

## Original article

### Violence against women: perspective of the man from Northern Minas Gerais

#### *Violência contra a mulher: perspectiva do homem norte-mineiro*

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### Abstract

**Objective:** to analyze the perception of men from Minas Gerais about the phenomenon of violence against women. **Materials and Methods:** a descriptive research was carried out, with a qualitative, quantitative and cross-sectional approach. The sample consisted of 100 men residing in cities in the north of Minas Gerais, aged 18 years or older. A questionnaire prepared by the researchers was used as an instrument, consisting of 22 questions. The quantitative data were interpreted from the scores obtained through the Google Forms tool and for the qualitative data, Bardin's Content Analysis was used. This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee with Opinion n. 4.927.193. **Results:** men demonstrate knowledge about the types of violence against women, Maria da Penha Law, facilitating environments and possible perpetrators of aggression. However, the sexist and patriarchal bias regarding the gender roles presented by their responses was noticeable, which are the basis for the perpetuation of gender violence. **Conclusion:** this research showed that there was an advance in the men's understanding about the different forms of violence; however, a position based on sexist and patriarchal conceptions is perceived.

**Keywords:** Violence against women. Women. Masculinities.

### Resumo

**Objetivo:** analisar a percepção de homens norte-mineiros sobre o fenômeno da violência contra a mulher. **Materiais e Métodos:** foi realizada uma pesquisa descritiva, com abordagem qualitativa, quantitativa e corte transversal. A amostra foi composta por cem homens residentes em cidades norte-mineiras, com idade igual ou superior a 18 anos. Utilizou-se como instrumento um questionário elaborado pelas pesquisadoras, composto por 22 questões. Os dados quantitativos foram interpretados a partir dos scores obtidos através da ferramenta Google Formulários e para os dados qualitativos, empregou-se a Análise de Conteúdo de Bardin. Esta pesquisa foi aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa com o parecer n. 4.927.193. **Resultados:** os homens demonstram conhecimento acerca dos tipos de violência contra a mulher, Lei Maria da Penha, ambientes facilitadores e possíveis autores de agressão. Contudo, foi perceptível o viés machista e patriarcal acerca dos papéis de gênero apresentados por eles nas respostas, os quais são base para a perpetuação da violência de gênero. **Conclusão:** a partir desta pesquisa, notou-se que houve um avanço quanto à compreensão dos homens acerca das diversas formas de violência, entretanto, percebe-se um posicionamento pautado em concepções machistas e patriarcais.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência contra a Mulher. Mulheres. Masculinidades.

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## Introduction

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization as:

[...] the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of violence is associated with notions of constraint, use of physical superiority over the other, conflicts of authority, struggles for power, will to dominate, possession and annihilation of the other or their goods<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the nature of violence, it can be classified as: **Physical violence:** use of physical force to produce injuries, trauma, pain and disability in another person. **Sexual violence:** is an act/game that aims to stimulate the victim or use them to obtain sexual arousal in sexual practices, under intimidation. **Psychological violence:** occurs through verbal/gestural aggressions in order to terrorize, humiliate, frighten, restrict freedom or provoke social isolation. **Neglect, abandonment and deprivation of care:** presented by absence, refusal of attention and care to others<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to the types of nature of violence mentioned above, the Maria da Penha Law (Law 11.340/06), which aims to curb and prevent domestic and family violence against women, exposes two other forms: **Property violence:** characterized by withholding, subtracting and partially or totally destroying the objects/instruments of work, personal documents, goods, values and rights or economic resources. **Moral violence:** occurs through attitudes of slander, defamation or insult<sup>4</sup>.

This discussion addresses gender violence, specifically practiced against women and its definitions, in addition to historical contextualization. Butler<sup>5</sup> understands gender as a result of the “cultural meanings assumed by the sexual body, it cannot be said that it stems from a sex in this or that way”, being then the meaning assumed by the body. For the Ministry of Health, gender constitutes a collective cultural construction of the attributes of masculinity and femininity, while sex defines the biological characteristics of each individual<sup>6</sup>.

According to Minayo<sup>2</sup>, violence against women consists of “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, emotional or suffering for women, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of freedom, whether in public or private life”.

To understand the phenomenon of violence, it must be analyzed from the perspective of

Silva AGC, Oliveira MM.

gender, that is, to investigate the power relations and cultural characteristics related to social roles and their biological peculiarities. From the understanding of this phenomenon, it is observed that violence against women originates from a factor distinct from the others, that is, it is based on expressions of inequalities based on the condition of sex, being violent acts existing due to asymmetric relations of power that permeate the daily life of the female figure<sup>2,7</sup>.

As described by Muniz and Fortunato<sup>8</sup>, the woman was seen in Brazilian society as an object under male possession, as fragile and incapable, her functions were reproductive and domestic care. The man had the duties of head of household and possession of savings. Thus, the social scenario has always been marked by the sexual division of labor. Men were responsible for public space and women for private space<sup>9</sup>.

