

Armed violence and illicit drug trade. An integrative literature review on Brazil

Mayalu Matos Silva (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0345-1902>)¹
Patrícia Constantino (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5835-0466>)¹

Abstract *The article maps relationships between armed violence (AV) and the illicit drug trade (IDT) in Brazil through an integrative review focused on empirical research. The sample included 20 articles, categorized according to year of publication and fieldwork, objectives, methods, study location and results. The results were interpreted based on thematic content analysis and showed that the relationship between IDT and AV occurs mainly through Organized Armed Violence. However, this violence spreads, affecting society, especially residents of peripheral areas. The following stood out: Availability of Firearms (AF), with a broad presence in the IDT environment; Illegality and violence, highlighting the need to use FA for the IDT due to its illegality and militarized perspective of repression; State action, thematizes the absence of preventive public security in peripheral areas and the violent, corrupt and ineffective action of the State; Armed territorial dominance, shows the strength of the organized IDT groups and the effects on the population; Young black people: primary victims and perpetrators, highlights the vulnerability of these young people to AV and also Health impacts.*

Key words *Illicit drug trade, Gun violence, Drug control, Homicides, Health disparate, minority and vulnerable populations*

¹ Departamento de Estudos sobre Violência e Saúde Jorge Careli, Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sérgio Arouca, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz. Av. Brasil 4036, sala 700, Manguinhos. 21040-361 Rio de Janeiro RJ Brasil. mayalu.silva@fiocruz.br

Introduction

Brazil faces a major challenge as to armed violence (AV). Considering firearm homicide (FAH), one of the main indicators of this type of violence, in 2021, the country ranked 11th with the highest rates, out of 86 countries (<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/homicide-rates-from-firearms?tab=table>). The concept of AV has sought to encompass the complexity of a phenomenon that concerns the widespread presence and use of firearms (FA) in society, and is broader than the traditional definition of armed conflicts: a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state¹.

From the 1990s onwards, conflicts between states lost momentum to intra-state conflicts, a phenomenon marked by the ease with which civil society can acquire and use FA without a specific political objective². AV is beginning to be observed in contexts of formal peace, especially on the periphery of capitalism and especially in Latin America (LA)³. In this region, Organized Armed Violence (OAV)⁴ stands out, an intermittent situation that results from the actions of armed civilian groups (ACG) with territorial control that seek illegal economic gains and which may challenge the state to ensure these gains⁵. However, AV is broader; it can be exercised by gang members, members of private security forces, state forces, ordinary individuals, among others⁶. Thus, it concerns the large presence of FA in society and the violence disseminated by its use, both by state forces and armed civilians, especially criminal groups, but which is widespread in society. This phenomenon is expressed through the use or threat of FA for violence, control of territory, clashes, *stray bullets*, *snipers*, among others⁷. Besides homicides, AV has serious impacts on people's health and social actions in the territories where it is present⁸.

This article examines one aspect of this phenomenon, i.e. AV and its relationship with the illicit drug trade (IDT) in Brazil. It should be noted that there is no necessary relationship between AV and IDT, but it can be shaped by specific determinants and LA has been considered one of the regions most affected by this relationship, with the highest regional rate of intentional homicides in the world: 19.91 in 2021, against a global rate of 5.79 (<https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-intentional-homicide-victims-est>). It

should be noted that LA is the main region for the production and sale of cocaine, a lucrative drug that has a privileged trade route to Europe in Brazil⁹. The War on Drugs has been applied in the region since its inception in the 1970s. This proposal, which emerged in the US, was based on the repression, militarization and demonization of drugs – especially cocaine – and has marked drug policies in Latin America and Brazil¹⁰. Criminalization has thus been the main state strategy for dealing with the drug issue¹¹, an approach that has seen few results and many social consequences^{12,13}.

In Brazil, while on the one hand we are seeing this intensive use of militarized resources, on the other hand we are seeing the development of IDT, which develops alongside other forms of crime. The strong presence of AV has serious consequences¹³ for society, such as the high rates of FAH, which in Brazil are significantly related to IDT¹⁴.

Criminal insecurity has the particularity of being aggravated by the intervention of state forces in view of the routine use of lethal violence by the police, which trivializes the brutality of the state and causes a climate of terror among the working classes, targeted by these operations¹⁵. Thus, we are interested in observing which relationships between AV and IDT are discussed in Brazilian academic literature.

Methodology

In this sense, we opted for an integrative review, a systematic method that allows us to include studies with different methodologies¹⁶ to provide an overview and also a synthesis of results, in the case of this review, with an exploratory objective. We worked with two groups of descriptors, one related to AV and the other to IDT, as described in Chart 1.

Duplicate articles were excluded and the sample was screened separately by each author, first by reading the titles and abstracts and then full articles following the criteria:

a) Inclusion: empirical research articles on Brazil, with fieldwork that addresses aspects of AV and/or IDT and/or relates these topics in the discussion, written in Portuguese, English and Spanish.

b) Exclusion: articles that did not mention AV and IDT in their fieldwork or discussion, articles carried out outside Brazil, review articles, essays and reviews, theses, dissertations, undergraduate papers, books and official documents.

The samples were compared, resulting in 17 articles. After reading them, we carried out a new search, considering that public security, a key issue relating to this topic, was poorly represented in this sample, although the descriptors “War on drugs”, “Drug policy” and “Drug repression” were used. To this end, we used the two groups of descriptors from the previous search, referring to AV on the one hand and IDT on the other, combining each one with the term public security so as to highlight it (Charts 2 and 3).

