

The prevention of violence in interdisciplinary programs implemented in Brazilian and Portuguese schools

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Abstract *This paper aims to understand how and to what extent interdisciplinary teams supporting public schools in the Brazilian and Portuguese context characterize and develop violence prevention actions. The research was carried out from an exploratory study through interviews with 24 professionals and later, a thematic analysis was done. The results indicate that prevention is always pointed out as a possibility in the Portuguese Program; in the Brazilian program, in addition to prevention-oriented discourses, limits regarding the realization of preventive activities in schools are also mentioned. In the locations investigated, flagged prevention actions are shown incipiently when compared to actions advocated by the WHO and the Pan American Health Organization. It is argued that a more strategic vision of the Ministry of Education and the Education Secretariats could contribute to avoid the sole accountability of schools concerning prevention of violence and thus enhance the decline of this phenomenon and favor its effects in the long term.*

Key words *School, Prevention, Violence, Program*

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Introduction

Annually, more than 1.3 million deaths are recorded as a result of violence worldwide, which corresponds to 2.5% of global mortality¹. This issue has been recognized internationally and has been the subject of several resolutions of the United Nations¹, a fact that has favored the understanding of the magnitude and complexity of the phenomenon, and especially contributing to the development of coping and prevention strategies in this field.

The various characterizations and definitions of violence derive from diverse social patterns and distinct forms of expression. Each society clarifies what it considers violent from its values, laws, standards, religion, tradition, history, among other factors². In order to consolidate a definition at the international level, the World Health Organization defines violence as the “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation”³.

Regarding violence prevention, the Pan American Health Organization points out that this can be understood as curbing the frequency of new cases, reducing or eliminating fundamental causes and risk factors, as well as lower risk exposure from direct and indirect effects of public policies and programs⁴. Violence prevention strategies have been investigated and implemented in different countries according to the assumptions established by the World Health Organization. Many of these strategies are based on the use of the ecological model as an essential tool in the identification of risk and protection factors^{3,5}.

The area of health excels in the conceptualization and dissemination of interventions in the field of violence prevention, with studies and scientific research in several countries⁶⁻¹⁰, as well as investigations directed to the planning and evaluation of strategies of prevention and coping with this phenomenon^{1,3,11}. However, it is worth pointing out that prevention is still considered a scarce object of both scientific investigations and political interventions^{12,13}.

In the international scenario, we can highlight two major recent scientific publications in the area of violence prevention in public health: Report of the Pan American Health Organization Report –*Prevención de la violencia: la evidencia*

(2013) and the World Health Organization Report—*Global status report on violence prevention* (2014). Both reports point to violence as a challenge to be faced by all countries, signaling that public health research and experiences show that it is possible to prevent violence and reduce its effects^{1,4}.

One of the recommendations for prevention actions at the local, national and international levels is the integration of actions between social and educational policies¹. The integration between policies and their transdisciplinary interfaces are an important initiative in this field¹, which may unfold fruitfully in the daily life of school units, mainly because school is recognized by health as a privileged violence prevention setting. This recognition seems to build on the fact that schools open their doors every day, to the same public and with the same professionals, enhancing the achievement of preventive, health- and citizenship-promoting practices¹⁴.

In the field of education, international scientific investigations also indicate that violence prevention actions in schools are relevant and necessary, although in some countries and regions these practices are weak and must incorporate more planning, systematization, and evaluation. When it comes to approaching the levels of violence prevention established in health with violence prevention levels commonly used in the educational context, it is worth highlighting the concepts of “specific prevention” and “non-specific prevention” of violence. According to Simões et al.¹⁵, specific prevention is characterized by education and training actions or programs aimed at preventing violence and its associated issues. In general, they are actions that seek to detect the problem and prevent its progression. In preventive strategies of a non-specific nature, violence is considered one of the themes in health promotion, and the actions involve institutional and macro-social issues. In general, specific actions can be viewed as a continuation of nonspecific preventions¹⁵.