Nevertheless, transformations occurred in this reality, mainly from the feminist movements, which began the search for equality between genders. This generated changes, such as the recognition in the Constitution of the Republic that everyone is equal before the law. Sexist ideas, despite all cultural transformation, remain present in modern society and women are seen as property and objects in both social and domestic environments<sup>8</sup>.

Still in this perspective, patriarchy is understood as the regime of domination-exploitation of women by men, which must be understood as a political structure of hierarchization stratified in gender. Coming from many roots, including cultural, is exercised over women, and violence reflects this view of superiority of the male figure. Its perpetuation, as social control of men towards women, occurs through socialization from childhood. In this way, conceptions are understood as natural because this is how they are conveyed<sup>8,10,11</sup>.

It is essential to promote the defamiliarization and consequent naturalization of practices that produce and reproduce gender inequalities in society, which propagate various forms of discrimination, including the practice of violence against women<sup>12</sup>.

Bandeira<sup>7</sup> addresses that prevention and care for violence against women require multidisciplinary reflections and actions that have a direct effect on the structure and conjuncture of the social context. Measures should be proposed and discussed in order to break the dominant paradigm, re-signify social roles, and deconstruct the gender hierarchy in which one subjugates to the detriment of the other. Since it is a historical-social process, its deconstruction must begin from the understanding of the female stereotype in society<sup>9</sup>.

It is necessary to recreate cultural actions whose generation based on patriarchal society does not perpetuate oppressive and harmful elements to gender elements. It is necessary that men

Silva AGC, Oliveira MM.

have the opportunity to deconstruct beliefs and moral values that have been incorporated and based on prejudices and discrimination against women<sup>13,14</sup>.

In this sense, the dimension of violence encompasses men perpetrators, through discussions, research, policies and prevention actions. Notably, the assimilation of possible aggressive behaviors, related variables and possible risk factors may help to anticipate and prevent such behaviors and, therefore, constitute important resources for intervention and prevention<sup>15,16</sup>.

Therefore, in view of the process of naturalization of violent practices against women, this research seeks to analyze the phenomenon of violence and its various manifestations against the female gender from the male perspective, aims to mark the presence of historical, cultural and social elements regarding the men's understanding of violence, understanding the process of naturalization of gender violence, in order to contribute to the denaturalization of these practices, and provoke the men's understanding about the theme. In short, the objective is to analyze the perception of men from Northern Minas Gerais about the phenomenon of violence against women.

## Materials and Methods

This is a cross-sectional study, descriptive in nature and with a qualitative and quantitative approach. The survey was conducted in cities in north of Minas Gerais with 100 men aged 18 years or older.

The instrument used was a questionnaire prepared by the researchers themselves on the Google Forms platform, set out in three sections that totaled 20 mandatory questions, six of which were sociodemographic, two discussion questions and twelve closed questions related to the proposed theme. Four categories of analysis were constructed: female representation from the male perspective, social representations of the male gender, understanding of the man about violence against women and legal aspects and the attitudes of men towards the phenomenon of violence

The questionnaires returned 111 responses, of which 11 were excluded, two due to participants not agreeing with the Informed Consent Form, six because they were female and three because they lived in cities that are not in the mesoregion of Northern Minas Gerais. The participants were approached from the sharing of the survey link in groups of social networks: WhatsApp and Facebook, in which the researchers have profiles, using the Snowball technique, which consists of identifying a first participant, who will indicate new participants and so on<sup>17</sup>.

The data obtained through the Google Forms tool referring to the multiple choice questions were classified and organized statistically in the descriptive model, through the Microsoft Excel

Silva AGC, Oliveira MM.

program and the statistical elements were analyzed and presented through tables. In the open questions, the interpretation was performed through the technique of content analysis according to Bardin's theory<sup>18</sup> by the criterion of similarity of the answers. Data were collected during the months of August to September 2021.

## Ethical care

The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculdades Unidas do Norte de Minas with Opinion n. 4.927.193.

## Results

According to Table 1, referring to age groups, most of the participating men were aged between 25 and 34 years (n=39). Of these, the most common marital status was single (n=61). Concerning schooling, most participants have completed higher education (n=36). Regarding the participants' profession, the prevalence was of formal workers (n=59). In relation to the cities in which they reside, Montes Claros predominated (n=58), and the other residents of 20 other cities in Northern Minas Gerais.

