject who has blood ties, affinity or responsibility for the victim (BRASIL, 2021). In this sense, Lopes (2020) points out that many studies demonstrate that this practice is of great recurrence in family environments being, in most cases, practiced by close relatives or by the parents themselves.

The aforementioned author also points out that this act is often performed by a family member, a person who lives with the child or who attends the family circle, which causes the cultural and socio-affective relations between adults and children/adolescents to be distorted by being transformed into "genitalized, eroticized, commercial, violent and criminal relationships" (FALEIROS and CAMPOS, 2000, p. 10).



In this context, it should be noted that any sexual act recognized as abuse can cause serious psychological damage to the victim, such as: the feeling of guilt, self-devaluation, repulsion to society and people due to the abuse suffered during childhood. In addition, child sexual abuse becomes one of the unconscious motives that influence prostitution (RITA *et al.*, 2020).

Zucatto (2019), too, states that:

a criança e o adolescente violentados sexualmente poderão sofrer consequências físicas: lesões físicas gerais, lesões genitais, gravidez geralmente problemáticas, DST/AIDS, disfunções sexuais e psicológicas tais como, sentimentos de culpa, autodesvalorização, depressão, medo da intimidade quando adultos, tendência à prostituição e ao homossexualismo, negação de relacionamentos afetivos quando adultos, distúrbios sexuais, suicídio e problemas de personalidade e identidade.

Thus, it is understood that sexually abused children will carry with them the mark of this violence and, along with it, irreversible sequelae that may interfere with their physical, psychic and social development. And, in addition to the situations mentioned, they may also suffer from feelings that may drag on throughout their lives, such as guilt, shame, pain and fear of the sexual violence suffered (FREITAS; MEIRELLES; TULIO, 2020).

2.1 LEGAL ASPECTS

Brazil occupies a prominent place in the establishment of rights, guarantees and freedoms of children and adolescents, because in addition to ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child (BRASIL, 1990a) and establishing in the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (BRASIL, 1990b) effective protection measures, it is a pioneer in the implementation of the protection system in the Constitutional Text (BRASIL, 1988).

However, according to Azambuja (2006, p. 4):



Até o advento da Constituição Federal de 1988, a criança não era considerada sujeito de direitos, pessoa em peculiar fase de desenvolvimento e tampouco prioridade absoluta. A partir de 1988, passamos a contar com uma legislação moderna, em consonância com a Convenção das Nações Unidas sobre os Direitos da Criança, inaugurando uma nova época na defesa dos direitos daqueles que ainda não atingiram os dezoito anos de idade.

In this context, the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) proposes measures to protect children and adolescents, as well as prioritizing their due rights (BRASIL, 1990b). In its article 2 it defines: "It is considered a child, for the purposes of this Law, the person up to twelve years of age incomplete, and adolescent that between twelve and eighteen years of age", thus making children and adolescents absolute priorities with regard to the safeguarding of fundamental rights.

In this understanding, the Federal Constitution of 1988 also establishes, in its art. 227, that:

É dever da família, da sociedade e do Estado assegurar à criança e ao adolescente, com absoluta prioridade; o direito à vida, à saúde, à alimentação, à educação, ao lazer, à profissionalização, à cultura, à dignidade, ao respeito, à liberdade e à convivência familiar e comunitária, além de colocá-los a salvo de toda forma de negligência, discriminação, exploração, violência, crueldade e opressão (BRASIL, 1988).

In this regard, Law No. 8,069/90 also guarantees in articles 4 and 5 the following rights:

Art. 4º- É dever da família, da comunidade, da sociedade em geral e do poder público assegurar, com absoluta prioridade, a efetivação dos direitos referentes à vida, à saúde, à alimentação, à educação, ao esporte, ao lazer, à profissionalização, à cultura, à dignidade, ao respeito, à liberdade e à convivência familiar e comunitária. Parágrafo único. A garantia de prioridade compreende:

a) primazia de receber proteção e socorro em quaisquer circunstâncias;



b) precedência de atendimento nos serviços públicos ou de relevância pública;

c) preferência na formulação e na execução das políticas sociais públicas;

d) destinação privilegiada de recursos públicos nas áreas relacionadas com a proteção à infância e à juventude.

Art. 5º- Nenhuma criança ou adolescente será objeto de qualquer forma de negligência, discriminação, exploração, violência, crueldade e opressão, punido na forma da lei qualquer atentado, por ação ou omissão, aos seus direitos fundamentais (BRASIL, 1990b).

In addition, in paragraph 4, the Constitution precepts that: "The law shall severely punish the abuse, violence and exploitation of children and adolescents" (BRASIL, 1988). And the ECA reports that: "Art. 130. Once the hypothesis of ill-treatment, oppression or sexual abuse imposed by the parents or guardian is verified, the judicial authority may determine, as a precautionary measure, the removal of the aggressor from the common dwelling" (BRASIL, 1990b).