The more systematic and widespread violence prevention activities in schools are located in the North American context^{16,17}. These practices are usually characterized by objective and quantitative methods, using inventories, systematic observations and experimental designs¹⁸. In European countries, prevention actions in schools aim for early interventions to reduce the impact of incidents and reduce the risk of new violent episodes. The evaluation of activities also appears as an essential tool for the continuity and

improvement of prevention strategies¹⁹. In Portugal, for example, data from the Ministry of Education point out that the fundamental elements to prevent and regulate violent situations are the negotiation and collective production of school standards and rules; by the involvement of levels of management in the functioning of the school and the construction of a school culture shared by all the stakeholders of the school community^{20,21}.

In Brazilian scientific investigations, proposals to prevent violence in schools can be found in actions and interventions involving students and other members of the school community, such as actions focused on youth leadership, e.g. conflict resolution; democratic relationships in school, such as student participation in the student body; the opening of schools on weekends and the presence of security professionals conducting systematic rounds at schools¹⁶. It is also possible to signal an intersectoral policy on Health and Education, called the School Health Program (PSE), as an important integration and articulation in the development of several actions promoting health and citizenship in Brazilian public schools¹⁴.

This paper investigates how interdisciplinary teams of support to public schools in the Brazilian and Portuguese contexts characterize and develop practices for the prevention of violence. These countries were selected due to programs established in educational policies, in the municipal sphere, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and nationally, in Portugal. Although these teams are not specific programs for the prevention of violence in schools per se, but intervention teams in situations of school dropout and failure, analyzing violence prevention practices they carry out may be interesting to understand the characterization of the phenomenon and limitations and possibilities of prevention in the two contexts investigated.

Methods

In this study, discourses on the ways of characterizing violence and prevention mechanisms are pointed out by professionals who work in two interdisciplinary school programs in Brazil and Portugal.

The Interdisciplinary School Support Program (PROINAPE) is located in the city of Rio de Janeiro. It is a municipal public policy established in 2007 and currently has approximately 180 pro-

fessionals working primarily in schools located in areas of socioeconomic vulnerability. The technicians were approved by public examination, and the teams are external to school units, in general, and develop projects and sporadic assistance to one or more schools for a minimum period of one semester.

The Priority Intervention Educational Territory (TEIP) has become a national education policy in Portugal since 1996. It is in its third generation and is located in schools in rural and socially vulnerable areas. It has approximately 467 technicians, hired temporarily in each school year and allocated to school units throughout the year.

Both programs are staffed with interdisciplinary support teams to schools consisting of psychologists, social workers, and teachers, whose work objective is to intervene in issues related to school dropout and failure, and in parallel, to the concern about situations of violence and their prevention.

A qualitative study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, with a previously defined roadmap including school violence characterization issues and violence prevention actions. Interviews took place in the second half of 2015 and the first half of 2016. They were held individually at a previously agreed place and time. The selection of the respondents occurred after the mapping of the programs in the two countries, based on the bibliographical and documentary analysis.

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 16 professionals were interviewed. Participants were selected from the indication of the Program's management and the time availability to participate in the research. In Portugal, the study was carried out with seven professionals working in the cities of Coimbra, Lisbon, and Porto, selected from the indication of the school unit director and time availability to participate in the research.

A thematic analysis was performed²², following the pre-analysis steps; analysis of meanings; elaboration of themes and final review. The expressed and latent meanings in the interviews came to light from the distinction of the programs as two bodies of analysis, from the meaning cores observed in statements. From this moment on, it was possible to elaborate thematic texts in order to synthesize the comments about the object of study in the following categories: 1) Characterization of violence; 2) Deadlock in the prevention of school violence (only found in statements of Brazilian professionals); 3) Preven-

tion as a work commitment; and 4) School violence prevention actions.

