




PSYCHODIAGNOSIS IN CHILDREN EXPOSED TO INDIRECT VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY AND THE REPERCUSSIONS ON THEIR DEVELOPMENT

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Elane Martins Silveira¹ and Elenise Tenório de Medeiros Machado².

ABSTRACT

Exposure to indirect violence in childhood, which is characterized by witnessing or perceiving aggression against others, can have repercussions on various problems. This study sought to investigate the effects of exposure to indirect violence in childhood on child development and the psychological tests commonly applied in the investigation of problems related to this type of violence. A literature review was carried out using the *Medline*, *Lilacs*, *Scielo*, and Index Psicologia databases (2012-2016), selecting scientific articles in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, based on inclusion/exclusion criteria. 12 studies were retrieved and analyzed, verifying the statistical relationship between the experience of violence and others with adverse problems in development until adulthood. It was obtained results that exposure to violence can cause serious developmental problems, in the short, medium and long term, such as alcohol and other substance abuse, early sexual intercourse, cognitive and mental health problems. The study concluded that it is crucial to investigate the experience of this type of violence in childhood through professional techniques and instruments in the area of psychological assessment to reduce and prevent possible damage.

Keywords: Exposure to Violence. Childhood. Psychological Evaluation. Psychodiagnosis.

¹ Hospital Psychologist EBSEH/UFC
elane.msilveira@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5106-7027>
<https://lattes.cnpq.br/6212742220461005>

² EY Welfare Neuropsychologist
elenisetmmachado@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6570-2853>
<http://lattes.cnpq.br/3290283594727153>

INTRODUCTION

Unlike direct violence, characterized by aggressions perpetrated or suffered by the individual in the broader family or social sphere, indirect violence is characterized by aggressions witnessed or perceived through other people (SILVA; TOKUMARU; HOWAT-RODRIGUES, 2015).

Violence influences all family members, either directly (being the person attacked) or indirectly (witnessing the aggression), and can cause short, medium, and long-term consequences (PATIAS; BOSSI; DELL'AGLIO, 2014).

Although it is not a determining condition, there is strong evidence of the experience of stress in childhood as a risk factor in the development of mental disorders, resulting in problems in brain structures, cognition, and the presentation of symptoms. And it suggests new studies that identify efficient strategies both in the primary prevention of mental disorders and in improving the resilience of abused children (BRIETZKE et al., 2012).

This literature review research is justified by the hypothesis of the relationship between exposure to indirect violence in childhood, suffered when the child witnesses other people being assaulted, and the development of psychopathological disorders. Aiming at contributing to the advancement of studies on psychological assessment of the results of indirect violence, and to the creation of new projects on this subject little debated, discussing some of the possible techniques of child psychological assessment in this context of violence.

The violence suffered – not only by the child himself, but by the simple fact that he has witnessed someone suffering some type of violence – can influence all the suffering developed from childhood to adulthood, prolonging disorders for many years.

The objective of this research is to correlate the data obtained in the existing literature and to contribute to avoid and early detection of possible harm in children who have witnessed violence, making it possible to have an education that is more aware of the weight of the attitudes of parents/caregivers and professionals about child development.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the research objectives, an exploratory literature review was carried out in one month, February 2017, in the Medline (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online), SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online), Lilacs (Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences) and Index Psychology – Scientific Technical Journals databases. As inclusion criteria, original articles, reviews and case studies from the last five previous years, in Portuguese, English and Spanish, were used, and the

following descriptors were searched, initially individually, and later correlated them: Exposure to Violence (and) Childhood (and) Psychological Assessment (or) Psychometrics (or) Psychological Tests.

The exclusion criteria were articles prior to 2012, those that demanded payment to gain access repeatedly, and those that focused on other types of violence.