Still, in consonance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, promulgated by Decree 99.170/90, establishes that:

Os Estados Partes adotarão todas as medidas legislativas, administrativas, sociais e educacionais apropriadas para proteger a criança contra todas as formas de violência física ou mental, abuso ou tratamento negligente, maus tratos ou exploração, inclusive abuso sexual, enquanto a criança estiver sob a custódia dos pais, do representante legal ou de qualquer outra pessoa responsável por ela. Essas medidas de proteção deveriam incluir, conforme apropriado, procedimentos eficazes para a elaboração de programas sociais capazes de proporcionar uma assistência adequada à criança e às pessoas encarregadas de seu cuidado, bem como para outras formas de prevenção, para a identificação, notificação, transferência a uma instituição, investigação, tratamento e acompanhamento posterior dos casos acima mencionados de maus tratos à criança e, conforme o caso, para a intervenção judiciária (BRASIL, 1990a).



Based on this, it is inferred that from the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (BRASIL, 1990b), these individuals began to be recognized as subjects of law, through the formulation of the policy of integral protection and articulation between the State and society, emerging the tutelary councils and councils of rights. In addition, with the emergence of councils at the state and municipal level, the decentralization of politics was generated, enabling fair access to social policies and dignified service to justice (VERONESE, 2006).

3. COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

Covid-19, a disease caused by the new coronavirus, has rapid spread and can lead to the death of thousands of people due to its mechanism of action. For this reason and due to mass contamination by the virus, in March 2020, the WHO declared it a pandemic (CASACA *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, as a measure of containment of this, some measures were implemented, such as social isolation, determining that most of the world's population should be sheltered in their homes. Thus, this emergency measure led to changes in the routine of the members who made up the family nucleus, bringing consequences for its entire structure (OKABAYASHI *et al.*, 2020).

In this sense, it is important to highlight that this social isolation, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, in which all indispensable and necessary services to the population were closed, among them, education, has caused them to become exclusively domestic, thus increasing the cases of sexual abuse in children and adolescents, due to the greater contact between family members and the vulnerable.

That said, this fact can be proven by a study conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2020), which found that the closure of schools and spaces considered important for living with people who did not belong to the family nucleus, made it more susceptible to sexual abuse during the Covid-19 pandemic.



In this perspective, it is emphasized that the family can contribute to increase or minimize the effects of sexual abuse in other instances on the children, since the problem often begins in the intra-family space. In this aspect, Winnicott (2005) mentions that, when family coexistence is healthy, the family is the best place for the development of children and adolescents. However, it is necessary to remember that the family, despite being considered a place of protection and care, is also a place of conflicts, of power relations and can be configured as a space of rights violations.

Thus, it is essential that, in the search and/or attempt to reverse this problem, it is included and committed to the incessant search for resolution, because child sexual abuse can compromise the cognitive development of children and adolescents.

4. ANALYSIS OF CASES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL

In the pandemic period, through isolation and social distancing measures, it was found that the numbers of notifications and reports of cases of child sexual abuse reduced considerably compared to previous years (LOPES, 2022).

In this context, Custódio and Cabral (2021) portray that:

Os dados contidos no Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública – Edição 2020 revelam que, no ano de 2019, houve 66.123 registros de violência sexual, o que indica que a cada 8 minutos, uma pessoa é estuprada no Brasil. Do total das vítimas, 85,7% são do sexo feminino e 57,9% tinham no máximo 13 anos. Ao analisar a autoria, o estudo aponta que em 84,1% dos casos – de estupro e estupro de vulnerável – o autor era conhecido da vítima, o que indica um complexo contexto de violência intrafamiliar. Referidos dados, contudo, não dão conta da real dimensão dos crimes sexuais, visto que revelam apenas aqueles casos que são notificados e registrados em Delegacia de Polícia. Estima-se que este número seja dez vezes maior, o que demonstra a subnotificação da violência sexual no país.

Given this, data released by the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (2020 *apud* SILVA, 2022), as shown in the chart below, show that in the period from 2018 to 2019, there was an increase of about 45% of complaints. However, in 2020, the number of reports of cases of sexual abuse against children and adolescents decreased by about 25%.

Graph 1 – Complaints of sexual abuse committed against children and adolescents by period



Source: *Ministério da Mulher, da Família e Direitos dos Humanos* (2020) *apud* Silva (2022).

That said, according to the Brazilian Forum on Public Security, there has been a significant reduction in reports of violence against children during the pandemic. This demonstrates a decline in opportunities for case identification and reporting, but not necessarily a decrease in cases of violence (MELO *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, for Silva (2022), some factors that may be associated with the decrease in complaints are: the lack of information on how to perform it online; the lack of access to virtual media; the social and financial question of the family; the difficulty of making the complaint due to threats, fear; the presence of the aggressor in the environment and daily life of these victims.