This study was authorized by the Ethics Committee of the Fernandes Figueira Institute (IFF/Fiocruz) in Rio de Janeiro (RJ) the Covenants and Research Committee of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro and the school directors investigated in Portugal. Clarification was provided to participants on ethical issues through the Informed Consent Form.

Results

The following are the discourses about the types of violence and the possibilities of prevention pointed out by the professionals who work in the two programs studied.

PROINAPE, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Concerning the characterization of violence, we can point out that the professionals mention concepts of interpersonal, symbolic and state violence. When they signal interpersonal violence, they characterize it verbally and physically between peers, from students vis-à-vis teachers, and from teachers vis-à-vis students: *In my work, I have already witnessed a lot of violence between teachers and students. And we have violence among students, where they do not respect each other, and swear words are frequent* (RJ, PROINAPE, psychologist).

Symbolic and state violence has characterized the ongoing violence, primarily due to school units' operating norms that contribute to inciting dysfunctional and aggressive ways of relating.

Two divergent perspectives were observed among the statements on the possibilities of violence prevention in school settings. Some professionals claim that prevention actions cannot be implemented, while others point to prevention as a work commitment.

Some technicians highlight a deadlock in the prevention of school violence. It was common to hear that they did not recognize prevention as a possibility for the teams, denoting discomfort when called upon to answer on that question. This malaise was felt throughout the program's management and professionals working in the daily school routine:

I find it difficult to talk about prevention. I prefer to speak about ethical commitment, individual and entity subjectivity, and to this end, I think this is preventive. I cannot think of prevention. It

is possible to think about coexistence and ethics in relationships. Before thinking about prevention. I do not have to act to prevent. My job is to build subjectivity (RJ, PROINAPE, MANAGEMENT).

We could notice that some professionals point out that it is difficult to think of violence prevention in schools for two reasons: 1) Violence is not a problem of the school itself: *it is not entirely the responsibility of the school, I think it is something that comes from home [...] I think it is rather a family and social issue than of the school itself* (RJ, PROINAPE, Psychologist); and 2) prevention of violence is not the working premise but rather the best management of situations: *the work's objective is not to eliminate violence, it is a bit managing to work despite some violence that happens in schools, getting children to stay in the school and learn. Our work does not eliminate but contributes to better management in certain situations* (RJ, PROINAPE, Area coordinator).

The professionals who report prevention as a work commitment point the possibility of making school a democratic and dialogical space and signal prevention strategies conceiving schools as an essential relational space of coexistence and conflicts.

Some violence prevention actions were reported by some Brazilian respondents, such as: workshops with students, teachers and pedagogical coordinators with topics related to domestic violence, dropout, excessive transfer of students, among others; network articulation with schools from different regions and with other equipment of the territory, in order to enhance the expanded view of situations, the planning and sharing of integrated actions. They also point to nonspecific possibilities of prevention, such as changing school curricula with the inclusion of hours to discuss topics such as racism, homophobia and human rights, and reviewing the teacher's academic background, with the inclusion of contents that facilitate the recognition of schools and its students as historically built partners.

When professionals, in general, address workshops with students and teachers, they indicate that dialogue is a powerful way of working violence. Statements also point out that workshops are opportunities to discuss issues that students and teachers may not have opened up to elsewhere.

The most worked themes and used as reflection triggers with students and teachers are racism, gender relations, homophobia and domestic violence. Some teams' work with students develops into discussions from poetry and poems that

address racial discrimination and prejudice. Conversation wheels with the pedagogical coordination of schools also stand out in the discourse of some teams as a way of dealing with violence in school, issues of indiscipline, violent acts and the repeated transfer of the same students.

An articulator who works with teams from different schools critically pointed out that PROINAPE's intervention itself could unfold violently on the population and that the actions of coping with everyday situations in schools could be addressed differently:

For certain situations to be confronted less violently, we must also reduce the intensity inherent in our intervention, which is also somewhat violent [...] we reproduce this school violence with families and students (RJ, PROINAPE, Area coordinator).

