

The Role of Nurses in Schools: Denaturalizing Violence Against Women Among Adolescents

A Atuação do Enfermeiro na Escola: Desnaturalizando a Violência Contra a Mulher entre Adolescentes

El Papel de las Enfermeras en las Escuelas: Desnaturalizando la Violencia Contra las Mujeres Adolescentes

RESUMO

Objetivo: A intervenção pedagógica realizada em uma escola estadual de Campinas, interior de São Paulo, avaliou o conhecimento de alunos do ensino médio sobre a violência de gênero. **Método:** A metodologia, mediada por um enfermeiro educador, incluiu diagnóstico, questionários e rodas de conversa. **Resultados:** Inicialmente, embora todos conhecessem o tema, a compreensão sobre formas específicas de abuso era limitada, e apenas 63% acreditavam na igualdade de direitos, resistência ligada ao machismo estrutural e à dissonância cognitiva. Os resultados pós-intervenção foram expressivos: 88,9% dos estudantes passaram a identificar situações de violência e 96,3% sentiram-se preparados para agir. Relatos colhidos expuseram realidades graves, como assédio por autoridades e controle comportamental. **Conclusão:** O estudo conclui que a educação é o instrumento vital para romper a naturalização do abuso, transformando percepções e capacitando os jovens para enfrentar a violência moral, psicológica e física, garantindo assim um futuro mais seguro para essas mulheres.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Enfermagem; Violência contra a mulher; Educação em saúde; Enfermeiros.

ABSTRACT

Objective: A pedagogical intervention conducted in a state school in Campinas, interior of São Paulo, in 2025 assessed the knowledge of high school students about gender-based violence. **Method:** The methodology, mediated by a nurse educator, included diagnosis, questionnaires, and group discussions. **Results:** Initially, although all students were familiar with the topic, their understanding of specific forms of abuse was limited, and only 63% believed in equal rights, a resistance linked to structural sexism and cognitive dissonance. The post-intervention results were significant: 88.9% of the students were able to identify situations of violence, and 96.3% felt prepared to act. Collected accounts revealed serious realities, such as harassment by authority figures and behavioral control. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that education is the vital instrument to break the normalization of abuse, transforming perceptions and empowering young people to confront moral, psychological, and physical violence, thus ensuring a safer future for these women.

DESCRIPTORS: Nursing; Violence against women; Health education; Nurses.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Una intervención pedagógica realizada en una escuela pública de Campinas, interior de São Paulo, evaluó el conocimiento de estudiantes de bachillerato sobre la violencia de género. **Método:** La metodología, mediada por una enfermera educadora, incluyó diagnóstico, cuestionarios y discusiones grupales. **Resultados:** Inicialmente, si bien todos los estudiantes estaban familiarizados con el tema, su comprensión de las formas específicas de abuso era limitada, y solo el 63% creía en la igualdad de derechos, una resistencia vinculada al sexismo estructural y la disonancia cognitiva. Los resultados posteriores a la intervención fueron significativos: el 88.9% de los estudiantes pudo identificar situaciones de violencia, y el 96.3% se sintió preparado para actuar. Los testimonios recopilados revelaron realidades graves, como el acoso por parte de figuras de autoridad y el control conductual. **Conclusión:** El estudio concluye que la educación es el instrumento vital para romper la normalización del abuso, transformando las percepciones y empoderando a los jóvenes para enfrentar la violencia moral, psicológica y física, asegurando así un futuro más seguro para estas mujeres.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Enfermería; Violencia contra las mujeres; Educación para la salud; Personal de enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a historical phenomenon, sustained by patriarchal and sexist structures that normalize gender inequalities and legitimize abusive practices in various social settings, including the school environment⁽¹⁾.

The school environment, as a place of socialization and value formation, is not exempt from the reproduction of such behaviors. In these institutions, violence can manifest in various forms—physical, psychological, moral, or sexual—affecting female students and teachers in particular^(2,3).

Studies indicate that this violence is linked to the cultural construction of female sexuality, marked by objectification and submission, a legacy of patriarchal colonization in Brazil that has persisted for centuries⁽⁴⁾. Furthermore, despite legal advances and protective policies, gender-based violence persists, reinforcing the urgency of implementing educational practices that promote gender equality and challenge these oppressive structures⁽⁴⁾.

