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REVIEW ARTICLE

Gender-based violence against women: a scoping review

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Abstract *Violence against women is a phenomenon that affects women all over the world from different age groups and social classes. This study aims to map existing scientific production on violence against women, seeking to identify what has been produced on this phenomenon. A scoping review was carried out on the EMBASE, LILACS, Web of Science and PsycInfo databases. The final sample of the review consisted of 233 articles published between 1998 and 2023, predominantly in the area of Health Sciences. The studies were primarily produced using qualitative methodology and focused on physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence. The thematic content produced by the articles indicated the existence of 4 classes: Configuration of recurrent violence; Recognition of social impact; Support strategies for victims and Methodological strategies. Research has widely discussed important issues for understanding and combating violence against women. However, in addition to the most common forms of violence, it was observed that women have faced other forms of violence that still receive little attention in the field of scientific production. Promoting a multidisciplinary dialog seems to be a promising way of bridging this gap.*
Key words *Violence Against Women, Gender-Based Violence, Victimization*

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Introduction

The World Health Organization defines gender as a set of socially established characteristics, including relationships, roles, and social norms that vary according to culture[1]. Specifically, gender is understood as a hierarchical marker that can reflect unequal power relations between men and women, with women having been economically, politically, and socially disadvantaged over the centuries[2]. Gender-based violence refers to abusive actions stemming from androcentric domination, which are not uniform and occur in different contexts[3].

The United Nations categorizes violence against women as any form of gender-based violence that causes or may result in suffering in women's lives, including physical, sexual, or emotional abuse[4]. This phenomenon represents a global public health issue, manifesting itself in a persistent and everyday manner in the lives of victims[5]. Violence against women is not limited by age or social class, affecting women from different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds[6]. The Amnesty International report on global human rights, published in 2023, highlighted that gender-based violence against women is deeply rooted in different cultures and has shown high incidence across multiple contexts[7].

Currently, there is a growing body of research on violence against women across various fields of knowledge. While remarkable advances have been made, recurring theoretical and methodological challenges remain evident. Three distinct approaches to research on violence are most likely found: theoretical studies, empirical research, and care interventions. These approaches are often assumed to be independent of one another, lacking the necessary research integration to address this issue comprehensively. Other limitations in the field include an excessive focus on the prevalence of the phenomenon, a lack of sociological studies, the complexity of variables associated with violence, and a tendency to prioritize certain variables at the expense of others that are overlooked. These aspects contribute to a scenario in which new knowledge struggles to emerge, leading to lacking novelty in findings[8].

Given the above, mapping existing scientific productions on gender-based violence against women may contribute to making this issue more visible. This research aims to identify what has been produced and the patterns present in studies on this phenomenon.

Methods

This study is a scoping review, descriptive and qualitative. The study was conducted following the Briggs Institute (JBI)[9] methodology, and reported following the guidelines of the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews* (PRISMA-ScR)[10].

This strategy was selected because it is suitable for reviewing evidence produced by research using diverse methods, enabling a comprehensive analysis of a specific topic or subject[11]. The following research question guided the study: "How has gender-based violence against women been addressed in scientific research?"

Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria were established using the mnemonic PCC (Participants, Concept, and Context) strategy for scoping reviews[12]. The eligibility criteria for the review were: Participants: Studies that investigated gender-based violence against women. Concept: Understanding the phenomenon, including its driving factors and strategies to fight its incidence. Context: Studies involving women and/or men.

Only primary studies that involved men and women, regardless of age group, and had a primary focus on researching violence against women – irrespective of methodological approach or field of study – were considered. Additionally, the studies included were articles with abstracts and full-text availability in Portuguese or English. Secondary studies and research addressing other forms of gender-based violence were excluded. No exclusion criteria were applied based on ethnicity or year of publication.

Research sources and search strategies

The study reviewed articles from four databases: EMBASE, Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Web of Science, and PsycInfo. These databases were selected based on the number of internationally indexed journals and their ability to retrieve relevant articles in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary fields[13].

