

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: A REFLECTION OF THE ROLE PLAYED BY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the school's role on tackling the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, based on a study carried out in state schools of Porto Velho - RO, a municipality that in recent years has been suffering from the social consequences of the construction of two hydroelectric power plants on the Madeira River. The research was carried out by means of semi-structured interviews, with the participation of 20 school agents linked to four educational institutions. The analysis of information was carried out in the light of critical references on human rights, education, and psychology, and through the definition of categories and subcategories. The results show that most of the school agents are unaware of the problem and that none of the surveyed schools are actively taking action. Sex education is not seen as a cross-sectional issue and discussions on sexuality are reduced to a focus on risk and victimization, not being understood from a human rights perspective.

Keywords: sexual violence; children and teenagers; school.

Exploração Sexual de Crianças e Adolescentes: reflexão sobre o papel da escola

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o papel da escola no enfrentamento da Exploração Sexual de Crianças e Adolescentes, com base em um estudo realizado em unidades de ensino da rede pública estadual de Porto Velho-RO, município que nos últimos anos convive com as consequências sociais da construção de usinas hidrelétricas no Rio Madeira. A investigação foi desenvolvida por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, da qual participaram 20 agentes escolares, vinculados a quatro instituições de ensino. A análise das informações foi realizada à luz de referenciais críticos sobre direitos humanos, educação e psicologia, por meio da construção de categorias e subcategorias. Os resultados revelam que a maioria dos agentes escolares desconhece a problemática e que nenhuma das escolas pesquisadas desenvolve ações de enfrentamento. A educação sexual não é trabalhada como um tema transversal e a sexualidade é reduzida ao enfoque do risco e vitimização, não entendida sob a perspectiva dos direitos humanos.

Palavras-chave: violência sexual; crianças e adolescentes; escola.

Explotación Sexual de Niños y Adolescentes: reflexión acerca el papel de la escuela

RESUMEN

En este artículo se analiza el papel de la escuela en el enfrentamiento de la Explotación Sexual de Niños y Adolescentes, con base en un estudio realizado en unidades de enseñanza de la red pública estatal de Porto Velho-RO, municipio que en los últimos años convive con las consecuencias sociales de la construcción de usinas hidroeléctricas en el río Madeira. Se desarrolló la investigación por intermedio de entrevistas semiestructuradas, de la cual participaron 20 agentes escolares, ligados a cuatro instituciones de enseñanza. El análisis de las informaciones se realizó a la luz de referenciales críticos sobre derechos humanos, educación y psicología, por intermedio de la construcción de categorías y subcategorías. Los resultados mostraron que la mayor parte de los agentes escolares desconoce la problemática y que ninguna de las escuelas investigadas desarrolla acciones de enfrentamiento. La educación sexual no es trabajada como un tema transversal y la sexualidad es reducida al enfoque del riesgo y victimización, no entendida bajo la perspectiva de los derechos humanos.

Palabras clave: violencia sexual; niños y adolescentes; colegio.

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INTRODUCTION

At the 1994 World Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, 184 participating nations recognized sex and reproduction as human rights. The Cairo Action Plan (United Nations, 1995a) includes a commitment to ensure, among other things: access to information on sexual and reproductive education; the provision of affordable, safe, and adequate health services to the population; the implementation of security policies to curb and eradicate all forms of violence; the provision of social and legal school services, including sexual and reproductive health. The plan recognizes education's positive effects in all stages of life as well as its capacity to empower the indivisible and interdependent nature of human rights (Ventura, 2003).

Education, according to Ventura (2003), is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means for the consolidation of other rights. It can (or should) result in the empowerment of marginalized individuals by means of raising awareness of all forms of violence and social exclusion. Education plays a role of great relevance in the protection and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents, and schools are the educational institutions providing the most comprehensive environments in this sense.

We know that there is still a lot of resistance when it comes to discussing the sexuality of children and adolescents as a human right. However, it is relevant to observe that both in the Cairo Plan of Action and in the Beijing Platform (United Nations, 1995a, 1995b), two international regulatory documents related to sexual and reproductive rights, adolescents were recognized as being entitled to specific rights. Therefore, these young people must be protected by these norms and by public policies that guarantee their free access, among other things, to sexual and reproductive health care, as well as sexual education, which should be included in school curricula (Leite, 2013).