Screening was carried out following the methodology already described, resulting in 3

articles in search 2 and 0 articles in search 3, for a total of 20 articles, which were categorized and analyzed according to year of publication and fieldwork, objectives, methods, study location and results. The results on the relationship between AV and IDT were interpreted using thematic content analysis¹⁷: in the pre-analysis, a floating reading was carried out focusing on the results and discussion, making up the *corpus* of analysis; then categories of meaning were created, based on the classification of the most frequent topics, followed by the organization of the information, analysis of the results and critical interpretation.

Chart 1. Search Strategy 1.

Topic	Date	Descriptors and Search Strategy*	Results
Illicit drugs, illicit drug control, homicides and FA.	September 2019	("Illicit drugs" OR "War on drugs" OR "Drug policy" OR "Drug repression" OR "Drug trafficking" OR "Illicit drug trafficking" AND "Violence" OR "Homicides" OR "Firearm homicides" OR "Armed violence" OR "Firearms")	BVS: 267 SciELO:32 Scopus: 59 Web of Science: 85 PubMed: 215 Sociological abstracts: 266 Total: 719

*Searches were also made with the corresponding words in Portuguese.

Source: Authors.

Chart 2. Search Strategy 2.

Topic	Date	Descriptors and Search Strategy*	Results
Homicide and public security	April 2020	("Homicides" OR "Firearm homicides" OR "Armed violence" OR "Firearms") AND ("Public Security")	BVS: 296 SciELO:34 Scopus: 221 Web of Science: 154 PubMed: 54 Sociological abstracts: 82 Total: 564

*Searches were also made with the corresponding words in Portuguese.

Source: Authors.

Chart 3. Search Strategy 3.

Topic	Date	Descriptors and Search Strategy*	Results
Illicit drugs and public security	April 2020	("Illicit drugs" OR "Drug policy" OR "Drug repression" OR "Illicit drug trade" AND "Public Security")	BVS:68 SciELO: 4 Scopus: 4 Web of Science: 13 PubMed: 1 Sociological abstracts: 2 Total: 79

*Searches were also made with the corresponding words in Portuguese.

Source: Authors.

Results

The articles range in time from 1998 to 2018, with an increase in academic production on the subject: 1990s: 1, 2000s: 6, 2010s: 13. Most of the publications were in the field of Public Health: 10, with 3 international publications (USA, Germany and England); followed by Social Sciences: 5, with one publication in Portugal; Psychology: 3. In addition to 1 article published in a Brazilian Multidisciplinary journal (Communication, Health, Education) and in an Australian journal about Drugs.

Most of the papers was carried out in the Southeast, with 10 articles: 2 on the capital of Rio de Janeiro (RJ) and 1 on the state of RJ (ERJ); 3 on the capital of São Paulo (SP) and 1 on the city of Ribeirão Preto-SP (RP-SP); 2 on Belo Horizonte-MG (BH) and 1 on its metropolitan region (RMBH). In second comes the Northeast (NE), with 6 articles: 1 on the NE region; 1 on the state of Pernambuco (PE), 1 on the city of Paulista-PE (PA-PE); 1 on the capital Salvador-BA (SSA) and 2 on the capital Fortaleza-CE (FOR). The Southern region had 4 articles, 1 on the municipalities of Paraná (PR), 1 on the state of Santa Catarina (SC), 1 on the city of Jaraguá do Sul-SC (JS-SC) and 1 on the city of Porto Alegre-RS (POA). Brazil (BR) is covered in 1 article. Papers from the North and Central-West regions were not selected.

The main indicator of violence used in the quantitative and quanti-quali studies was homicides. Data from death certificates were used in 9 articles: 4 articles specified the study with FAH¹⁸⁻²¹ and 5 articles worked with homicides in general. Of these, Lima *et al.*²² made the relationship with FA in the discussion of the data, Sant'anna *et al.*²³, Zaluar and Barcellos²⁴, Barcellos and Zaluar²⁵ and Silva *et al.*²⁶ from the qualitative part of the fieldwork. Two articles used police data on homicides: police reports²⁰ and police investigations^{20,27}, and one article used court cases²⁸. The relationship with FA and IDT was present in these documents. It should be noted that, in this sample, only 3 papers specify the use of the indicator of deaths by legal intervention^{18,19,24}, which is measured differently from homicides committed by civilians, both in health data – processed by the Ministry of Health's Mortality Information System (SIM/MS) through death certificates – and in police data – processed from police reports. Mentions of violence committed by State agents were mainly mentioned in the qualitative fieldwork.

They also addressed the phenomenon of homicide and/or possession, use and threat by FA, from homicide perpetrators²⁸, drug dealers²⁷, victims²⁹, family members^{23,30} and friends of victims³⁰, young delinquents³¹⁻³³, students²⁶, young people living in violent neighborhoods³⁴, homeless young people³⁵ and, moreover, various professionals^{26,30,34}. To this end, interviews were used in 11 articles^{23,26-35} and 3 focus groups^{26,30,34}. Further, work was carried out in peripheral neighborhoods marked by violence and/or drug trafficking: 2 victimization research²⁴, 1 survey²⁴, 2 participant observations^{28,35}, 2 intervention research^{30,34}, as well as 4 ethnographies^{24,25,33,36}. Mention of IDT and FA appears above all in qualitative studies²³⁻³⁶, and also in the discussion of some quantitative studies^{18,19,21,22} (Chart 4).