Selection

The selection of search terms occurred in three stages during the review. Between September and October 2023, a controlled vocabulary search was conducted using the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS/MeSH). This process aimed to investigate key concepts, analyze the most relevant descriptors in research on gender-based violence against women. and categorize them. Subsequently, in November and December 2023, multiple search strategies were developed using the selected reference terms. Four researchers individually tested these strategies to assess their effectiveness and select the most appropriate one. Finally, the final search strategy was developed and adapted according to each database used.

Selection

Using the descriptors "*Violência contra as mulheres*", "*Violência de gênero*", "*Violence Against Women*" and "*Gender-Based Violence*" along with their corresponding search strategies, searches were conducted in Portuguese and English in the selected databases between January and February 2024 (Table 1).

The Rayyan application (Qatar Computing Research Institute, Qatar) was used to manage and document the review process. The authors conducted training sessions in Rayyan to ensure screening consistency with the reviewers. The reviewers independently and blindly identified the publication titles and indexing terms used to describe the articles based on the eligibility criteria. A third reviewer assessed and resolved discrepancies, and when necessary, discussions were held with the research team regarding the inclusion of studies in cases of eligibility doubts. The same process was applied to evaluate and select abstracts for the study's final sample.

Data extraction and organization

The extracted data included the following information: year of publication, authorship, country of publication, methodology used, type of violence discussed, and the journal's field classification according to the CNPq Knowledge Areas Table[14]. Subsequently, the extracted data was reviewed, compiled, and organized in a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel version 2401 for further analysis.

The selected abstracts were translated and uploaded to the online platform Google Docs following formatting guidelines[15]. One of the authors reviewed the extracted data and the formatting of the corpus before importing it into the free application OpenOffice.org Writer for final configuration.

Analysis and presentation of results

The data were analyzed using two strategies: manual evaluation followed by constructing tables for results discussion and thematic exploration using the free lexical analysis software Iramuteq version R 3.2.1.

In Iramuteq, data processing was performed using Hierarchical Descendant Classification (HDC). This computerized text analysis method was chosen for its ability to decompose and present a classification of words based on their distribution. HDC calculates partitions into lexical classes and presents their relationships through a dendrogram, considering the connections between classes and the representativeness of each axis within the analyzed textual content[15]. The details of the data can be consulted at the following link: https://doi.org/10.48331/scielodata.KA7BBJ.

Results

Article selection

The database search identified a total of 3,971 studies. After excluding 1,779 duplicates, 2,192 studies were subjected to title screening, of which 1,259 were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria: being a primary study and discussing gender-based violence against women. A total of 933 abstracts were analyzed, and 700 studies did not meet the eligibility criteria: 211 had a different population than specified in the PCC strategy, 255 had different objectives than those intended, 134 were not freely available. In the end, 233 studies were included in this review. No reference list searches were conducted for additional studies. The entire selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1.

Publication dates

The distribution of the 233 studies by year of publication was heterogeneous, covering the period from 1998 to 2023. No studies published in 1999 met the inclusion criteria. A growth in publications can be observed starting in 2010.

Between 2012 and 2018, 111 studies were published (46.7%). However, this growth was followed by a significant drop in 2019, with only five studies, followed by a sharp increase in 2020. Between 2020 and 2021, 54 articles were published (23.18%).

Table 1. Results from the databases.

	PsycInfo	Web of Science	LILACS	Embase
Portuguese	53	1	327	4
English	224	1,025	122	2,265
Total	227	1,026	449	2,269

Source: Authors (2024).