**Table 1** - Sociodemographic data of the participants. Northern Minas Gerais, Brazil.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Age</b>	
18-24 years	32
25-34 years	39
35-44 years	21
45-54 years	4
55-64 years	3
65 or more	1
<b>Schooling</b>	
Elementary School	2
Incomplete High School (attending)	3
Complete High School	34
Incomplete Higher Education	25
Complete Higher Education	36
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	61
Married	30
Stable union	6
Separated or divorced	3

Widower	0
<b>Profession</b>	
Student	17
Formal worker	59
Informal worker	16
Unemployed	7
Retired	1
<b>City</b>	
Montes Claros	58
Other cities in Northern Minas	42

For a better understanding of the qualitative data, four categories of analysis were constructed: female representation from the male perspective, the social representations of the male gender, men's understanding of violence against women and legal aspects and men's attitudes towards the phenomenon of violence.

In the qualitative study, the category "Female representation from the male perspective" provides subsidies to interpret the understanding of men about the representation of women in society, as illustrated by the speeches of the participants:

*P3: A normal human being, with qualities and defects like any other. Maybe some are more emotionally fragile.*

*P6: Sensitivity, responsibility, protection and, finally, the basis of the family.*

*P8: Mother, partner, maintainer, warrior.*

*P17: A human being like any other, but who suffers socially because the male figure feels superior.*

*P26: The family basis.*

*P46: Usually someone like me, a male figure. I believe that it is necessary to have political, legal and social equality, and the same rights, it should not be a claim, but an obvious obligation. I spoke of the context of equality, because many men practice violence, whether in the physical, sexual or psychological sphere, because they think they are superior, presenting a mentality that has been established many times culturally.*

*P85: A being equal to man in rights, but with different duties due to their physical, emotional characteristics.*

*P90: Weaker sex that should be more respected!*

When considering Table 2, it is observed that the male attribution selected by the majority of the participants was that of being provider and maintainer of the home and the characteristics most attributed to gender are: strong, confident and fearless.

**Table 2** - Social representations of the male gender. Northern Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Variables	n
<b>Select below which assignments you consider male:</b>	
Provider and housekeeper	82
Build and repair/make repairs	78
Take care of children	72
Wash, iron and cook	65
<b>What characteristics do you think are masculine?</b>	
Strong, confident and fearless	79
Expressive and thoughtful	69
Independent, objective and practical	59
Feeling afraid in certain situations and crying	52
Sensitive and delicate	42
Competent, financially successful and sexually imposing	40

Regarding participants' understanding of violence against women, it was found that:

*P6: Violence against women consists of physical or verbal aggression, where the woman is placed as inferior!!*

*P41: Violence that occurs due to the false belief of male superiority or the feeling of possession that men have over women.*

*P59: A with structural bases. The inequality in power relations between men and women has its historical roots that echo in society, for a long time the woman was treated as a man's property, and this happened from the patriarchy that objectifies the female body. By seeing the woman as property, the man thinks he has the right to violate her, whether physically or psychologically, among other possible violations of women's dignity.*

*P95: When talking about violence against women, many understand it only as physical violence. Yes, there is physical violence, but there are also other types of violence. Moral violence, belittling the female figure, oppressing, abusing, demotivating, psychological manipulation, etc.*

Regarding the quantitative data of this category, expressed in Table 3, it is explicit that the type of violence against women known by the participating men is physical violence (n=99). Concerning witnessing any situation of violence against women, most (n=72) participants in this

research said they had already witnessed. As for the author of violent acts, in the participants' perception, it is the spouse (n=86), and on the facilitating environment for the occurrence of violence, most men (n=89) selected the residence. In relation to the type of help to be sought by the author, psychological help was the most pointed (n=89). However, when asked about the first attitude of the victim of violence, most (n=34) selected the search for official bodies.

**Table 3 - Men's understanding of violence against women. Northern Minas Gerais, Brazil.**

Variables	n
<b>What types of violence against women do you know?</b>	
Physical violence	99
Moral violence	95
Sexual violence	94
Psychological violence	89
Traffic of women	75
Property violence	62
<b>Have you ever witnessed any situation of violence against women?</b>	
Yes	72
No	20
Maybe	8
<b>In your opinion, who most commits violent acts against women? *</b>	
Husband	86
Boyfriend	72
Boss	52
Groom	49
Hookup	45
Relatives	42
Men walking on the street	40
Men and women practice violence against women	35
Coworkers	35
Religious leaders	33
The elderly	12
Did not agree with any alternative	5
<b>What environments do you consider facilitators for the occurrence of violence against women?</b>	
At home (domestic)	89
Parties/bars	68
Streets	52
Job	50
Large agglomerations	46
School	25
Parks	22



<b>What should the male aggressor do to avoid violent acts?</b>	
Psychological help	89
Support groups	51
Talk to family and/or friends and seek out religious centers	40
Social assistance	31
Seek the police	17
I can't answer	7
<b>What is the first attitude a woman should take in a situation of violence?</b>	
Report	34
Find the Women's Police Station	31
Call the police	25
Chat with friends and family	5
Talk to the aggressor	3
Others	2

As expressed in Table 4, most participants are aware of the Maria da Penha Law (n=90), and most (n=93) are in favor of it. Regarding the factors that contribute to the maintenance of violence against women, it was found that patriarchy and sexism (n=83) are the main ones. Moreover, according to the majority (n=34), educational programs for men would help reduce violence against women.