In this sense, denying, and not promoting the sexual rights of children and adolescents, and other related policies, within school education or other social policies can also be considered a form of violence. The impossibility to access information and spaces of protection for this public can prevent society from breaking and eradicating the cycles of sexual violence to which these young people might be subjected.

Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents (SVACA) is considered a serious violation of human rights because it affects the basic right to a safe and healthy sexuality. It is a multidimensional phenomenon, determined by macrosocial and cultural relations and, according to Ribeiro, Ferrarini, and Reis (2004), implies articulately the economic, political, and cultural dominations of gender and age hierarchy.

Sexual violence manifests itself in two ways: intrafamily/interpersonal sexual abuse or commercial sexual exploitation. Sexual abuse occurs when an individual engages into sexual activities with children/adolescents. "It involves the use, persuasion, induction, or coercion into any sexual experience that interferes with the health of individuals including physical, verbal, and emotional components" (Queiroz, 2003).

Theme of the analysis proposed here, the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (SECA) is defined by a commercial character. It is recognized as all types of commercial activity in which users or networks of users use the body of a boy or girl for sexual gratification (Castanha, 2008).

The Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents maintains a direct relationship with the category of sexual abuse of an intrafamily and extra family nature and also includes other forms of violence. In addition to economic exploitation, there is also structural, physical, psychological, social, and moral violence, as well as symbolic violence, which stimulates all forms of violence (Faleiros & Faleiros, 2007).

Coping with SECA and other forms of sexual violence require the implementation of various interconnected public policies as protection networks, as we will discuss below. Education and, more specifically, school education play a vital role.

Although we agree that there is an excess of extracurricular functions attributed to school institutions nowadays, which even limits the specificity of their educational action related to the transmission of scientific knowledge elaborated by humanity, we assume that sexuality and sexual rights are part of such accumulated productions, necessary for the wholesome formation of people in our society, as we will seek to demonstrate in the following sections.

In view of these prerogatives, this text, an excerpt from a more comprehensive master's research, proposes to analyze the role of schools in coping with sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, and, more specifically, their actions in the face of such serious problem.

The context is Western Amazonia, stage of major engineering enterprises, with the construction of two major hydroelectric power plants on the Madeira River in Porto Velho, in the Brazilian state of Rondônia. This is the scenario in which it was possible to record an increase in the rates of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents during the construction of the power plants (Dhesca Brasil, 2011).

The school and sexual rights of children and adolescents

Regarding the rights of children and adolescents, it is observed that different articles of the ECA (Brazil,

1990, with updates) approach the theme of sexuality from the perspective of sexual violence as a crime, explaining the forms of punishment for perpetrators and/or participants. Some of the examples of the articles we found are: Art. 5; Paragraph 2 of Art. 101; Art. 130; Art. 241 D; Art. 244. However, sexuality as a fundamental right of children and adolescents is intentionally omitted or denied in Brazilian legislation.

The failure to recognize the right to healthy sexual development of children and adolescents raises obstacles because sexuality is an essential part of every person's personality. Sexual health is a basic human right and, in order to provide children and adolescents with safe environments where they can have a healthy and safe sexual development, it is imperative to guarantee their sexual rights in conditions of freedom, respect, and dignity.

However, as Leite (2013) emphasizes, sexuality in general does not have a place on the agendas of educational or welfare projects aimed at children and adolescents. When the sexuality theme is approached, it is presented in a negative way, that is, as a "problem", from the perspective of controlling sexual and reproductive human behaviors.

Rios (2013) considers it quite harmful to ignore sexual rights especially in crucial stages of life such as childhood and adolescence, in which developing human beings need to receive adequate information about health, reproduction, and sexuality, in a responsible, unprejudiced way. Young people should even learn to recognize violations that can put their safety at risk, even within their own family environment.