RESULTS

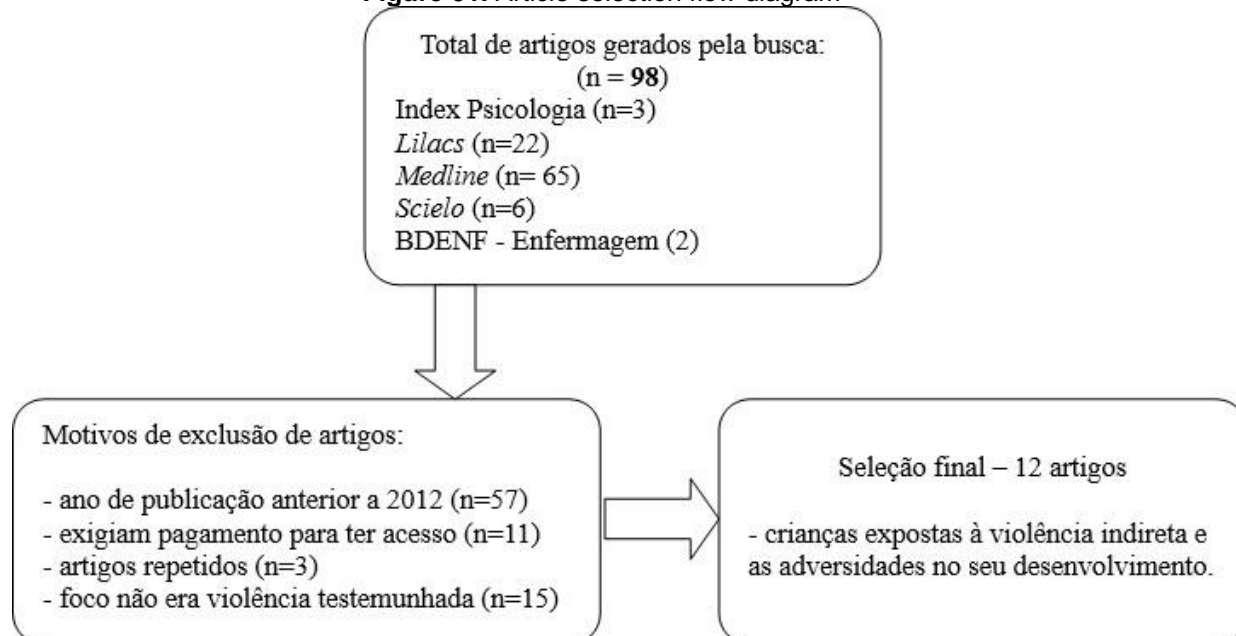
A total of 98 articles were found, of which, in total, only 41 were published from 2012 to the current year, which excluded 57 of the articles found. Among the remaining 41 articles, 25 were in the Medline database; 08 in the Lilacs database; 02 in the Index Psicologia database – Technical-scientific journals; and 06 in the Scielo database. However, 37 were from international databases, and only 04 were from National databases. Of these, 07 were published in 2012, 03 articles in 2013, 07 in 2014, 17 in 2015, and 07 in 2016. In the current year, none has yet been published.

03 repeated articles were removed, leaving 38. Of these 38, 11 articles required payment to have access, a factor that caused their exclusion, leaving 27 articles for reference, of which 14 were in the Medline database; 07 in the Lilacs database; 02 in the Index Psicologia database – Technical-scientific journals; and 04 in the Scielo database. The remaining 27 articles were read and their content evaluated, thus excluding 15, as they were not related to the subject of witnessed violence but to other types of violence, such as sexual abuse or physical aggression, or even to other subjects, such as suggested therapies.

Based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria, 12 studies were retrieved and analyzed, of which 07 were published in 2015, 02 articles in 2014, 01 in 2013, and 02 in 2012. According to the databases, 07 were in the Medline database; 03 in the Lilacs database; 02 in the Index Psicologia database – Technical-scientific journals; and only 01 in the Scielo database.

In addition to the recovered articles, seven other studies were used as references because they are of great value for the enrichment of this research.