The results showed that the relationship between IDT and AV is mainly based on OAV, but that this violence spreads and affects society as a whole, especially residents of the peripheries. The following categories stood out: Availability of FA; Illegality and violence; State action; Armed territorial control; Young black men: the main victims and perpetrators and Impact on health.

Availability of FA

The high profits of IDT make it possible to acquire and facilitate the presence of FA in the drug trafficking environment^{35,37}, making the trafficking of FA and their illegal possession by ACG key factors in this equation^{19-22,24-28,37}. Szwarcwald and Castilho¹⁸ point to the spread of FA among increasingly younger groups and the proliferation of homicides in ERJ from the 1980s onwards, linked on the one hand to the need for organized crime to militarily control IDT points^{18,24} and on the other to the growing presence of armed ordinary citizens, frightened by insecurity.

Zaluar and Barcellos²⁴ also highlight the availability of FA for young favela residents in Rio de Janeiro and Sant'Anna *et al.*²³ point out as a vulnerability factor that 21% of adolescents victims of homicide in POA used to use FA. Kodato and Silva²⁸ point out that the homicides perpetrated by the young people they interviewed were almost entirely committed by FA, which are easily accessible. Mclennan *et al.*³² report in their sample that young people have easy access to FA. Sapori *et al.*²⁷ outline that the chances of a homicide being perpetrated by FA in Belo Horizonte are 3.5 times higher than those perpetrated by other means.

Chart 4. Summary of Results.

Authors and year of publication	Objectives	Methods	Year and location of fieldwork	Results
Search 1				
Szwarcwald and Castilho ¹⁸ 1998	Characterize the temporal evolution of mortality due to FA.	Temporal and spatial analysis of FA deaths. Data: SIM/MS.	ERJ 1979/1992	The mortality rate from external causes rose from 96 to 125/100,000, driven by PFA, attributed to the international smuggling of FA, an increase in crime, the expansion of the IDT and the growing number of armed individuals seeking “protection”.
Kodato and Silva ²⁸ 2000	Investigate factors associated with homicides committed against adolescents.	Data from court cases on homicides/ MP; participant observation and interviews with adolescents imprisoned for homicide.	RP/SP Court cases 1995/1998 Quali work did not inform the year of collection.	Main factors: institutional fragility, financial needs, drug trafficking, violent conflict resolution.
Lima <i>et al.</i> ²² 2005	Investigate the association between socio-economic variables and homicide rates.	Spatial analysis of homicides in the male population. Data: SIM/MS.	PE 1995/1998	The process of producing and selling marijuana in PE has helped to increase the average income of the population, but has also led to an increase in violence.
Sant’Anna <i>et al.</i> ²³ 2005	Characterize situations of vulnerability to homicide.	Family reports and case series study of homicide victims (10/19 years of age). Data: SIM/MS.	POA 1997	Young people in situations of social vulnerability, school dropouts, low <i>per capita</i> income and parental schooling. Predominance of deaths among men. Criminal record, mainly for assault and IDT and habit of using FA.
Barata <i>et al.</i> ²⁰ 2008	Identify patterns of homicide according to strata of living conditions.	Conglomerate analysis by random sample of homicides. Data: death certificates (SEADE), police reports and homicide investigations.	SP 1998	Stratum A: association with robberies. Strata B, C and D: association with IDT and other illegal activities. Stratum E: association with fights and disagreements. There is a growing proportional increase in black and young victims as one moves from stratum A to stratum E. As for the reasons: 37.3% unknown, 21% drug trafficking/ consumption, 19.6% fights and other futile reasons, 12.1% robberies followed by death
McLennan <i>et al.</i> ³² 2008	Describe experiences with IDT of young offenders and identify adverse experiences. Febem/SP.	325 interviews with young people (12/17 years of age).	SP 2004	Substance abuse, school dropouts, <i>gang</i> involvement, witnessing violence, easy access to FA, drugs and alcohol were significantly related to IDT involvement.
Vieira ³³ 2011	Analyze situations of violence in three institutions for adolescents.	Ethnography and interviews with 16 adolescents (13/18 years of age) under a socio-educational measure.	SC Year of collection not informed.	Identify stories about life in drug trafficking, constant risk and the relationship with death.

it continues

Illegality and violence

The illegality of IDT^{26,27} is pointed out as a factor that encourages the growth of a specific

and violent culture of conflict resolution. Illegality does not prevent the the market from developing, but it does make it develop in an illicit and criminal manner, and the presence of

Chart 4. Summary of Results.