It is important to highlight the fact that, in 1997, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) inserted sexual orientation as a cross-sectional theme of the National Curriculum Parameters (NCPs) (Brasil, 1997, 1998). The proposal was presented as a means to attribute to schools the responsibility of developing educational actions for the promotion of the health of children and adolescents, while sharing this task with families.

It is observed that, 20 years after the insertion of sexual orientation as a transversal theme in school, a merely biological approach to sex, reproduction, and sexually transmitted diseases predominated in the debate, in detriment of broader issues, which involve sexuality as a right, while approaching themes such as satisfaction, autonomy, affections, gender relations, responsibilities, equality, freedom, etc. (Santos, Neumann, & Ippólito, 2011).

In this sense, regarding the sexual rights of children and adolescents as human rights has great relevance, taking into account that we live in a society which is still adult-centric and heterosexist. Defending sexual rights means, therefore, defending human dignity, understood

here as an autonomous space of experimentation, maturation, and construction of an individual's destiny, according to personal preferences, desires, and tendencies (Rios, 2013). At the same time, the defense of sexual rights implies confronting, and preventing any forms of sexual domination and coercion, which are manifested by different forms of violence.

In order to accomplish this task within public institutions, as expressed in the School Guide (2011), schools play a pivotal role because they occupy a very strategic place when it comes to coping with and preventing sexual violence, while providing students with empowerment. Schools are places where knowledge, affections, values, norms, and cultural models are also built in accordance with broader parameters provided by society.

However, the school does not happen to be neutral territory. Certain views of the world, humanity, and society predominate. And such views are reflected in the relationships that are established within the school environment. The school is part of a larger context of profound inequalities reflected in the unequal distribution of income and rights in our capitalist system.

Thus, it is necessary to set up spaces of resistance and reflection, since working from the perspective of human rights implies overcoming isolation and collectively articulating a confrontation response, while respecting differences and plurality. It is necessary to ensure the participation of all the forces that make up the school environment: principals, supervisors, advisors, teachers, students, and the community. Open dialogue is one of the most game-changing tools in the search for solutions to problems, and the fight for better quality of life.

The school as a participant in the network to combat sexual violence against children and adolescents

At a time when sexual violence against children and adolescents (and, more specifically, commercial sexual exploitation) has become a public issue and a serious violation of human rights, it has presented itself as a formidable issue that demands immediate attention by public policy makers. In addition, numerous social movements have risen in favor of childhood protection.

The first nationwide survey on the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, as stated in Silva (2014), took place in 2004, with the development of an Intersectoral Matrix to Combat the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents. It was the result of a partnership between the Bureau of Human Rights (SEDH), the UNICEF, and the Research Group on Violence and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women, Children and Adolescents (Violes) of the Department of Social Service (SER) of the University of Brasília (UnB).

In this geosocial and political mapping of Brazilian

municipalities, 932 Brazilian municipalities and small towns were identified in which the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents occurs, of which 292 (31.8%) are in the Northeast; 241 (25,7%) in the Southeast; 161 (17,3%) in the South; 127 (13,6%) in the Midwest; and 109 (11.6%) in the North (Silva, 2014).

In 2011, the matrix was updated with data from Dial 100 phone line service and indicated a number of 2,930 Brazilian municipalities with SECA records, i.e., the number of cases registered in the country nearly tripled.

Also according to Silva (2014), this increase is due to the combination of three factors: society's greater awareness and sensitivity to complaints; more efficient forms of identification and reporting; and a real increase in the incidence of the phenomenon.

That is the reason why the national plan to combat SECA, in 2000, by the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA) was so necessary. The plan represents a considerable achievement by civil society, which has enabled the construction of methodologies and strategies for coping with sexual violence against children and adolescents by means of a process of great articulation and mobilization in collaboration with public institutions and international support.

The National Plan has become a reference for the structuring of policies, programs, and services that articulate prevention, attention, accountability, and defense of the rights of children and adolescents at the federal, state, and municipal levels (Tourinho & Gomes, 2011).