Figure 01. Article selection flow diagram



Source: Authorship (2017)

In Table 01, below, the selected articles are organized according to title, author, year of publication and database found:

Table 1. Articles applied to research

N o.	TITLE	AUTHOR	YEAR	DATABASE
01	Relationship between child abuse exposure and reported contact with child protection organizations: Results from the Canadian Community Health Survey.	Afifi, T. O. et al.	2015	Medline
02	Impact of childhood stress on psychopathology.	Brietzke, E. et al.	2012	Lilacs
03	Sex and sexual orientation disparities in adverse childhood experiences and early age at sexual debut in the United States: Results from a nationally representative sample.	Brown, M. J. et al.	2015	Medline
04	Alcohol misuse, alcohol-related risky behaviors, and childhood adversity among soldiers who returned from Iraq or Afghanistan.	Clarke-Walper, K.; Riviere, L. A.; Wilk, J.E.	2014	Medline
05	Drug use among university students and their relationship with maltreatment during childhood and adolescence.	Gonzalez, Y. et al.	2015	Lilacs
06	The Influence of Direct and Indirect Juvenile Victimization Experiences on Adult Victimization and Fear of Crime.	Grubb, J. A.; Bouffard, L. A.	2015	Medline
07	Child Maltreatment and Later Cognitive Functioning: A Systematic Review.	Irigaray, T. Q. et al.	2013	Index Psychology
08	Safeguarding the child athlete in sport: a review, a framework and recommendations for the IOC youth athlete development model.	Mountjoy, M. et al.	2015	Medline
09	Repercussions of Exposure to Conjugal Violence on the Emotional Characteristics of Children: A Systematic	Patias, N. D. Bossi, T. J. Dell'aglio, D. D.	2014	Lilacs

	Review of the Literature.			
10	Effects of Family Unpredictability and Sex Differences on Risk Propensity, Exposure to Violence, and Future Discount of Young University Students: An Evolutionary Approach.	Silva, A. A.; Tokumaru, R. S.; Howat-Rodrigues, A. B. C.	2015	Index Psychology
11	Correlates of joint child protection and police child sexual abuse investigations: results from the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2008.	Tonmyr, L.; Gonzalez, A.	2015	Medline
12	Exposure to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder in crack users.	Tractenberg, S. G. et al.	2012	SciELO

Source: Authorship (2017)

After analyzing the articles, information was sought that associated exposure to violence in childhood with adverse outcomes in adulthood, observing the statistical data and the types of instruments applied in the investigations (interviews, tests, questionnaires, scales, inventories).

DISCUSSION

Data from the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights reveal that, in 2015, a number of 80,437 (59%) of the complaints registered were related to violations of the human rights of children and adolescents, out of a total of 137,516 complaints. Of these complaints, the greatest violations are negligence (38%), followed by psychological violence (23.9%), physical violence (22%) and sexual violence (11%) (BRASIL, 2016).

Child abuse is a major and complicated public health problem. (AFIFI et al., 2015). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), the weakening of health caused by child violence makes up relevant numbers of the global burden of disease.

As in cases of direct physical abuse or sexual abuse, children who witness violence are at risk of developing multiple symptoms, including behavioral, emotional, or social disorders, and decline in cognitive or physical development, although it is not the rule that some type of problem will develop (WHO, 2002). In all the articles researched, to a greater or lesser extent, positive relationships were found between the experience of witnessed violence and problems.

PROBLEMS RELATED TO EXPOSURE TO INDIRECT VIOLENCE

When compared to other types of violence, such as sexual violence, physical violence, negligence and psychological violence, exposure to indirect violence appears to a lesser extent, as shown by Tonmyr and Gonzalez (2015), when they report that, in Canada, among the various types of child abuse, sexual abuse is more likely to involve joint

investigations with the police. While the records of sexual abuse presented 55.6% of investigations, physical abuse indicated 21.0%, negligence portrayed 10%, emotional abuse showed 7.8% and exposure to conjugal violence, only 5.6%.

Although the type of violence in question occurs much less than the others, it is still worth paying attention to its results, since difficulties such as the relationship between this type of violence and drug use and abuse have been found in several places in the world, such as Brazil, the United States and Panama (SILVA, A. A.; TOKUMARU, R. S.; HOWAT-RODRIGUES, A. B. C., 2015); (CLARKE-WALPER; RIVIERE; WILK, 2013); (BROWN et al., 2015); (GONZALEZ et al., 2015).