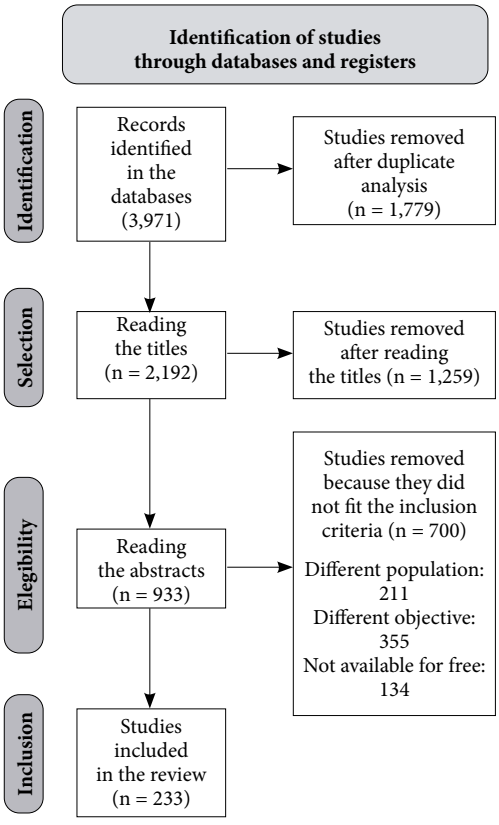


Figure 1. Study Selection Flowchart.

Source: Authors (2024).

Study methodologies

Regarding the methodological design of the studies included in the sample, a predominance of qualitative research was observed. Among the total studies, 130 specified the use of a qualitative approach (55.8%), 81 opted for a quantitative approach (34.8%), and only 22 combined both approaches as their methodological design (9.4%).

Study authorship

This review incorporated 233 studies: 28 (12%) were authored exclusively by men, 60 (25.8%) exclusively by women, 145 (62.2%) were co-authored by men and women, totalling 525 authors. Regarding institutional affiliations, institutions from the American continent predominated (37.7%), followed by Europe (9.9%), Asia (8.6%), Africa (1.0%), and Oceania (1.7%).

In terms of racial or ethnic background, data were gathered from publicly available academic profiles with photos. Of the 525 authors, 400 were identified as White (76.2%), 84 as non-White (16%), for 41 authors (7.8%), race or ethnicity information was unavailable.

Countries of publication

This review included studies from five continents: Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania. Most of the publications were from the American continent (147 studies), including 81 from South America – 77 from Brazil – and 66 from North America – 64 from the United States. Other continents also had an important number of studies – Europe: 48 studies, Africa: 19 studies, Asia: 17 studies, Oceania: 2 studies from Australia (Table 2).

Journal fields

Regarding the disciplinary fields of the journals where the selected studies were published, they were predominantly Health Sciences (83%), – Public Health (102 studies) and Medicine (73 studies), and Human Sciences field, – Psychology (22 studies) and Political Science (5 studies) (Table 3).

Types of violence discussed

Although different forms of violence against women often overlap, six types of violence were identified for analytical purposes: Physical vio-

lence (n=139). Sexual violence (n=133). Psychological/emotional violence (n=91), Property-related violence (n=15), Moral violence (n=4) and General violence, which includes studies investigating multiple manifestations of violence.

Lexicographic analysis

The complete corpus contained 233 texts, 1,922 text segments, 7,337 distinct forms and 68,681 occurrences. CHD divided the corpus into 1712 text segments and four clusters. The percentage of text segments retained was 89.07%. For analysis purposes, we used the standardization of grammatical forms indicated in Iramuteq (Figure 2).

The lexicographic analysis divided the corpus into three partitions and four classes. Initially, the content of the analysis was divided into one partition: Class 4, **"**Methodological Strategies**",** which was later merged with two other partitions: the combination of Class 2, "Recognition of Social Impact", and Class 3, "Support Strategies for Victims". In a third stage, the combination of these two previous partitions resulted in the third partition, which includes Class 1, "Configuration of Recurrent Violence". The CHD (Hierarchical Descending Classification) was finalized at this stage, as the classes demonstrated stability, presenting text segments with similar vocabulary.

The degree of proximity between Classes 2 and 3 suggests a semantic connection in their textual content. Furthermore, the organization of the CHD indicates that the discussion on the recognition of social impact (Class 2) and the support strategies for victims (Class 3) is encompassed within the analysis of the configuration of recurrent violence (Class 1). The separation of Class 4 suggests that its lexical content is distinct from the topics addressed in the previous partitions, yet it enables the construction of these analyses.