Another fundamental mechanism for the protection of rights was the institutionalization of a national system of promotion and protection in favor of childhood and adolescence. As Baptista (2012) points out, Resolution No. 113 of the CONANDA, April 2006, provides the parameters for the institutionalization and strengthening of the System of Guarantee for the Rights of Children and Adolescents.

According to the mentioned resolution, this system is structured by means of the articulation and network integration of government public institutions and civil society. The system is based on three strategic axes of action in the area of human rights, namely: I - defense; II - promotion; and III - social control. Its competence is to promote, defend, and control the full consolidation of civil, political, economic, social, cultural, collective, and diffuse rights, in favor of all children and adolescents.

Each axis is composed of institutions with specific attributions and responsibilities. The school is situated within the axis of promotion. It is one of the institutions that are members of the integral protection network and, in this sense, plays a fundamental role in the

prevention of sexual violence against children and adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The research on actions to cope with the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents developed by schools was carried out in four (4) institutions of the state network operating in the municipality of Porto Velho-RO. Based on the geographical division of this urban area, we chose to research a school unit in each area of the city.³

The fieldwork was developed centrally by means of semi-structured interviews with school agents, based on a script of questions on the investigated theme. A total number of 20 people were interviewed: 04 (four) principals, 04 (four) supervisors, 04 (four) educational advisors, 04 (four) teachers, and 04 (four) elementary and high school students. Researchers selected one representative from each segment in each of the four schools surveyed.

Fifteen participants are female, aged between 14 and 51 years. The 4 (four) school principals and an educational advisor are male, aged between 43 and 56 years. In order to safeguard the identity of the research participants, the schools investigated will be named here by letters of the alphabet: North Zone (A), South Zone (B), East Zone (C) and West Zone (D). The participants will be identified by the letter corresponding to their function, followed by the letter of the school to which they belong (P = principal; S = Supervisor; A = Educational Advisor; T = Teacher; St = Student).

The information was organized into categories and subcategories after a laborious process of reading and rereading the interviews, analyzed in the light of critical references on human rights and the current legislation, briefly presented here in the previous sections. In this article, we will discuss the subcategories: is coping with SCA a school responsibility?; procedures adopted in case of suspicion or confirmation of sexual violence; and actions to prevent sexual violence.

Given the textual limits of this article, we seek, in the choice of excerpts from the different interviews and in the organization of the analyses, to present a broader picture of narratives, meanings, and opinions, both in their similarities/convergences, as in their divergences and contradictions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Is coping with SECA a school responsibility?

The Statute for children and adolescents, in article 70, recommends that "It is everyone's duty to prevent

³ The research was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Federal University of Rondônia.

the occurrence of threats or violation of the rights of children and adolescents” (Brasil, 1990, p. 22, with updates). Recognizing the importance of prevention, the National Plan to Combat Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents established, as a goal, the development of preventive actions against sexual abuse and/or exploitation of children and adolescents, primarily by means of education, awareness and self-defense.

Thus, it is possible to observe the relevance that is attributed to school as a priority space for the development of educational actions aimed at promoting the human rights of children and adolescents.

In the interviewees’ Speeches, however, we observed that few actors are aware of their role at the school. None of them mentioned the need for actions promoted by the institution in order to confront sexual violence. According to what they said, the school acts more as a supporting accessory for campaigns carried out by other institutions of the municipality and / or for welcoming volunteers who are willing to debate the theme in the school environment. Let’s look at the speeches of two directors:

In fact, it’s not even a responsibility of the school, because the mission of the school is to convey knowledge, right? And now they’re making schools responsible for fixing all sorts of problems in society. I might be getting it all wrong but that’s how it feels to me. (Interviewee PA)

The school she does the schooling work. This part of sexual exploitation is still connected to the family environment. It doesn’t happen at school. (Interviewee PC)

This discourse, according to Paro (2010), underlies education systems and educational public policies, demonstrating a narrow-minded view of education in which the role played by schools is limited to the mere transmission of knowledge. The author recalls that Law 9.394 (1996) proclaims that “[...] the purpose of education is the full development of students, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship and their qualification for work” (Law 9.394, 1996, Art. 2).