Research carried out with female crack users, by Tractenberg et al. (2012), found relationships between their use and the experience of traumatic events in childhood, bringing as the nature of the events experienced, five types: aggression/physical abuse; sexual assault/abuse; threat to life; victim of violent crime; testimony of a traumatic event. And they point out that 57% of the sample reports the fact that they have been witnesses of violent events that occurred to third parties.

The traumatic experience in childhood is considered a risk factor for drug experimentation, as it can function as a way for the subject to self-medicate, thus seeking to attenuate the mood symptoms associated with the trauma (TRACTENBERG et al., 2012).

From the application of the questionnaire "Drug use and adverse experiences of child" to university adolescents, and analyzing the data statistically obtained from the Chi-Square Test of Independence, Gonzalez et al. (2015) point out as crucial indicators for drug use and abuse, witnessing mother abuse and divorce or separation of parents, along with sexual abuse.

When it comes to the development of mental health disorders, Clarke-Walper, Riviere and Wilk (2013), in a study carried out with American soldiers fighting in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), relate the results between adverse childhood experiences, development of mental health problems and alcohol abuse. The study was carried out through the application of scales, with positive results of mental health problems in 17.3% of the participants, and the statement that all categories of adverse childhood experiences were associated with 1.3 to 1.9 greater probability of meeting the criteria for alcohol abuse, and 1.4 and 2.4 greater probability of meeting the criteria for alcohol abuse associated with risk behaviors.

As for indirect violence, among the survey participants, 18.3% stated that they had seen, throughout their childhood, their mothers being violated in some way. And these statistics increased to 21.8% (1.4 times the highest probability) among respondents who

admitted to using alcohol, and 24.3% (1.6 times the highest probability) among those who admitted to abusing alcohol with risky behaviors. The authors point out, with the obtaining of such data, that childhood traumas can induce decisions about alcohol use and related risk behaviors (CLARKE-WALPER; RIVIERE; WILK, 2013).

Cognitive problems were also related to witnessing violence in childhood, in the short, medium and long term. Irigaray et al. (2013) in a systematic review, point out that traumatic experiences in childhood can cause cognitive changes in children, adolescents and adults, and suggest the urgency of new studies on the issue, criticizing the fact that most studies have emphasized physical and sexual abuse, to the detriment of other types of violence, such as emotional abuse and neglect; in addition to the non-standardization of the neuropsychological instruments used in most existing studies.

It is noticed, in the course of the research, that few children who suffer exposure to violence have access to care from child protection organizations or even from the protection of the police. Afifi et al. (2015) used the Child Violence Experiences Questionnaire (CEVQ) to assess physical abuse and exposure to spousal violence by children in Canada, finding that 1.4% of children experienced exposure to violence, while 4.2% experienced sexual abuse and 16.8% experienced physical abuse.

Once again, the difference between the types of abuse is noted, however, 16.6% of these children who were exposed to conjugal violence had contact with child protection organizations, while only 8% of those who suffered physical abuse and 10.4% of those who suffered sexual abuse had this contact with protection organizations (AFIFI et al., 2015).

When suffered together with exposure to violence, these last two types of violence increased (physical abuse and exposure to violence 15.4% and sexual abuse and exposure to violence 10.5% of contact with such organizations), which is justified, according to the research, by the fact that when there is another victim, usually the mother, the community becomes aware of the case, which makes it easier to report and denounce them. In other words, the fact that the children were assisted by organizations occurred more due to complaints of the violence suffered by the mother, in these cases, than due to the child's suffering (AFIFI et al., 2015).

Another problem related to exposure to violence was the recurrence of victimization in adulthood. Grubb and Bouffard (2015), in a survey conducted in Texas with 669 men and women, through a computer-assisted telephone system, point out that 31.5% of the sample reported having witnessed intimate partner violence between parents/stepfathers while young. The results also obtained a higher prevalence of victimization during adulthood for

people who were exposed to conjugal violence when they were young (64.5%), compared to those not exposed (39.4%).