The Class 4: "Methodological Strategies" represents 454 ST, accounting for 26.5% of the analyzed corpus. This class includes terms such as "Conduct" (*f*=146, x^2=299.49), "Data" (*f*=155, x^2=209.7), "Interview" (*f*=88, x^2=190.48), "Cross-sectional" (*f*=74, x^2=176.71), and "Questionnaire" (*f*=53, x^2=115.13). The excerpts in this class highlighted the strategies used by researchers to conduct their studies, as shown next: "Face-to-face interviews were conducted using a questionnaire developed by the WHO for research on violence with 883 randomly selected women. A sample of 265 women, aged 18 to 49 years, was interviewed using a face-to-face questionnaire".

The Class 2, "Recognition of Social Impact", represents 291 ST (17% of the total corpus) and contains words such as "Problem" (*f*=80, x^2=123.16), "Important" (*f*=40, x^2=89.43), "Different" (*f*=51, x^2=71.43), "Public Health" (*f*=27, x^2=63.34), and "Consequence" (*f*=45, x^2=48.7). The analysis of the text segments allows for identifying a reflection on the understanding of both individual and social impacts of gender-based violence on the lives of victimized women. This

Table 2. Countries of Publication.

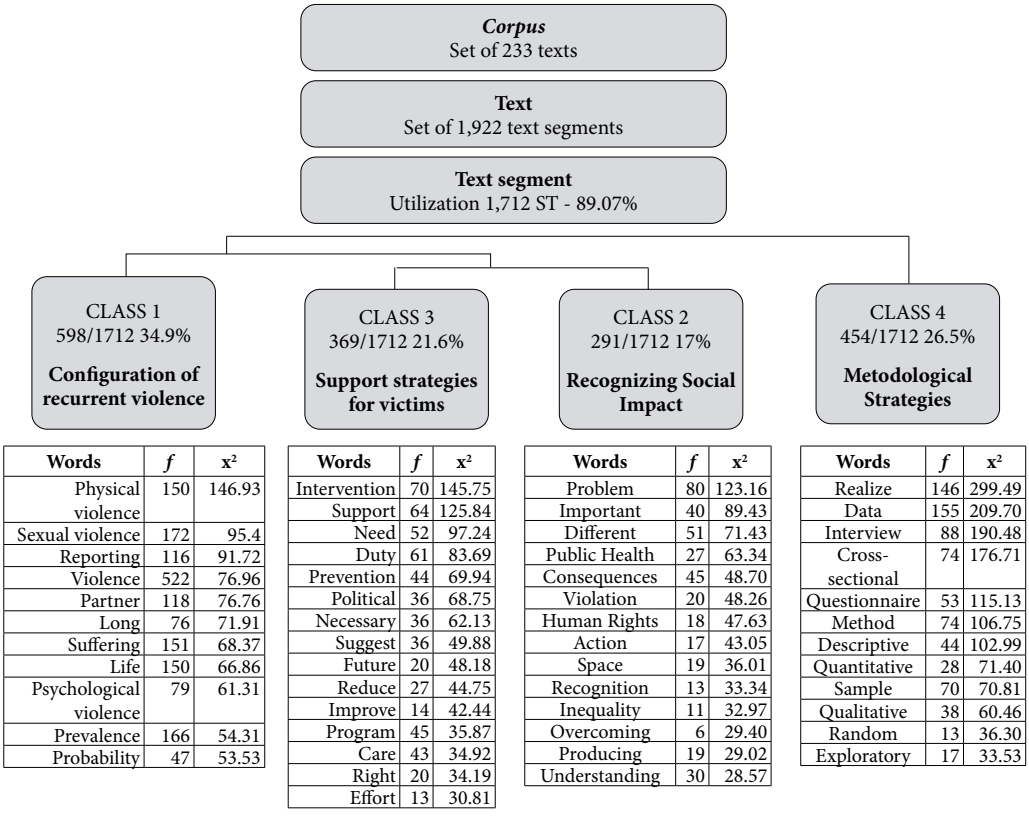
Continent & Country	N° of Studies
America United States (64); Jamaica (1); Canada (1); Brazil (77); Colombia (1), Venezuela (3)	147
Europe Spain (10), United Kingdom (22), England (1), Switzerland (4), Sweden (5), Romania (1), Netherlands (3), Belgium (1), Slovenia (1), Germany (1)	48
Africa: Tunisia (1), Ghana (1), South Africa (3), Nigeria (2), Rwanda (7), Sudan (1), Zimbabwe (1), Ethiopia (3)	19
Asia: Turkey (2), India (4), Saudi Arabia (1), Iran (2), Vietnam (1), Pakistan (2), Bangladesh (1), China (1), Russia (1), Iraq (1), Nepal (1)	17
Oceania: Australia (2)	2