Authors and year of publication	Objectives	Methods	Year and location of fieldwork	Results
Andrade <i>et al.</i> ¹⁹ 2011	Identify mortality characteristics.	Ecological, cross-sectional study of homicide mortality rates and legal interventions in young men (15/29 years of age). Data: SIM/MS	PR 2002-2004	The mortality coefficient in PR was 94.8/100,000. The percentage of use of FA in municipalities with more than 150,000 ha is 85%. The IDT is an important factor in the internalization of homicides, especially on the border with Paraguay and in cities on the fringes of the highways linking the borders to the southeast.
Marinho and Andrade ³⁷ 2011	Analyze the homicide rate.	Exploratory research on homicide time series, in dialog with the literature. Data: SIM/MS.	RMBH 1998/2007	IDT, especially crack, is a relevant element in the study of homicides.
Sapori <i>et al.</i> ²⁷ 2012	Analyze the relationship between homicides and IDT.	Sample of 673 homicide investigations and 19 interviews with drug dealers.	BH 1993/2006	18.5% of homicides were related to drug trafficking conflicts, with an increase in this percentage - 1993 to 1996: 8.3%. 1997 a 2004: 19.2%. 2005 to 2006: 33.3%. The arrival of crack was decisive in the increase in homicides.
Malvasi ³⁶ 2013	Examine the influence of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) faction in the management of violence in IDT.	Ethnography in two periphery neighborhoods.	SP 2009/2011	The spread of the PCC as the guiding power of crime led to a reduction in homicide rates in the 2000s.
Zaluar and Barcellos ²⁴ 2013	Discuss homicide rates considering armed conflicts (AC) over the control of favelas.	Victimization research carried out in Rio de Janeiro and in the city's favelas, survey, ethnography and ecological analysis of homicide distribution. Data: SIM/MS	RJ Victimization research in RJ (2005/2006) and in the favelas (2007), survey (2010), ethnography (date not informed) and ecological analysis of the distribution of homicides (2006/2009).	The AC areas are in strategic locations for obtaining and distributing FA and drugs. The ACs take place in IDT territories, inhabited mainly by the black and poor population. Emphasis is given to the absence of preventive policing and the violent and corrupt actions of the police in the favelas.
Barcellos and Zaluar ²⁵ 2014	Assess the risk of homicide in favelas considering territorial disputes.	Ethnography and spatial analysis of homicides. Data: SIM/MS and ISP/RJ.	RJ 2006/2009	Within the favelas, drug dealers offer "protection" to the population, but the presence of armed drug trafficking in strategic areas of the city increases the homicide mortality rates around the favelas. Approximately 1/3 of the homicides took place in areas close to the territories of drug retail groups, above all in conflict zones between rival armed territories. Emphasis is given to the role of FAs in the socialization of young people and the corrupt logistics that supply FA to criminal groups.

it continues

Chart 4. Summary of Results.

Authors and year of publication	Objectives	Methods	Year and location of fieldwork	Results
Zilli ³¹ 2015	Understand practices of violence among delinquent groups in favelas.	40 interviews with young members of armed groups serving sentences for criminal acts.	RMBH 2010/2011	The sociability and identity processes of these groups are based on the instrumental and symbolic use of violence, with an emphasis on the use of FA. Punishments for violations of IDT are marked by homicide. Emphasis is given to the absence of the police and the “security” provided by drug dealers in the favela.
Auger <i>et al.</i> ²¹ 2016	Investigate life expectancy in Brazil and compare with Canada.	Estimates based on data on deaths, births and population. Data: SIM/MS and Statistics Canada.	BR and Canada 2010	In 2010, men had a life expectancy of 71.63 years of age (BR) and 79.86 years of age (Canada). FAH was the main cause of decreased life expectancy among men in Brazil, accounting for 72% of homicides. Homicide rates in the favelas are high and exacerbated by the conditions that encompass violence, such as income inequality, drug trafficking, FA smuggling and organized crime.
Freitas <i>et al.</i> ²⁹ 2017	Identify the clinical and epidemiological profile of young FAH victims admitted to a referral hospital.	Interviews with 231 young people (12/24 years of age).	NE 2014	Main causes of aggression: Disagreements (25%), unknown reason (16%), settling scores with drug dealers (14%), “stray bullet” (14%), robbery (11%), offenses (10%). 69% directly involved in the practice of AV. Emphasis is given to conflicts related to drug trafficking and the police.
Benício <i>et al.</i> ³⁰ 2018	Analyze juvenile homicides.	Intervention research, interviews and focus groups. 97 young people. 54 professionals.	FOR 2015	The growth of drug trafficking, militarized security policies, the naturalization of the death of racialized bodies and the socio-institutional helplessness of young people in the peripheries have changed the dynamics of violence.
Search 2				
Silva <i>et al.</i> ²⁶ 2013	Understand homicides in two municipalities with opposite behavior between 1980/2007: PA/PE and JS/SC	12 interviews with managers, guardianship counselors, police officers, community leaders; 12 focus groups with health professionals, young people, teachers, students, family members of young people. Calculation of homicide rates. Data: SIM/MS.	PA/PE and JS/SC 2010	In both municipalities, drug use and IDT were identified as the main causes of homicide. The illegality of the product, the repressive security policy, the illegal possession and trafficking of FA create a fertile scenario for homicides. In PA/PE, these effects are aggravated by the territorial disputes between rival groups of drug dealers.

it continues

FA is essential to protect the lucrative criminal business^{27,36}, both from other ACG interested in its profits and from the police, who will crack down on illicit acts^{24,35}, which makes residents

of territories controlled by IDT especially vulnerable to AV.

It should be noted that, in these territories, the exercise of power is based on an extra-legal

Chart 4. Summary of Results.

Authors and year of publication	Objectives	Methods	Year and location of fieldwork	Results
Ursin ³⁵ 2014	Investigate crack consumption in scenes of use.	A longitudinal study carried out over 4 years, with three different fieldwork periods. Participant observation and interviews with 11 young men (18/28 years of age) living on the streets.	SSA Years of collection not informed.	The article problematizes the relationship between crack use, street crime, homicides and FA, with an emphasis on the repression of crack users.
Barros <i>et al.</i> ³⁴ 2018	Analyze the drug trafficking “pacification” pact.	Research-intervention, interviews, focus groups with young men (15/29 years of age) and professionals.	FOR 2015/2016	Under the rhetoric of “peace”, the logic of war has been perpetuated by other means, expanding the management of IDT and FA, affecting above all youth segments whose lives are considered “disposable”.