Thus, respondents who were victims of indirect violence when they were minors were 145.9% more likely to suffer violence as adults than those who did not suffer this type of victimization. The authors relate contact with violence also to substance use and mental health problems, concluding that, if violence is identified early, it can be reduced (GRUBB; BOUFFARD, 2015).

Problems related to sexuality were found by Brown et al. (2015), who point out that adverse childhood experiences (including neglect, physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to parental violence, parental incarceration, and parental psychopathology) are associated with early sexual debut, which indicates various harmful health outcomes. In terms of the participating respondents in general, the survey obtained data that, when children are exposed to violence between their parents, they are 8.58 times more likely to have their first sexual intercourse before the age of 13, and the disparity between the sexes was significant (men were 4.60 times more likely, while women were 45.7 times more likely).

It is worth mentioning that the environment where exposure to violence among others can occur is not only at home, nor only among family members. Mountjoy, et al. (2015) points out as a type of violence suffered by child athletes in the sports environment, the "abuse of spectators", along with physical and sexual abuse, bullying, doping, among several other forms of violence. The authors indicate the creation of policies and systems for receiving complaints of violence in sport, to raise awareness about the existence of violence, especially child violence in sport.

Thus, the subject must be taken in more depth, to know the real data on violence witnessed in childhood, since "increasing our ability to identify all experiences of child abuse is important to protect children from harm" (AFIFI et al., 2015).

RESEARCH TOOLS

Psychodiagnosis is a scientific process that uses psychological techniques and tests in order to understand problems based on theoretical assumptions, to identify and evaluate specific aspects, to classify and predict possible situations, and to communicate results. All these possibilities depend on the objectives of each specific evaluation, due to previous hypotheses and through an evaluation plan, which defines which techniques to use, and when to use them (CUNHA, 2000).

Among the articles researched, it was observed that most of the researches used interviews, questionnaires, likert scales, and some used psychological and non-psychological tests, of which the interview is one of the techniques of an investigation process, through which information is collected from personal, relational or systemic aspects, allowing the professional to describe and evaluate each case investigated, relating events to experiences, making inferences, establishing conclusions and making decisions (TAVARES, 2000).

Something to be highlighted is the importance of child psychological assessment starting with playful interviews, which means collecting data through the observation of the child's relationship with toys and games, such as the child's attitude at the time of the game, his position in the office, the choice of toys, among other observations (WERLANG, 2000).

Children who are abused at home have difficulties in talking directly about what they feel and experience internally and, through projective instruments, they can symbolically express how dangerous and harmful the experience of domestic violence can be for their mental health (TARDIVO; PINTO JR.; SANTOS, 2005).

In Brazil, there are children's psychometric instruments that can be used both in statistical research and in clinical investigations, and used exclusively by professional psychologists, in order to enrich the investigation of the results of exposure to violence in childhood. Projective techniques characterize a strong resource in the context of Psychological Assessment, enabling the manifestation of unconscious aspects, providing adequate intervention (TARDIVO, 2010).

An example of these instruments is the Children's Apperception Test (CAT), a projective psychological test that is very useful to psychologists when it comes to the diagnosis and treatment of various children's clinical disorders, which includes the repercussion of traumatic situations experienced by the child, such as negligence, abuse, abandonment, mistreatment and loss. It is used to determine the causes of children's reactions in groups, schools and in the face of family events (FREITAS, 2000).

The CAT-A (Child Apperception Test with Animal Figures) is considered an effective technique in the psychological understanding of children who are victims of domestic violence. The CAT-A can symbolically communicate the type of anxiety developed by victimization (TARDIVO, 2010).

The Döss Fables test is another projective test pointed out as an effective technique in an in-depth investigation of the conflicts experienced by children who are victims of domestic violence. The test consists of ten small fables, easy for children to understand, through which children can externalize their desires, fears, needs and thoughts as if they

were not theirs (TARDIVO; PINTO JR.; SANTOS, 2005). The instrument presents a problem-situation to be solved by the examinee, who may not express any conflict, or associate the solution with his/her daily life problems and conscious and unconscious conflicts (CUNHA; WERLANG; ARGIMON, 2000).