Source: Authors (2024).

Table 3. Journal Fields.

Field	N° of Studies
Health Sciences Medicine (73), Dentistry (2), Nursing (16), Public Health (102), Occupational Therapy (1)	194
Human Sciences Psychology (22), Political Science (5)	27
Applied Social Sciences Law (2), Social Work (1), Demography (9)	12

Source: Authors (2024).



Words	*f*	x²
Physical violence	150	146.93
Sexual violence	172	95.4
Reporting	116	91.72
Violence	522	76.96
Partner	118	76.76
Long	76	71.91
Suffering	151	68.37
Life	150	66.86
Psychological violence	79	61.31
Prevalence	166	54.31
Probability	47	53.53

Words	*f*	x²
Intervention	70	145.75
Support	64	125.84
Need	52	97.24
Duty	61	83.69
Prevention	44	69.94
Political	36	68.75
Necessary	36	62.13
Suggest	36	49.88
Future	20	48.18
Reduce	27	44.75
Improve	14	42.44
Program	45	35.87
Care	43	34.92
Right	20	34.19
Effort	13	30.81

Words	*f*	x²
Problem	80	123.16
Important	40	89.43
Different	51	71.43
Public Health	27	63.34
Consequences	45	48.70
Violation	20	48.26
Human Rights	18	47.63
Action	17	43.05
Space	19	36.01
Recognition	13	33.34
Inequality	11	32.97
Overcoming	6	29.40
Producing	19	29.02
Understanding	30	28.57

Words	*f*	x²
Realize	146	299.49
Data	155	209.70
Interview	88	190.48
Cross-sectional	74	176.71
Questionnaire	53	115.13
Method	74	106.75
Descriptive	44	102.99
Quantitative	28	71.40
Sample	70	70.81
Qualitative	38	60.46
Random	13	36.30
Exploratory	17	33.53

Figure 2. Descending Hierarchical Classification.

Source: Authors (2024).

is demonstrated in the following excerpts: "Gender-based violence is a widespread problem in South Africa. Structural inequalities from the past have created an environment conducive to violence against women. Violence against women is a significant social and public health issue in Saudi society. Healthcare professionals may need to consider this diagnosis when identifying risk factors found in this study".

The Class 3, "Support Strategies for Victims", represents 369 ST (21.6% of the corpus) and includes words such as "Intervention" (*f*=70, x²=147.45), "Support" (*f*=64, x²=125.84), "Need" (*f*=52, x²=97.24), "Duty" (*f*=61, x²=83.69), "Prevention" (*f*=44, x²=69.94), and "Political" (*f*=36, x²=68.35). The text segments in this class highlight strategies that can be developed to support victims in situations of violence, as described next: "The magnitude of this issue highlights the need to develop interventions that provide support to victims and implement effective public policies to break the cycle of violence. The results obtained in this study are important as they can serve as a source of information for the establishment of policies and programs aimed at preventing violence against women".