The articulation with the existing services network in the territory and with the sectors of Education was also signaled as a practice that facilitates the prevention of school violence by some professionals insofar as it allows joint discussion of cases and planning and integration of actions. They also recognize that the network articulation in Education is weak because Education seeks the network only for specific issues and does not discuss its place in the network of protection of children and adolescents. The PROINAPE teams that operate in the articulation of the intra- and intersectoral network report that they promote meetings with different actors that traverse the school operation and the local network.

The fact that Brazilian professionals are part of extracurricular teams, that is, they are part of the Secretariat of Education organizational chart but are geographically located outside the school's physical territory, may leverage greater deployment throughout the area and favor the articulation of intra- and intersectoral networks.

Non-specific forms of violence prevention have also arisen, such as the change in school curricula and teachers' academic training content. It is commented that schools do not provide for spaces in the curriculum to discuss or talk about violence. Revision of faculty's academic training methods is vital and conducive to violence prevention in schools.

TEIP – Coimbra, Lisbon and Porto, Portugal

Professionals, in general, recognize the violent episodes as residual and characterize them as acts of indiscipline and bullying. With professionals working in schools located in Lisbon,

there was a differentiated discourse about what is recognized as school violence, as opposed to statements of professionals from Porto and Coimbra. In Lisbon, the psychologist points out that *school violence is common here* [school], *the way of relating is aggressive, that for me is violence, even without intention [...] for some, it is seen as a playful act* (Lisbon, TEIP, Psychologist).

Prevention as work commitment emerges unanimously in the interviews of Portuguese technicians. All point to the perspective that it is possible to prevent school violence. It was common to hear that school is a privileged place for prevention and it is crucial to carry out actions with students. The importance of early efforts, such as the intervention occurring with first cycle students and of bringing parents to school and developing parental skills was also emphasized.

In general, the prevention resources reported by professionals traverse individual intervention commitments and resources and the interest in initially understanding the causes of violence for later intervention. The prevention discourse also reveals the desire for more significant presence of public security forces in schools, usually linked to the notion of prevention rather than punishment in school spaces. However, some professionals approach the perspective of accountability: *concerning public policies, I think parents should be held accountable in case of their child's violence against someone*. (Lisbon, TEIP, Psychologist).

In contrast, some professionals report that many types of violence cannot be contained, mentioning the family models of students and the affective and emotional difficulties manifested by them. There are also signs of disturbing cultural issues in Portuguese society:

There is a growing crisis regarding social and moral values, which has a significant adverse impact on the way people currently relate, particularly in adolescence, but also, which is very alarming, in the first cycle, where very high hetero-aggressive behaviors are already observed. (Lisbon, TEIP, Psychologist).

Regarding the school violence prevention actions carried out in schools, it was possible to hear that different activities are being performed, such as networking, school meetings, referral to psychotherapeutic care in health institutions and partnership through lectures with the Commission for the Protection of Children and Young People; the dissemination and compliance with internal rules in schools and the incentive to participate of extracurricular activities, such as music, arts and sports; interdisciplinary interventions of

the TEIP program were seen as preventive actions because they contribute with specific and substantiated technical training to intervene in psychosocial situations; and the continued and daily work with students through teachers, staff and administration that consists in the realization of projects, revitalizations and sensitization on violence.

Networking is characterized by intrasectoral and intersectoral actions, with the participation of different public schools, partner entities, such as the health network in the area, public security forces and close linkages with families.

One teacher considered the disclosure and enforcement of internal rules in schools as essential to prevent violence, as well as the importance of keeping students busy with extracurricular activities. The permanent daily actions of violence prevention for students carried out by teachers, employees, and management involve projects and revitalizations in the classes, work on cyberbullying and sensitization on violence. Some respondents indicate the TEIP program as a violence prevention activity since these professionals are inserted within the school establishments and evidence specific and substantiated technical training to intervene in psychosocial situations, carrying different training and specialized knowledge to implement prevention actions.