The lack of clear guidelines on gender, sexuality, and violence in official educational documents, such as the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC), hinders the critical address-

ing of these issues in everyday school life⁽⁵⁾. It is worth noting that school violence directed at girls and adolescents tends to intersect with gender-based violence, reinforcing stigmas and amplifying vulnerabilities⁽⁵⁾.

On the other hand, intersectoral initiatives involving schools, families, and health services have proven effective in promoting a culture of peace and addressing situations of violence through educational workshops, conflict mediation, and community strengthening⁽⁶⁾.

Discussing violence against women in the school setting, therefore, is essential for challenging discriminatory

Experience Report

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practices, promoting more equitable relationships, and ensuring that girls and women have the right to a safe education. Furthermore, addressing this issue with younger generations helps shift mindsets and cultural norms in society at large, sowing the seeds of social transformation in the fight against sexism.

Given this context of vulnerability and the lack of structured discussions on gender in schools, the motivation arose to carry out a university outreach activity focused on preventing violence against women in the school environment.

Believing in the potential of health education to catalyze change, the outreach team—composed of undergraduate nursing students and a faculty advisor—proposed an educational intervention at a public high school in the city of Campinas, São Paulo, with a focus on raising students' awareness and sensitivity to the issue. Below, we reflectively describe this experience, its stages, challenges, impressions, and the lessons learned from the practical implementation of the project.

METHOD

This is a descriptive and exploratory study based on an experience report that describes a pedagogical intervention carried out at a state-run public high school serving young people from all regions in the city of Campinas, in the interior of the state of São Paulo (SP), during the second semester of 2025. The target audience was a class of 27 students in their second year of high school.

The method consisted of three main stages: planning and situational diagnosis, implementation of the outreach activity, and evaluation of the results obtained.

During the planning and situational diagnosis stage, a visit was made to the school. Through conversations with the class's teachers, the need to

address the topic was identified. Situational diagnosis consists of a critical and systematic analysis of the reality of a health facility or community, going beyond simple data collection. Its objective is to identify not only health problems and needs, but also the causes, critical issues, and local potential to inform decision-making⁽⁷⁾.

The implementation involved organizing a session on the topic of violence against women, which included a pre-test questionnaire, a presentation of the topic, open dialogue, a discussion circle, and a post-test questionnaire; and an evaluation, which used the questionnaire results to validate conceptions regarding the topic before and after the class and group activity, all while ensuring that no sensitive data was collected.

As this is an experience report, the study does not require review by a Research Ethics Committee. However, the principles of CNS Resolutions No. 466/2012 and No. 510/2016 were respected^(8,9).

RESULTS

School is a place for socialization and the development of values. Based on this, nurses, as health educators, can contribute not only to the prevention of violence but also to the establishment of a culture of respect, citizenship, and equality.

The issue identified through the situational diagnosis was that the topic of violence against women is still underreported, and its various forms have not yet been fully addressed.

From the data analyzed, it was observed that the students answered the questions posed to them without hesitation. Regarding gender, more than half identified as female.

Regarding the questions, all participants stated that they had already heard about violence against women and acknowledged that this type of violence can also occur in the school

environment. These two responses prompted important reflections on the recognition of gender-based violence.

Recognition of gender-based violence, as well as the identification of its multiple forms (physical, psychological, moral, sexual, and economic), is the first and most important step toward breaking the cycle of violence, as it demystifies the abuse and enables access to the protection and support mechanisms established by law⁽¹⁰⁾.

In addition to recognizing gender-based violence, it is necessary to name and identify the violence in order to rebuild the victim's autonomy and self-esteem, allowing them to free themselves from isolation and guilt, and to actively pursue justice and the guarantee of their human rights⁽¹¹⁾.

The responses indicated that the identification of types of violence was still lacking. Therefore, we have already addressed this issue here by presenting the most well-known types of violence. Property-related violence came as a general surprise; that is, few participants were aware that it existed.

Economic violence is unknown not only to students but also to the general population. The 2025 Atlas of Violence lists the following types of violence against women: physical, psychological, sexual, neglect, multiple forms of violence, and other forms⁽¹²⁾. Economic violence is described as a silent obstacle⁽¹²⁾.

In the questionnaire section on gender equality, it was observed that just over half currently believed that men and women have the same rights.

This fact is linked to multiple factors. One of them is the functioning of the human mind, which processes new information based on what is already established. If a new idea clashes with the existing belief structure, the tendency is to reject it to maintain internal coherence^(13, 14, 15).