Corroborating the above, Silva and Martins (2021) report that:



Os dados reiteram a relação familiar entre suspeitos e vítimas. De acordo com os números do segundo semestre de 2020 do Disque 100, 67,30% dos suspeitos são familiares, o que corresponde a 4.926 denúncias. Neste ambiente, a categoria padrasto/madrasta (1.145) representa a maioria dos suspeitos de violência sexual infantil, seguidos de pais (1.121) e mães (767). (SILVA E MARTINS, 2021, p. 01).

Thus, among the cases that occurred during the pandemic involving child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment, the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of São Paulo is cited:

ESTUPRO DE VULNERÁVEL – AUTORIA E MATERIALIDADE COMPROVADAS – CONDENAÇÃO MANTIDA – Suficientes os elementos probatórios a demonstrar a ocorrência de estupro de criança de 04 anos pelo próprio pai, de rigor a manutenção do édito condenatório – PENA READEQUADA. RECURSO PARCIALMENTE PROVIDO. (TJSP; Apelação Criminal 0003289-32.2017.8.26.0361; Relator (a): Willian Campos; Órgão Julgador: 15ª Câmara de Direito Criminal; Foro de Mogi das Cruzes – 3ª Vara Criminal; Data do Julgamento: 05/05/2021; Data de Registro: 05/05/2021) RECURSO DE APELAÇÃO. Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente. Ação de acolhimento institucional. Apelo tirado pela genitora em face da r. sentença que decretou a procedência do feito, para ratificar a medida protetiva liminarmente aplicada aos filhos menores. Insurgência que não prospera. Demanda de natureza cautelar, que tem por objeto tão somente a aplicação de medida de proteção aos petizes. Irmãos menores expostos a risco pelos pais – o genitor, em razão das agressões físicas e sexuais praticadas contra a genitora, a enteada e a filha; a genitora, em virtude da incapacidade de se desvencilhar do relacionamento abusivo e de proteger a prole. Estudos técnicos que apontam a impossibilidade de reinserção imediata dos menores na companhia materna, ante a necessidade de fortalecimento psicossocial da genitora, com vistas à perene superação das adversidades pessoais constatadas. Medida que poderá ser revista a qualquer tempo, caso substancial e positiva alteração do panorama fático atualmente observado autorize e recomende, no superior interesse dos petizes, a reintegração familiar. Recurso não provido. (TJSP; Apelação Cível 1009423-53.2020.8.26.0361; Relator (a): Issa Ahmed; Órgão Julgador: 28 Câmara Especial; Foro de Mogi das Cruzes – Vara da Infância e Juventude; Data do Julgamento: 21/06/2021; Data de Registro: 21/06/2021)



The case reported above demonstrates an occurrence of intrafamily sexual abuse of a 4-year-old child that occurred during the pandemic. The case reported demonstrates that the father physically and sexually assaulted the daughter, the mother and the stepdaughter and that, after sentencing, institutional reception was determined to the victims, due to the violence suffered by the father and the inability of the mother to protect the children.

Given this, Santos (2022) argues that:

Nesse cenário, em casos de abuso sexual intrafamiliar a família não cumpre seu dever, tornando-se os algozes da vítima, como visto acima, pais e mães tornam-se o vilão e não cumpre o papel de proteger e cuidar de seus filhos.

For this reason, it is important to highlight that it is up to the State to guarantee with absolute priority the rights of children and adolescents, as well as the family and society as a whole. In addition, even though Brazil is a pioneer in establishing rights, guarantees and freedoms to children and adolescents, having one of the most advanced legislations in the world regarding the rights of these individuals, the reality found is totally distant from that provided in the normative plan, since this is a supposed protection of the child in the legal and welfare spheres, when in reality, that is, at the time of application to the concrete case, a blind eye is turned to a problem that affects society.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

"Sexual abuse", when called intrafamiliar, is related to the fact that it originates within the family. Therefore, considering that, in most cases, cases of sexual abuse in children and adolescents are linked directly or indirectly to the family, where the aggressors, in most cases, are parents and/or other family members, this article aimed to answer: what is the relationship between COVID-19 and the decrease in cases of child sexual abuse in the intrafamily environment?



Through the above, it was possible to verify that social isolation was one of the main factors that made the practice of child sexual abuse more succintible, as well as contributing significantly to the decrease in complaints, either because the aggressor is present in the environment and daily life of the victims, the lack of knowledge or the lack of access to virtual media.

Thus, it can be concluded that child sexual abuse needs to be in public policy discussions as a globalized phenomenon within society. Its eradication and prevention are a constant challenge for professionals in the social, health and education areas, as well as for all those involved and interested in the problem. In this aspect, it is not necessarily enough just to create programs, but, mainly, to be committed to study and analyze rigorously the causes and consequences of the breadth of this theme and the moral and social damages suffered by children and adolescents, victims of sexual violence.

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APPENDIX - FOOTNOTE

3. Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (ECA).

Submitted: July, 2022.

Approved: August, 2022.

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