The Class 1, "Configuration of Recurrent Violence" represents 598 ST (34.9% of the analyzed corpus) and includes terms such as "Physical Violence" (*f*=150, x²=146.93), "Sexual Violence" (*f*=172, x²=95.4), "Report" (*f*=116, x²=91.72), "Violence" (*f*=522, x²=76.96), and "Partner" (*f*=118, x²=76.76). The text segments within this class reveal the most prevalent types of violence and the dynamics of their manifestations, as illustrated next: "The types of perpetrated violence included physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse against women or their children. The existence of previous violence was observed within the families of both victims and perpetrators. Physical, psychological, and economic violence was more frequently reported by women who live with a partner, are married, or are divorced/separated. Sexual violence was asso-

ciated with individuals from non-Indigenous ethnic groups, while all types of violence were more common among urban dwellers, except for physical violence, which was more prevalent in the Highlands or the Amazon region".

Discussion

The scoping review demonstrated that the selected studies show a predominance of female authors in research, indicating women's interest in different countries and cultures in the issue of violence against women. The results of this research also highlight that the investigation of this phenomenon is predominantly conducted in three fields of knowledge: Health Sciences, Human Sciences, and Applied Social Sciences, with a greater emphasis on Health Sciences. Although qualitative studies are predominant, quantitative and mixed-method studies are also present. Additionally, there is a tendency to address the three primary forms of intimate partner violence against women: physical, sexual, and psychological.

Discussions on other manifestations of violence in different settings are also observed. The social significance of this issue is evidenced by the conceptualization of violence against women not only as an individual problem but also as a social and global phenomenon. This problem is recognized as one of the major social challenges in several countries, as seen in Turkey[16], the United States[17], and Brazil[18]. A study published in 1998 analyzed intimate partner violence against women and the perpetration of sexual violence[19]. Between 2000 and 2009, various studies addressed issues such as intimate partner violence, marital relationships, and domestic violence[20-22].

However, new discussions have emerged, expanding beyond relationship dynamics to other contexts in which women are victimized, including the impact on victims' health[23] and the manifestation of violence against women in their workplaces[24]. A scoping review on sexism in the workplace highlighted that, although ambivalent sexism persists in environments marked by gender stereotypes in interpersonal and institutional relationships, feminist claims and women's rights advancements have contributed to recognizing and challenging normalized gender role beliefs in academic research[25].

There is a discernible trend in studies exploring intersections between violence and other relevant issues affecting the studied populations. This is exemplified by a study in South Africa that related gender-based violence against women to intergenerational relationships and compared the attitudes of young and older men toward their partners' sexual health[26]. Another study demonstrated that social structures impose a resigned stance on women regarding the violence they experience, emphasizing the importance of considering contextual limitations such as poverty and inequality[27].

The results of this review also suggest an increase in publications between 2020 and 2021, linking violence against women to topics such as the cyber context[28], conflicts in eastern Ukraine[29], refugee camps in Kenya[30] and Canada[31], and COVID-19[32]. When analyzing the types of violence discussed in the studies, physical violence emerges as the primary focus of investigation, followed by sexual and psychological/emotional violence. These findings are also reflected in a study conducted in Kenya with 283 female sex workers, which revealed a high rate of gender-based violence, with 86% of respondents experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional violence[32].

A study involving young people aged 15 to 24 in low- and middle-income countries who had experienced physical and sexual violence at significant rates demonstrated that researchers had made global efforts to investigate, prevent, and develop intervention strategies to combat gender-based violence against women, mainly focusing on physical and sexual violence. This perspective highlights a shift in societal attitudes regarding the acceptance of physical abuse[33]. The normalization of physical violence has been increasingly challenged, and as social support for its justification declines, more subtle forms of violence, such as psychological abuse, have intensified[34].

The emergence and persistence of these forms of violence were discussed in a study involving university students in Spain. The authors found that participants could easily associate physical or sexual aggression with violence against women. However, when presented with behaviors involving domination, humiliation, or control – such as preventing a woman from speaking or making derogatory comments about her appearance – many did not recognize these actions as forms of abuse against women[35].