Discussion

It is necessary to characterize the manifestations of violence in society in general, and school violence, in particular, to understand the deadlocks and possibilities in the prevention of school violence in the two contexts investigated. This issue is related to what has been pointed out by WHO¹, where violence is established from the social, historical and cultural processes of each region. To investigate and intervene in this phenomenon, it becomes vital to understand the specificities of society that is responsible for its production^{23,24}.

It is worth considering the numbers related to the homicide rate to characterize violence in general, which is an essential indicator of the prevalence of violence in a society. In 2014, the homicide rate in Portugal was 1.2 murders per 100,000 inhabitants²⁵. In that same year, 29.1 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants²⁶ were recorded in Brazil. This gap signals that meanings assigned to violence, as well as events recognized and validated as violent, may differ.

School violence, in general, is characterized in both countries essentially as interpersonal of

a verbal and physical nature among students. In Brazil, it was possible to perceive a broadening in this perspective, including teachers as promoters of violence, as well as an expanded understanding of violence. In Portugal, some professionals report that school violence is residual. In fact, according to the literature, the perception of violence in Portuguese schools is classified as moderate in the different empirical contexts investigated; the Brazilian context has a more marked understanding, where a high and prominent incidence is noted concerning community-related violence²⁷⁻²⁹.

Concerning violence prevention actions, in the Portuguese program, all professionals show unanimity when reporting that they are committed to the prevention of violence within schools. Discourses also reveal that preventive ways build from the understanding and intervention, focused on the students themselves and their families. In a review article that points to another direction, Alves³⁰ points out the better organization of school functioning and the accomplishment of a differentiated pedagogical work by teachers as relevant practices in the prevention of violence in Portuguese schools. This view did not appear in the discourses of the Portuguese professionals investigated in this paper.

Although some Portuguese technicians engage in discourses against the existence of violence in schools, all professionals are favorable and are committed to prevention. It can be hypothesized that current compensatory education policies in European countries, including Portugal – aimed at populations living in regions of social vulnerability and curbing school inequalities through a differentiated treatment of specific groups – allow familiarization with the theme of prevention and favor the engagement in the development of preventive actions within education^{31,32}.

In Brazil, unlike Portugal, some professionals tend to question the possibility of carrying out the prevention of violence in the school environment, signaling deadlocks in the realization of preventive practices. These lines seem to dialogue with the concern to emphasize that the concept of violence is complicated and that prevention strategies must accompany such complexity, that is, the idea of violence and prevention actions must be understood under relational and coexistence-oriented lenses, not in an individual, decontextualized and superficial way. The lines seem to point out that it is difficult to distinguish the different manifestations of violence at school, insofar as there are symbolic and state violence,

and are concerned that there is a tendency within schools to reduce complex situations involving various forces, motives, and intentions to a single one-off understanding. However, it is possible to signal that the recognition of violence complexity and multidimensionality characteristics should not result in a fatalistic stance³³ that accepts the impossibility of carrying out actions to minimize the occurrence of violent events and their unfolding in school daily life³⁰.

On the other hand, professionals who report their ability to prevent violence in Brazilian schools underline the importance of dialogue as a way to relate and prevent dropout. Literature has shown that school dropout is one of the primary predictors of crime and violence³⁴.

Other reported actions refer to rethinking pedagogical and institutional practices and coordinating intra and intersectoral networks. The signaled practices also meet with what Valverde's³⁵ points out when this author indicates the relevance of prevention strategies in schools and joint and interdisciplinary work with different actors of the school community.

When professionals from both countries describe their prevention practices, they seem to indicate the concepts of "specific prevention" and "non-specific prevention," as pointed out by Simões et al.¹⁵ In Brazilian professionals, for example, when they report curriculum change and revision of academic contents in faculty training as prevention actions, these seem to traverse non-specific preventions. On the other hand, actions conducted directly with students and other school employees, pointed by professionals from both contexts, seem to dialogue with a specific prevention strategy.