All the interviewed supervisors, on the other hand, recognized the importance of the school acting to combat sexual violence against children and adolescents. They justified, however, that the excess of bureaucratic demands did not allow the planning of this educational action, as evidenced in the following fragment:

I think the school would be a great ally in this fight. Schools have the opportunity to promote awareness. When children have access to information, and get well-informed, they will know

it when adults are trying to take advantage of their own authority in order to manipulate children. You know, we have to deal with so much bureaucracy. There is so much paperwork to write and record. There is so much stuff that you have to organize, and then pedagogical matters suddenly get less important. (Interviewed SA)

The statements by the agents provoke a reflection on school’s mission. We agree with the opinion of Santomé (2001) that

[...] one of the fundamental purposes of every curricular intervention is to prepare its students to become active, critical citizens”. Thus, it cannot refrain from educational, curricular contents and goals that promote knowledge, attitudes, and values which are consistent with this purpose (p. 159).

The author states that curriculum planning should move away from the cumulative, banking view regarding schooling and migrate towards educational goals that contribute to a critical socialization of individuals and reality, with a view to a fair, democratic society.

In this sense, the contents developed should include the cultures or voices of minorities and/or marginalized groups that are daily silenced within school institutions, due to the strong presence of hegemonic cultures. For example, childhood, which is often stereotyped, deformed, and silenced due to the adultcentrism of our society (Santomé, 2001).

Among the four teachers interviewed, three were unable to define the role played by schools when it comes to coping with the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, and two justified not working the theme in the classroom due to lack of time, accumulation of work, their busy timetables of deadlines, and lack of autonomy.

We have a lot of classes to teach. I teach Portuguese, English, and art.

So that’s a lot of classes I have to prepare. And when I’m in the classroom I have to spend a considerable amount of time correcting text productions, checking homework, taking assignments to correct at home, and mediating the students’ interactions. So, we end up having to focus on our specific content... (Interviewee TA)

It is possible to observe, in most statements, that sexual education and the right to sexuality are understood as peripheral issues at the school, themes that should be addressed by health officials, but not as contents that are part of the curriculum, because they involve scientific knowledge and psychology notions.

In this respect, the teacher from school B was the

one who showed greater clarity concerning the school's role in the formation of students, while understanding that learning institutions can help students change reality by teaching them how to think critically:

Because when we talk about school, we talk about forming citizens, opening our minds, raising awareness. And when you talk about raising awareness, you talk about a lot of things. When it comes to fighting exploitation, I think the keyword is awareness. So that boys and girls will not let themselves be exploited, or abused.

Kids will be able to develop a conscience of the value of their bodies, and their self-esteem, that's it. (Interviewee TB)

The statements by CA and AD express these demands in more detail:

I think the school should do more events, like lectures, and explain things more often, you see? [...] I think we should talk more to the students, be less absent.

We should not have talks only to the students in the 3rd year. It kind of makes sense because they are just about to graduate and go on with their lives. (Interviewee SC)

I think so, there should be support by psychologists and I also think there should be more lectures. We're at a stage where students are already becoming teenagers, right? [...] Teachers should address these issues more often. Sometimes, course material should be set aside so that teachers could discuss other themes related to the students' reality ... (Interviewee SD)

The set of obtained answers demonstrates how detached schools are from social problems related to SECA. This position, however, is not one of neutrality. The school environment, Louro (1997) says, not only produces or transmits knowledge. It also molds individuals and reinforces ethnic, gender, and class identities. It acts by reproducing society's dominant ideology even though it sometimes makes room for the unmasking of such ideology. Therefore, it is necessary to intervene to transform the school environment because it is a place of political and cultural struggle. Freire (2003, p.112) said "[...] even though it is not the solution to all problems, education is fundamental."

As a component of a protection network, the school is committed to fighting for the human rights of children and adolescents. It should stimulate critical thinking and develop educational practices that encourage students to live in society with responsibility and solidarity.