Source: Authors.

and violent logic of conflict resolution^{27,28,30,32-35} that makes AV banal³⁵. This is related both to territorial disputes for IDT^{18,24,27,35}, and to relationships of abuse of power within territories of ACG control, in relation to settling debts related to the sale or consumption of drugs³⁵ and controlling robberies and other crimes within these places^{27,34,36}. It should be noted that committing property crimes in these places increases the risk of suffering homicidal violence^{34,35}. In Santa Catarina, Vieira³³ draws attention to adolescents accounts of the banality of death in drug trafficking.

Sapori *et al.*²⁷ point out that the despotic practices of violence in Belo Horizonte are not limited to IDT issues, but are often incorporated as commonplace in these localities, causing simple misunderstandings to be settled using extreme solutions, leading to the banalization of homicides. Kodato and Silva²⁸ talk about the phenomenon of adolescents killed by ACG by mistake, mistaken for someone else.

State action

The lack of effective preventive public security in peripheral territories is mentioned in SSA³⁵, RJ²⁴, PA-PE²⁶ and FOR^{30,34} as an important factor that enables IDT. On the other hand, these places are marked by violent police action, as a result of the increased militarization and ostentatious policing required by the War on Drugs, to the detriment of actions to integrate security forces and intelligence³⁰. As Benicio³⁰ points out, the violence is trivialized as accept-

able to settle conflicts and is publicly demanded as a security policy, being referred to as one of the factors for the production of AV and intensification of homicides in the periphery of FOR, both of young people, especially blacks, and also of police officers, which Zaluar and Barcellos²⁴ also reports in RJ.

In this sense, emphasis is given to the criminalization of peripheral, poor and black youth, socially identified as the “internal enemy” and a killable body^{24,30,34}. The stigmatization of the territory as a violent place, controlled by drug dealers, criminalizes the entire local youth population, which becomes the target of arbitrary police actions without distinction. This process, together with ostentatious police violence and the lack of preventive policing in the peripheries, causes distrust and a loss of legitimacy for the police in these places, favoring the violent territorial control of ACG^{26,30,34}. Zaluar and Barcellos²⁴ points out that the image of the PM-RJ as violent and corrupt reached over 70% among young people and 92% among young people aged 15 to 19.

Another point that stands out is the inefficiency of the state in attributing responsibility for homicides in the peripheries^{28,30,34} or among the homeless population³⁵, which are trivialized as IDT settling accounts, or even “social hygiene”²⁸, not deserving the attention of the public authorities, thus contributing to the banality of this phenomenon.

Growing insecurity and distrust of the police institution are cited as the motto for the ex-

pansion of private forms of security. These have given rise to other ACG that use AV, known as “militias”, in RJ²⁴ and FOR³⁴, and extermination groups in PA-PE²⁶, in many cases involving members of state forces^{24,26}.

Another aspect is the corruption of law enforcement agents^{24-26,35}, who, through active participation, complicity and impunity, ensure the presence of FA and the continuity of IDT. These illicit activities, practiced by state agents, increase mistrust and the feeling of insecurity among the population²⁶ and reinforce IDT³⁵.

Armed territorial control

This violence is not equally distributed throughout the cities, but is located in certain peripheral areas, configured as territories controlled by ACG that operate in IDT in BH^{27,37}, PE²², SSA³⁵ and RJ^{24,25}, which increases the risk of territorial disputes between rival ACG^{26,31}. Territorial control implies that, in these places, the power of force is exercised by groups different from the state, which will be retaliated against with violent repression by the state.

Zaluar and Barcellos²⁴ point out that the rivalry between ACG that sell drugs in RJ has given rise to an arms race. This has been going on for decades and is expressed in the map presented by the authors of the ACG spatial distribution in Rio de Janeiro between 2005 and 2010, especially in territories inhabited by the black population.

The authors show that areas located close to major traffic routes, ports, airports and Armed Forces weapons depots are those with the highest concentrations of FAH, resulting from armed conflicts for local control – above all between IDT groups, but also with the police and militias²⁵ – as they offer better logistics for obtaining and distributing FA and drugs.

This territorial dispute is also reported in PA-PE²⁶, FOR^{30,34}, SSA³⁵ and BH³¹, highlighting the fragmented nature of rival criminal groups in the capital of Minas Gerais, which increases the potential for violent conflicts, whether of a personal, territorial or criminal nature.

An important aspect is the violation of the right to come and go of the residents of these places, who often lose their lives for crossing territorial boundaries or even by simply living in a certain locality and being identified in some way with a rival faction despite not even being involved with IDT^{24,27,30,34}. This situation also prevents them from attending leisure spaces and social facilities such as schools and health

centers³⁴, in addition to being evicted from their homes and communities, increasing the number of homeless people in FOR³⁰.

A noteworthy aspect is the management of violence by groups linked to IDT, showing the strength of these groups and a process that is autonomous from state public security. In São Paulo, although territorial control and the use of FA are reported, this violent dispute between rival groups and also with the police has not been verified, which has been attributed to PCC's control and its guideline to reduce homicidal violence and ensure fewer risks for economic activity during the first decade of the 21st century³⁶.