The Drawing of the Human Figure is a very frequent instrument in psychological assessment, since it is from its drawing that the subject expresses himself and the way he sees the other (SILVA et al., 2010). This test is presented in a validation study in children and adolescents who are victims and without suspicion of being victims of Domestic Violence in several regions of Brazil, to offer its standardization in the area of child domestic violence (TARDIVO, 2010). The instrument can be applied to assess child development, personality, emotional adjustment and anxiety of the child (HUTZ; BANDEIRA, 2000).

The use of the Drawing of the Person in the Rain technique is not yet authorized in Brazil. However, there are attempts to revalidate it, since it is considered a useful technique in assessing the dimension of the conflict and the fragility of the subject in the face of stressful situations, and can bring important elements in the detection of emotional conflicts (SILVA et al., 2010). Its use is suggested as a resource in the work of the judicial psychologist, as an auxiliary instrument in the process of child victims of domestic violence, considering that the technique can favor the explicit and direct revelation of bad and secret experiences of child abuse (VAGOSTELLO, 2007).

Another considerably important instrument in the identification of victims of violence in childhood is the Inventory of Phrases in the Diagnosis of Domestic Violence against Children and Adolescents (IFVD), which works based on various types of existing child violence. According to Tardivo (2010), the inventory is composed of 57 phrases that are simple to understand and require the child to answer if the phrases have to do with his life. The phrases do not directly deal with the experiences of victimization, but are related to the emotional, cognitive, social and physical disorders that the child can bring.

The instruments mentioned above are some of the various tools that the psychologist can use in the investigation to collaborate with the intervention and prevention of child abuse, and it is also essential to practice interviews and clinical observations as part of the process, since, according to Hutz and Bandeira (2000), no test can replace clinical judgment. And he can't even make a safe judgment about a personality without analyzing the specific context through other techniques.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study tends to confirm the initial hypotheses that children who experience indirect violence may develop problems during their development.

One of the limitations of the research was the number of articles found that did not mention indirect violence as one of the existing types of maltreatment.

Most of the articles found were mainly on sexual violence, to the detriment of other types of violence, which decreases the chances of obtaining more accurate data on the burden of experiencing violence indirectly, consequently reducing scientific knowledge and public awareness of these results.

In addition, in most articles, indirect violence was mentioned only as one of the multiple types of violence suffered in childhood, while only a few articles were exclusively focused on this subject, not allowing the scrutiny of current research.

Another limitation found was the fact that most of the articles found were international, and the data were collected from other countries, such as the United States, Canada, Colombia and Panama, which presupposes different results from the possible Brazilian results. Thus, new national research focusing on exposure to violence in childhood is suggested.

An important point is that the type of violence researched, as it has not been widely studied, did not have an official name, generating doubts in the way to research, since names such as "exposure to parental violence" were found; "having seen the mother being assaulted"; "abuse of bystanders"; "exposure to conjugal violence"; "witnessing a traumatic event"; "witnessing mistreatment of the mother"; or even "emotional abuse".

Some of the previous expressions make it clear that some research was carried out considering the assumption that only the mother/caregiver can suffer family violence, while the father/stepfather perpetrates it. However, caution should be exercised about this hypothesis, in order not to take it as a rule.

Another point to highlight is the fact that there is not only indirect violence in the family environment, which suggests research also in other environments frequented by children, such as school.

Adversities such as alcohol, crack and other drug abuse, early sexual intercourse (which can lead to early pregnancy, STDs, among other problems), mental health disorders, revictimization in adulthood and cognitive problems were related to the abuse of indirect violence in childhood, when the child witnesses violence between other people.

Many forms of psychological evaluation of these children are possible, and some have been made explicit, based on the idea that it is essential to respect the child's way of



expressing himself, and looking for the simplest and least invasive way to investigate each case.

In addition to suggesting techniques for psychological assessment of victimized children, these data contribute both to the beginning of new research and the development of intervention programs and prevention of indirect child violence, since it is necessary to make the population aware of child care, which is indispensable for the healthy development of the child.

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