Procedures adopted in case of alleged or confirmed violence

In the interviews it became evident that in cases when school agents identify signs of sexual violence inflicted on students, the most common practice is to set up a meeting with mothers/fathers or guardians to talk about the situation. However, reporting to the Child and Adolescent Guardianship Council, which is mandatory by law, does not always happen. Out of the 4 (four) principals interviewed, only C said it was standard procedure to report the cases, whereas the others said they seek to fix the situation internally and, only when it is not possible, contact the Guardianship Council.

Among the school segment represented by supervisors and advisors, there were divergences regarding this issue. The advisors of schools A and C contradicted the speech of their principals, stating that formal notification was not always sent to the authorities. One of them even stated categorically that he advised the parents or guardians of the student to do the reporting themselves.

Usually, I give them a phone number through which they can contact the council and advise them to go there and report. (Interviewee AA)

The speech of a school supervisor on this subject drew our attention. She felt upset about the fact that the school did not report all cases and pointed out a justification for this negligence:

You have to report to the agencies responsible and the school fails because the school itself is too afraid to take on a certain responsibility, you know?... I think it's fear, you don't want to cause trouble to the community, or you don't want to be there, having to answer questions, being a witness... I don't know... (Interviewee SA)

Schools play a key role in combating sexual violence against children and adolescents. The ECA, in Art. 13 (Brasil, 1990, p.12, with updates), determines that: "Cases of suspected or confirmed abuse of children or adolescents will be mandatorily communicated to the Guardianship Council of the respective municipality, without prejudice to other legal measures."

Also, the School Guide (2011) recommends that schools get familiar with the procedures, the guidelines on how to send notifications, how to handle the situation, and its consequences.

Failure by an educational institution to comply with this rule, in addition to being an administrative offence, has a number of negative consequences. If cases of suspected or confirmed violence are not reported to the authorities, they will not be investigated. This, from the

point of view of accountability, means maintaining the cycle of impunity and permissiveness for perpetrators of sexual violence against children and adolescents. With regard to the victims, it means the perpetuation of violence and the impossibility of these children being identified and assisted by the protection network.

Notification is essential to articulate the actors of the right-protection system in order to promote collective action in defense of children and adolescents who are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. Inter-sector cooperation and the integration of public policies should involve, as a priority, education, health, social assistance, security, and justice.

Saints and cols. (2011) discuss in the School Guide that there are several reasons why professionals do not report. One of them is the lack of perception about sexual violence and how to proceed, which evidences the need for training to identify the signs. Another reason is the emotional and psychological discomfort of educators in dealing with child sexuality and/or with their own sexuality. It is possible that many educators have been victims of sexual violence in their own childhoods and resist going through such memories.

Some professionals claim lack of time and end up omitting information; others are afraid of getting involved in family and legal matters. There are also those who do not believe in the capacity of the police or of the justice system for solving cases, and think they should fix the problem internally.

In addition to notification, the school has the mission to support children and adolescents in situations of sexual violence, identify the risks it takes and seek reliable professionals who can guarantee the protection of these children.

“The school could be doing something and it’s not”: actions to prevent sexual violence.

In order to research the pedagogical practices developed by schools to confront sexual violence against children and adolescents, we asked school agents about the existence of studies on the theme, school projects, or partnership with other agencies, considering sexual orientation as a cross-sectional theme to be worked in the classroom.

We got contradictory answers within the same school. For example, in schools A and B, principals and educational advisors said they would hold lectures to students with the participation of volunteers. However, the supervisors, teachers and students of these same two schools, when answering the question, stated that there was no specific work on the subject. The statements by three agents of school A express this duality:

[...] *The school could be doing something and it’s not, you know? A cycle*

lectures, workshops. [...] When you bring experts to discuss situations of teenage pregnancy, present testimonials by girls who are already mothers, responsibility, I think ... that if you show them, that it’s not like playing house.

Unfortunately, my colleagues think that’s silly because they believe the kids already know these things, but the kids don’t. (Interviewee SA)

[...] we don’t do any preventive work. [...] I’ve never worked on the subject in my discipline, but the biology teacher has, I guess. I think she mentioned it to me. (Interviewee TA)

[...] not at school. In the classroom already, there was this guy who came to give a lecture, he was from outside the school, I don’t know where he was from. (Interviewee StA)

In schools C and D, school agents have verbalized that the educational actions performed are usually lectures given by external actors. The students of private colleges and public universities, members of evangelical churches, teams of healthcare agents, police officers, representatives of the Public Prosecutor’s Office and Justice Courts for children and adolescents. Tutelary Counselors and teams of the School Health Program (PSE) of the State Department of Education were mentioned as collaborators and/or partners of the school.