In FOR, this management was also referred to through the phenomenon described as “pacification”, a local agreement between ACG that took place between 2015 and mid-2016, characterized by the prohibition of the cycle of revenge and homicide practices^{30,34}. This process reduced violence between ACG, increased conflicts with the police and also exacerbated the violent power of each group in their territories, showing the arbitrariness of “pacification” and, moreover, the need to spectacularize the imposition of order by force³⁴. The significant decrease in homicides during this period shows the seriousness of the phenomenon of rivalry between ACG in the peripheries of FOR and points to the difficulty the state has in exercising control of force in these places, ensuring non-violent forms of mediation³⁴.

Young black men: main victims and perpetrators

The key aspect is that this violence mainly affects young^{18,19,21,25,29,37} and black men^{20,23,24,28-32,34}. Zilli³¹ observes that perpetrators and victims of homicide have the same sociodemographic profile (young, black, poor and with little formal education), live in the same neighborhood (favelas and periphery neighborhoods) and kill and die as a result of violent conflicts in their own territories. Kodato and Silva²⁸ and Saporì *et al.*²⁷ point out that adolescents are placed on the front line of drug trafficking, being used as killers and assuming responsibility for the crimes. Kodato and Silva²⁸ and Sant'anna *et al.*²³ highlight a victimization cycle of young people: involvement in offences, apprehensions by the police, stints in institutions, involvement in drug trafficking, use and carrying of heavy weapons, killing and death.

Impacts on health

With regard to the impact on health, Freitas *et al.*²⁹ show that young people injured by PAF are often admitted to hospital at a referral hospital in the Northeast, with frequent disabilities and functional limitations. The presence of drug trafficking in the peripheries, as a job market for vulnerable young people, is highlighted by several authors^{19,23,26,27,36}, often related to conflicts with FA that victimize these young people^{29,33}. Auger *et al.*²¹ also highlight the magnitude of injuries and disabilities by PAF, which are related to economic and social losses for the country.

Discussion

Goldstein³⁸ highlights that one of the possible relationships between the issue of drugs and violence concerns aggressive patterns of interaction in the system of distribution and use of illicit substances. The fact that it operates outside the law and the dispute over profits means that extreme measures of violence, especially FAH, are commonplace in regulating this market, giving rise to what he called systemic violence. However, as Garzón-Vergara³⁹ points out, the existence of IDT does not necessarily translate into high levels of lethal violence, but this relationship is strengthened by two main aspects: the access to FA and the weakness of the state's legitimate authority, both highlighted in this review.

It should be emphasized that the most damaging consequences of this relationship disproportionately affect a very specific group, made up of peripheral and poor populations, especially young black people with low levels of education. The drug market in BR is strengthened by the structural precariousness of means of subsistence and functions as an important place of work and social insertion for the black and vulnerable youth^{19,23,26,27,29,33,36}. This market's relationship with the FA incites a systemic violence that seems to be concentrated at the bottom of the IDT chain of command.

For Wacquant¹⁵, the spread of FA and the development of a structured drug economy, linked to international trafficking, represent the growth of predatory economies that absorb those excluded from the formal economy. They are responding to the social insecurity generated by neoliberal economic policies, which since the 1980s have been reducing wage labor and collective protections. This process is exacerbated in countries similar to BR, where the marked

social and economic inequalities and the incipient democratic tradition, combined with the FA market, strengthen criminal violence.

Valencia⁴⁰ proposes the term *gore* capitalism to refer to explicit and unjustified violence, often related to organized crime, which is constituted as a tool of necro-empowerment – processes of transforming contexts of vulnerability into possibilities of self-empowerment – which are born from perverse practices based on violence. This process, however, is part of an economic structure that sustains it and is therefore a hidden result of neoliberal globalization processes, taking on a central role on the borders of the hegemonic capitalist economy. Thus, the author points out that this violence is not limited to the individuals who commit it, but is linked to a social structure that makes life precarious for a large part of the world's population, especially in the global south.

Mbembe⁴¹, through the concept of necropolitics, seeks to circumscribe experiences of material destruction of bodies and populations, as ways of operationalizing political space through violence, in historical contexts marked by colonialism and racism. In these contexts, the exercise of the right to kill, although also exercised by the state, is no longer its monopoly; other means to exercise power coexist, such as *de facto* legal bodies that hold the right to exercise violence. The author draws attention to the demarcation of transnational capital movements, which concentrate activities related to the extraction of valuable resources, and which become spaces of war and death. This operation, marked by technologies of destruction and put into practice by ACG that control territories and act behind the state, is also characteristic of IDT.

As Garzón-Vergara³⁹ points out, in the case of IDT, this violence is related to disputes between groups, turf wars and the use of force to impose an informal order on communities. However, to make matters more complex, this territorial control can also reduce the incidence of homicides when there is regulation of violence in these places or some kind of agreement between rival groups, a fact that has also been documented in Brazilian literature^{30,34,36}.

Another aspect of this process concerns the role of the state: both the inability to establish a legitimate monopoly on the use of force and the relative rates of impunity for violent crimes allow IDT freedom to act³⁹. In this sense, the War on Drugs in Latin America, its focus on military and police operations, are factors that end up driving violence.

Wacquant¹⁵ points out to the intensification of police and judicial intervention in street crime, which aims to remedy the economic and social “less state” with the police and penitentiary “more state”, relegating the issue of security to the criminal dimension. In the case of BR, this author highlights the trivialized use of lethal violence by the police, which delegitimizes the role of public security among the popular classes, mostly black, who are the target of these brutal operations.