It was also possible to perceive that violence prevention and intervention actions seem to be confounded in discourses. In fact, schools are established by different strategies of action on violence, among which are those focused on prevention and those focused on intervention²⁹. The prevention strategies aim to avert the emergence of situations of violence and build on the idea of violence as a complex and multidetermined phenomenon. On the other hand, intervention actions seek to reestablish the order and functioning of schools, focusing in particular on students, individually or in small groups²⁹. It seems that what is at stake in these practices, whether of prevention or intervention, is the fact of making people speak out about the daily violence that traverses school spaces and incites new practices among all stakeholders in the school community.

As there are practices in both countries developed from the school establishments, we emphasize that these actions can be enhanced if they depart from contextualized interventions, attuned to the reality of the school itself, considering its global nature and interconnections of its underpinning spaces and times³⁰. The surrounding community must also be involved, and the methodological approach should be based on the integration of approaches focused on prevention and intervention^{29,36}.

It is necessary to understand the impossibility of prescribing prevention recipes in schools in a standardized way and displaced from their socio-historical and cultural context³⁰. In general, the perspective of the prevention work of the investigated teams occurs in some moments motivated by emergency situations, which seems to favor the distortion of the real objectives of prevention as an institutionalized social practice³⁷. In this context, the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization, for example, point to scientific evidence that favors prevention proposals, first directed to the knowledge of risk factors, and later refined with the mechanisms that allow the evaluation of results. Such perspectives could be of great value if considered in the elaboration of prevention practices in school spaces.

These international bodies point out that the implementation of proposals to prevent violence cannot be carried out in a watertight fashion by school institutions, rather, strategies must be carried out through cooperation from different sectors such as health, education, justice, politics and social welfare. These agencies also exemplify cooperative actions among industries, such as actions aimed at encouraging the development of healthy and stimulating relationships between children and their caregivers; reducing alcohol availability and alcohol abuse; reducing access to lethal means, such as firearms, knives and pesticides; prevention of sexual abuse of children; prevention of violence against women; prevention of dating violence; among others^{1,4}. This wide range of possibilities of prevention strategies is very restricted in the contexts investigated, geared rather to measures aimed at student control in schools and discussions of topics than to actions that advocate the reduction of violence in its various nuances.

In this regard, when considering the discourses of professionals from both countries, it is possible to believe that, in general, the statements about the prevention actions developed are bash-

ful when compared with the relevant literature. There is a mismatch between the practices reported by the technicians and those recommended by literature, which can be understood by the fact that interdisciplinary teams are not designed as specific programs to prevent violent situations. However, as cases of violence affect school events at all times, the incorporation of prevention practices systematized and refined with the existing theoretical, and methodological frameworks in the literature can be an interesting resource.

Unlike the observed questions of the statements, according to the literature, an effective prevention program in schools should recommend the risk and protection factors, the targeted audience, facilitating aspects for the recruitment and selection of participants, theoretical approach, financial cost and evaluation tools. Such an example is given by the *Violência Nota Zero* (Zero Violence Program), developed with a group of teachers from 6th to 9th grade and lead-

ers of a Brazilian public school with the objective of training teachers and managers in twelve training sessions to identify situations of violence in schools where they work, as well as plan and implement strategies to curb such circumstances. The Program showed the results evaluated using a quasi-experimental design, with follow-up after eight months. Analyses seem to indicate that the Program has achieved its primary objectives¹⁸.

A more strategic view of the Ministry of Education and Education Secretariats concerning prevention practices and strategies in schools can contribute to the lack of school accountability vis-à-vis the prevention of violence. The participation of political authorities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of prevention practices would tend to potentiate the reduction of violence and favor its effects in the long term^{1,4}. After all, every one of us must be held accountable for violence prevention in schools.

Collaborations

FR Silva: PhD responsible for the research, participated in all planning, execution and preparation of the manuscript. SG Assis: supervisor and supervisor of the research, participated in the planning, execution and preparation of the manuscript.

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