However, the contents of these *lectures are diverse: bullying, drugs, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, depression, sexual violence, basic rules of traffic, eye problems, and worm infections.* These are sporadic, discontinued activities, based exclusively on the verbal accounts of specialists. Methodological characteristics that raise obstacles to free speech and the exchange of experiences between participants, as well as affectionate relationships of trust and care. In addition, no school claimed to work on sexual orientation as a curricular and cross-sectional content.

According to the report of the school agents interviewed, we observed that sexuality in adolescence is always worked in the preventive perspective of avoidance of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This means that it is not presented openly and fully, with a focus on affection, sexual drive, and satisfaction. Some researchers confirm that sexuality is seen from the perspective of the problem, which includes sexual abuse and exploitation (Nascimento & Fonseca, 2018).

Sex education at school is important for the prevention of sexual violence, but it cannot be directed only to this protective bias. Professionals must be careful so that they will not reinforce a condition of dependence and non-autonomy of adolescents.

Guastafarro (2014) highlights that schools need to understand that sexuality is part of the personality of every individual. It should not be denied. They need to work on the theme to generate critical reflections from the perspective of gender and sexual diversity, contributing to students living their sexuality in a healthy and responsible way.

The educational advisor of school A, when asked during the interview why the topic of sexuality occupied little space in the school agenda, explained that the students did not show interest in the topic: “they do not have much curiosity, today with the internet ...” (Interviewee SA).

Louro (1997), when referring to the silencing of issues affecting sexuality, supposes that this is a way to maintain a sense of “normalcy”. The fact that adolescents have access to the Internet does not mean that they are mature enough to make the right decisions and protecting themselves.

Information on sexuality, according to Guastafarro (2014), should consider a series of conceptions and social scenarios. Sexual education and awareness need to be planned, constructed, and supported from different perspectives. In social networks, the author says, information appears fragmented and will be read in different ways and in different contexts, depending on the psychological and cognitive resources of the people who read it.

The approach to such a complex problem, such as sexual violence against children and adolescents, and in particular sexual exploitation, requires preparation, knowledge, availability, and commitment. In the speech of the interviewed individuals, it is observed that the majority never had any specific training on the subject. Among the 20 (twenty) individuals interviewed, 5 (five) mentioned having received only general information on the subject in seminars and/or lectures held by the State Public Prosecutor’s Office.

In this sense, how can we expect school institutions to be spaces for protection and coping with SECA if the professionals who work on it do not have in-depth knowledge about the theme and do not even know how to recognize its causes and consequences, much less that it is a serious violation of human rights?

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research shows that sexual rights are not understood from the perspective of human rights at school, which means, as Rios (2013) points out, the possibility of the free responsible exercise of sexuality, based on the principles of freedom, equality, and dignity. Schools have been unable to play, or sometimes even understand, its role in coping with sexual violence against children and adolescents.

The various attempts of political and religious segments to prevent the debate on gender and sexuality in schools reinforce their conservative, sexist, adult-centric, and heteronormative view of sexuality, contributing to the violation of the rights of children and adolescents.

Bill 7.180/14 (Brasil, 2014), of the so-called “Schools without Politics”, by proposing to amend the Brazilian Education Law (LDB) in order to rule out the possibility of offering disciplines with on gender or sexual orientation in schools throughout the country, is an example of this.

We arrive at the end of this study with the conviction that there is still so much to be done to confront sexual violence and, specifically, the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. Among various public institutions, the school is the most important actor in the development of pedagogical practices that help in the development of a healthy sexual life. It is essential that schools become spaces of critical thinking and open channels of reflection and debate in order to build a culture of prevention of sexual violence and affirmation of the sexual rights of children and adolescents.

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