Not believing in gender equality, above all, may be related to structur-

al machismo, in which people do not want to believe in facts that threaten their social identity—for example, the role of women as caregivers or homemakers—or, to maintain the cohesion of the group to which they belong (political, religious, professional), it is easier not to believe. Disbelief serves as a psychological defense against the threat⁽¹⁶⁾.

Furthermore, disbelief in equal rights stems from the fact that women have been unprotected for centuries—why would this be the moment for protection? As a result, this yields an adaptive and rational response to a history of discrimination and exploitation by the very institutions that should serve to protect them⁽¹⁷⁾. This disbelief is often justified by direct experience of barriers, neglect, or microaggressions in institutional settings⁽¹⁸⁾.

Disbelief in gender equality may also align with what Freire noted: for individuals facing daily violence, the urgency of a long-term problem or a distant threat may be deprioritized in relation to immediate survival needs; here, disbelief is a matter of contextual priority⁽¹⁹⁾.

As the questionnaire unfolded, immediately following the presentation and discussion, most students responded that they can identify situations of gender-based violence within the school. Although it is a hard lesson to learn, recognizing violence and identifying it as wrong is a sign that learning has taken place—that is, a measure of pedagogical success⁽²⁰⁾.

Subsequently, most students felt better prepared to act in the face of a violent situation; they also reported that the conversation helped them reflect on disrespectful behaviors in daily life.

Finally, in their responses to the two open-ended questions about reflecting on violence against women that may occur in the school environment, students were able to share their

experiences, knowledge, criticisms, praise, or suggestions. The most striking examples were:

“When a girl ‘rejects’ a man’s advances and he insults her in front of everyone, calling her a ‘whore,’ ‘slut,’ or ‘loose.’”

“Honestly, I see a lot of boys spreading rumors after a breakup that affect the girl’s confidence and integrity.”

Such acts seek to discredit, humiliate, and socially isolate women, attacking their honor and image. In the first case, it is a punitive reaction to rejection (a desire to control the female body and sexuality); in the second, it is a way to perpetuate control and power over the ex-partner. Psychological violence, often underestimated, is the most common type and is the first step toward escalating aggression⁽²¹⁾.

“I once witnessed a colleague’s boyfriend forbidding her from wearing shorts.”

This prohibition reflects the normalization of ownership and the belief that the partner has the right to dictate the woman’s standards of conduct and appearance. This restricts the woman’s individual freedom and autonomy over her own body and her choices. It is a control tactic that often precedes social isolation and other more serious forms of violence, such as financial abuse, where the person begins to control the partner’s life, money, and friendships⁽²²⁾.

“When a teacher ‘accidentally’ brushes a student’s hand.”

Sexual violence is not limited to rape; it includes any act that forces a woman into unwanted sexual practices or physical contact, such as sexual harassment. The teacher’s conduct constitutes an exploitation of the student’s vulnerability and a serious breach of institutional trust. Gender-based violence, in this context, is facilitated by the aggressor’s (teacher’s) position of power over the victim (student), which hinders reporting due to fear of academic reprisal or dis-

crediting⁽²³⁾.

Analysis of the results demonstrates that the pedagogical intervention played a catalytic role in breaking historic silences within the school environment. Although violence against women was a topic known in general terms, the students’ initial difficulty in naming specific forms of abuse—such as economic and psychological violence—highlights how structural machismo operates through invisibility. The resistance of a portion of the students to accepting equal rights reinforces that the school environment is not an isolated bubble, but a reflection of the psychological and social barriers that protect the patriarchal status quo.

However, there was an increase in the ability to identify abusive situations following the intervention, and the students’ reported readiness to take action confirms that critical learning is the primary antidote to the normalization of abuse. The accounts shared by students regarding control over clothing, post-breakup defamation, and harassment by authority figures show that gender-based violence in schools is an everyday and multifaceted phenomenon. By labeling these acts as “wrong,” students cease to be passive spectators and begin a process of ethical internalization that is indispensable for citizenship.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that schools are a strategic arena for addressing gender-based violence. The role of professionals, such as nurses and educators, is vital for denaturalizing abuse, naming the various forms of violence, and rebuilding victims’ autonomy. The education of new generations thus emerges as the indispensable path toward a profound shift in the culture of the population.

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APPENDICES

Image 1 – In the background, a slide presented during the Q&A session for immediate intervention; in the foreground, a copy of the participation certificate.