Zaluar⁴² also draws attention to the inefficiency of repressive action, focused on small traders from the lower classes and not on the big drug dealers and money launderers. The ineffectiveness of preventive public security in favela and peripheral areas, the corruptive capacity of drug trafficking and the violent actions of the police thus lead to a lack of credibility for this institution⁴². However, the way to reduce homicides lies in the legitimacy of the state in guaranteeing fundamental rights and not in relying on violent repression, which historically has not been able to influence the behavior of criminal organizations in LA³⁹.

The process of prohibition, criminalization and demonization that surrounds the issue of drugs contributes to the growth of a dark market that develops into a predatory and violent economy. On the other hand, this process contributes to the strengthening of a stigmatized image, especially of those who work at IDT who, as Reis and Guareschi⁴³ point out, occupy the role of “internal enemy”, which socially legitimizes the arbitrariness against their bodies. However, this stigma often falls on entire populations inhabiting these territories, especially young black men, who end up being the target of criminal suspicion and/or violent acts by the state. Thus, while the participation of young

people in violent acts mobilizes public opinion and feeds punitivism, the victimization of these same young people and their vulnerability to this cycle of violence occupy a secondary place in the public debate³¹.

Final considerations

This review shows a worrying and persistent scenario of the relationship between AV and IDT in Brazil, which prioritizes the issue of drugs as a crime, to the detriment of a public health perspective, reiterating a model of drug policy based on the exclusion of those involved in IDT. This encourages the dark development of this market and makes its gears increasingly marginalized and marked by FA. In this process of emphasizing militarization, spirals of violence are incited, especially against the most underprivileged classes.

While we must avoid improper causal relationships, it is essential that the characteristics of this violent process be observed, which permeate the relationship between deprivation of livelihoods, institutional precariousness, predatory markets, FA, the intensity of violence, racism and the criminalization of poverty. Thus, the relationship between AV and IDT is linked to structural issues in a colonized and racist society, deepening its processes of inequality.

We urgently need to deconstruct this machine for destroying people, questioning the processes that engender this situation. There are no easy answers, but after decades of trying, we need to look at the harmful impacts and insufficient results of this militarized approach and develop a more rational way of dealing with these issues, above all from the perspective of human health and dignity.

Collaborations

MM Silva worked on the conception, conceptualization, data curation, research, methodology, analysis and writing. P Constantino worked on the conception, conceptualization, data curation, research, methodology, analysis and writing.

Acknowledgements

This work was carried out during the doctoral research internship of the author Mayalu Matos Silva, carried out at the Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra under the supervision of Doctor Bruno Sena Martins, with support from the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES).