Women continue to face various forms of subordination, with sexual violence and victim-blaming frequently intertwined with variables such as gender, skin color, and normativity[36]. These variables interact, creating different

experiences for victims. Analyzing social representations of women reveals that perceptions of sexual violence against women are often tied to the notion that the victim is co-responsible for the violence suffered, reflecting the persistent influence of patriarchal values in structuring our society[37].

Additionally, the results indicate the existence of other forms of violence, including economic, moral, patrimonial, and conjugal violence. Despite the predominance of certain types of violence, women are frequently exposed to multiple forms of violation, experiencing polyvictimization, which complicates recognition and escape from abusive scenarios[16,38]. Moreover, this review identifies strategies for supporting victims in dealing with multiple abuse scenarios. Between 1998 and 2007, the main strategy adopted by studies was training professionals to assist victims[39,40].

A study involving 386 pregnant women who experienced intimate partner violence during prenatal care at Family Medicine Units in Mexico City highlighted that, despite social and governmental support for combating violence, it remains a "taboo" for many women. The authors noted that this limitation extends to healthcare providers, who often categorize the issue as a private and sensitive matter. The study's findings emphasize that healthcare professionals play a crucial role in identifying violence, assessing risk, sharing legal information, and providing proper referral and support services for victims[41].

Recognizing preventive actions, such as projects that raise women's awareness of their rights[42], the development of health policies focused on prevention[43], and the promotion of safe spaces for discussions on violence and empowerment, were the predominant strategies in studies published between 2008 and 2014[44,45]. Research published between 2015 and 2019 emphasized the importance of developing interventions aligned with victims' beliefs and coping strategies in abusive environments[46,47]. This includes efforts such as strengthening public education to combat the normalization of violence[48] and leveraging information and communication technologies as awareness tools for victims' rights[49].

Finally, between 2020 and 2023, strategies aimed at challenging gender stereotypes[16,50] have predominated, focusing on redefining social roles and women's lived experiences[51]. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the importance of developing tools and public policies to combat the manifestation and perpetuation of these stereotypes in online social networks[26].

Final considerations

The results indicated that, over the years, gender-based violence against women has been widely investigated across different social and cultural contexts. These investigations have addressed critical issues necessary for understanding and combating abuse. Despite evident progress, it is important to note that discussions still predominantly focus on the most common forms of violence in romantic relationships, with a concentration of publications in the Health Sciences. However, even within this framework, studies have presented various support strategies for victims.

The implication of these findings for the development of new research lies in recognizing that the investigation of this phenomenon must consider the victim's context and the limitations imposed by it. Beyond the most commonly discussed forms of harm, women experience other forms of oppression that still do not receive adequate attention in scientific production. Promoting dialogue among different fields of knowledge to analyze this multifaceted phenomenon could be a promising approach to expanding and broadening research on violence against women.

Although this investigation has satisfactorily answered the research question, some limitations must be acknowledged to guide future studies on gender-based violence against women. The sample of this review was composed of open-access articles, without considering other publication formats, such as gray literature. Additionally, the search filter included only articles in English and Portuguese, limiting access to full texts published in other languages. A future research agenda could consider multiple formats for disseminating evidence, ranging from media productions to projects and other academic-scientific publications, given that gender-based violence against women is a phenomenon with a multifaceted origin and complex dynamics.

Collaborations

SCS Fernandes was responsible for drafting the research concept, assessing the appropriateness of the study design, supervising the data collection strategies, analyzing and discussing the results, as well as drafting and revising the article. Also approved the final content of the manuscript. MN Martins and SAF Rocha participated in the conception of the study, the design of the study, the collection, analysis and discussion of the data and the writing of the article. JLÁ Estramiana, M Isidora Bilbao-Neiva, KC Vione, MJ Antônio and BFS Maloa contributed to the study design, analysis of the results, revision of the discussion of the results and approval of the final content of the manuscript.

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