References

- Wallenstein P, Sollenberg M. Armed Conflict, 1989-2000. *J Peace Res* 2001; 38(5):629-644.
- Sousa FX. A evolução do conceito de violência armada [Internet]. 2014 [acessado 2023 jun 10]. Disponível em: <https://repositorio.ual.pt/handle/11144/2877>.
- Moura T. *Novíssimas Guerras: Espaços, Identidades e Espirais da Violência Armada*. Coimbra: Almedina; 2010.
- Motta BL, Dutra GC. Violência Armada Organizada: um fenômeno que ameaça fronteiras estatais. *Oikos* 2010; 9(1):85-105.
- Dowdney L. *Crianças do Tráfico: Um estudo de caso de crianças em Violência Armada Organizada no Rio de Janeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Sete Letras; 2003.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). *Conflict and Fragility: Armed Violence Reduction-Enabling Development*. Paris: OECD Publishing. 2014.
- Silva MM, Ribeiro FML, Frossard VC, Souza RM, Schenker M, Minayo MC. "No meio do fogo cruzado": reflexões sobre os impactos da violência armada na Atenção Primária em Saúde no município do RJ. *Cien Saude Colet* 2021; 26(6):2109-2118.
- Ribeiro FML, Silva MM, Andrade CB, Oliveira CA, Barbosa I, Almeida BC, Santos MMSN. Impactos da Violência Armada na Saúde: estudo de caso em Manguinhos/RJ. In: Barros C, Santos L, Sardinha M, Vianna P, organizadores. *Artigos do Congresso Internacional Falando sobre Segurança Pública na Maré*. Rio de Janeiro: Redes da Maré; 2022. p. 87-96.
- Polet F. Narcotráfico: Ravages du narcotrafic, naufrage de la «guerre aux drogues». In: *La guerre aux drogues en question: points de vue du Sud*. Paris: Editions Syllepse, Louvain-la-Neuve, Centre Tricontinental; 2013.
- Del Omo R. *A face oculta da droga*. Rio de Janeiro: Revan; 1997.
- Fiore M. O lugar do Estado na questão das drogas: o paradigma proibicionista e as alternativas. *Novos Estudos Cebap* 2012; 92:9-21.
- Gomes-Medeiros D, Faria PH, Campos GW, Tófoli LF. Política de drogas e Saúde Coletiva: diálogos necessários. *Cad Saude Publica* 2019; 35(7):e00242618.
- Silva MM. *Controle de substâncias ilícitas e seus impactos em violência e saúde. Estudo de caso no Rio de Janeiro (Brasil) e Lisboa (Portugal)* [tese]. Rio de Janeiro: ENSP/Fiocruz; 2023.
- Daudelin J, Ratton JL. Mercados de drogas, guerra e paz no Recife. *Tempo Soc* 2017; 29(2):115-134.
- Wacquant L. *As prisões da Miséria*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar; 2011.
- Mendes KDS, Silveira RCCP, Galvão CM. Revisão integrativa: método de pesquisa para a incorporação de evidências na saúde e na enfermagem. *Texto Contexto Enferm* 2008; 17(4):758-764.
- Bardin L. *Análise de conteúdo*. Lisboa: Edições 70; 1977.
- Szwarcwald CL, Castilho EA. Mortality by firearms in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: a spatial analysis. *Rev Panam Salud Publica* 1998; 4(3):161-170.
- Andrade SM, Soares DA, Souza RKT, Matsuo T, Souza HD. Homicídios de homens de quinze a 29 anos e fatores relacionados no estado do Paraná, de 2002 a 2004. *Cien Saude Colet* 2011; 16(Supl. 1):1281-1288.
- Barata RB, Ribeiro MCSA, Sordi MD. Desigualdades sociais e homicídios na cidade de São Paulo, 1998. *Rev Bras Epidemiol* 2008; 11(1):3-13.
- Auger N, Le Serbon E, Rasella D, Aquino R, Barreto ML. Impact of homicide and traffic crashes on life expectancy in the largest Latin American country. *J Public Health* 2016; 38(3):467-473.
- Lima MLC, Ximenes RAA, Souza ER, Luna CF, Albuquerque MFPM. Análise espacial dos determinantes socioeconômicos dos homicídios no Estado de Pernambuco. *Rev Saude Publica* 2005; 39(2):176-182.
- Sant'Anna A, Aerts D, Lopes MJ. Homicídios entre adolescentes no Sul do Brasil: situações de vulnerabilidade segundo seus familiares. *Cad Saude Publica* 2005; 21(1):120-129.
- Zaluar A, Barcellos C. Mortes prematuras e conflito armado pelo domínio das favelas no Rio de Janeiro. *Rev Bras Cien Soc* 2013; 28(81):17-31.
- Barcellos C, Zaluar A. Homicídios e disputas territoriais nas favelas do Rio de Janeiro. *Rev Saude Publica* 2014; 48(1):94-102.
- Silva JG, Valadares FC, Souza ER. O desafio de compreender a consequência fatal da violência em dois municípios brasileiros. *Interface (Botucatu)* 2013; 17(46):535-547.
- Sapori LF, Sena LL, Silva BFA. Mercado do crack e violência urbana na cidade de Belo Horizonte. *Dilemas* 2012; 5(1):37-66.
- Kodato S, Silva APS. Homicídios de adolescentes: refletindo sobre alguns fatores associados. *Psicol Reflex Crítica* 2000; 13(3):505-515.
- Freitas NA, Silva AVS, Brasil AC, Bastos VPD, Fernandes LCBC. Perfil clínico-epidemiológico de adolescentes e jovens vítimas de ferimento por arma de fogo. *Cad Saude Colet* 2017; 25(4):429-435.
- Benício LF, Rodrigues JS, Leonardo C, Barros JPP, Silva DB, Costa AF. Necropolítica e Pesquisa-Intervenção sobre Homicídios de Adolescentes e Jovens em Fortaleza, CE. *Psicol Cien Prof* 2018; 38(n. esp. 2):192-207.
- Zilli LF. O "mundo do crime" e a "lei da favela": aspectos simbólicos da violência de gangues na região metropolitana de Belo Horizonte. *Etnografica* 2015; 19(3):463-487.
- McLennan JD, Bordin I, Bennett K, Rigato F, Brinkerhoff M. Trafficking among youth in conflict with the law in Sao Paulo, Brazil. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiol* 2008; 43(10):816-823.
- Vieira D. Histórias sobre homicídios entre jovens: "Mundo do crime" e comensurabilidade. *Dilemas* 2011; 4(2):281-308.
- Barros JPP, Paiva LFS, Rodrigues JS, Silva DB, Leonardo CS. "Pacificação" nas periferias: discursos sobre as violências e o cotidiano de juventudes em Fortaleza. *Rev Psicol* 2018; 9(1):117-128.
- Ursin M. "Crack Ends it all?" A Study of the Interrelations between Crack Cocaine, Social Environments, Social Relations, Crime, and Homicide among Poor, Young Men in Urban Brazil. *Contemp Drug Problems* 2014; 41(2):171-199.
- Malvasi PA. The "mind" and homicide: Violence management in drug trafficking in São Paulo. *Dilemas* 2013; 6(4):675-698.

37. Marinho MAC, Andrade LT. O sobe e desce das taxas de homicídios na Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte: Armas de fogo, drogas e políticas de segurança pública. *Dilemas* 2011; 4(2):229-259.
38. Goldstein PJ. "The Drugs/Violence Nexus: A Tripartite Conceptual Framework". *J Drug Issues* 1985; 14(15):493-503.
39. Garzón-Vergara JC. Qual é a relação entre o crime organizado e os homicídios na América Latina? [Internet]. Instituto Igarapé; 2016 [acessado 2022 ago 19]. Disponível em: https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Homicide-Dispatch_3_PT_07-07.pdf.
40. Valencia S. *Capitalismo Gore*. Espanha: Melusina; 2010.
41. Mbembe A. *Necropolítica*. São Paulo: N.1; 2018.
42. Zaluar A. Democratização inacabada: fracasso da segurança pública. *Estud Av* 2007; 21(61):31-49.
43. Reis C, Guareschi NMF. Produção de morte como prática de governo: discursos sobre segurança pública. *Rev Polis Psique* 2014; 3(3):58.

Article submitted 27/09/2023

Approved 03/04/2024

Final version submitted 05/04/2024

Chief editors: Maria Cecília de Souza Minayo, Romeu Gomes, Antônio Augusto Moura da Silva