**Table 4** - Legal aspects and men's attitudes towards the phenomenon of violence. Northern Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Variables	n
<b>Do you know the Maria da Penha Law?</b>	
I know something about	59
I know a lot about the Law	31
I've heard of, but my knowledge is limited	10
<b>What is your position in relation to the Maria da Penha Law?</b>	
In favor	93
Neutral	6
Against	1
<b>In your view, what contributes to the maintenance of violence against women?</b>	
Patriarchy and machismo	83
Cultural and historical issues	66
Men's power	38
Men lack information	30
Women must obey men	6
This is common and won't change	2
<b>What do you think would minimize violence against women?</b>	

Educational programs aimed at men	34
Punish the perpetrator of aggression	27
Arrest the perpetrator of aggression	23
Avoid contact with violent men	6
Others	7
I'm unable to answer	3

## Discussion

According to the 2010 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the male population of the northern cities of Minas Gerais was 412,443 people<sup>19</sup>.

In the patriarchal system, it is evident the understanding of men's dominance over women to the extent that they place themselves above them, in a position of superiority, they nullify their initiatives and singularities and invalidate their social representativeness by reducing their tasks to domesticity exclusively<sup>20</sup>.

Although there are timid changes in this scenario, they are still required to pay greater attention to the care of their children and the perfection of home<sup>21-23</sup>. Therefore, the maternal function of submission and inferiority that permeates the feminine universe is still present in the discourses of men.

For Beauvoir<sup>20</sup>, the under-representation of women is a reflection of the conditions and patriarchal relations in which they live daily, is linked to the culture of subordination and silence that was historically imposed on them in gender education, values that underestimate them, that disqualify their opinion and discourage their exercise as a citizen subject, as expressed in the participants' report.

Social representation is the transcription of reality, which is built through constant changes, different looks and understandings<sup>24</sup>. Thus, there are social representations of gender that are present in the female and male figure in society.

Regarding the attributions considered masculine by the participants, although women are conquering the public space, that is, present in the labor market, politics and universities, the household chores are still mostly done by women, according to the answers given. The attributions listed as female were selected in a lower number when compared to those socially considered male by the participants<sup>25</sup>.

As for male characteristics, the results corroborate the social roles mentioned by Nóbrega *et al.*<sup>26</sup>, in which the man is seen as the figure of power and dominion that reinforces masculinity,

while the figure of the woman is represented by passivity, submission and victimization. However, the following characteristics: competent professional, financially successful and sexually imposing who are seen as man's role, obtained the lowest percentage.

According to Balbinotti<sup>27</sup>, cultural, sexist and patriarchal structuring values are directly associated with violence against women and social and rights inequalities. Thus, violence against women should be understood as a naturalized phenomenon in gender inequalities, as the basis of a patriarchal society, which is sustained through unequal relations (domination and submission) between men and women<sup>28</sup>. These relationships are manifested through the sexual division of labor, physical and psychological violence against women, as a way of maintaining male dominance over them<sup>29</sup>. Balbinotti<sup>27</sup> states that violence is shown as the most evident expression of male domination, as an affirmation of the virility and superiority of man over woman. Such aspects are observed in the speeches highlighted by the participants on the understanding of men about violence against women.

Therefore, violence against women is understood as all forms of rupture against their integrity and not only physical violence<sup>28</sup>. This can be evidenced from the statements when some claim to be a physical or psychological aggression.

Nevertheless, concerning the knowledge of the participating men about the types of violence against women, physical violence was unanimous among them, because when it comes to violence against women, it is common to associate only with physical aggression, but there are many types of violence, most of which not considered violent acts, being naturalized<sup>30</sup>.

About witnessing any situation of violence against women, there is the largest number of participants who have ever witnessed, which demonstrates the frequency with which this phenomenon occurs. According to data from the State Department of Justice and Public Security, extracted from the Storage of Integrated Information on Social Defense (SIDS) and the Record of Social Defense Events (REDS), between January 2018 and March 2021, 33,223 occurrences of domestic and family violence against women in the 89 cities of the northern region of Minas Gerais were recorded, through the Military Police, Civil Police, Military Fire Department and Prison System<sup>31</sup>.

In Brazil, perpetrators of aggression against women, whatever the nature of violence, are usually current or ex-partners with the victim. Thus, in most cases, the perpetrator is known and about 1/3 is unknown<sup>32</sup>. In this sense, the participants of this research demonstrated that men who have some relationship, whether affectionate or professional (husband, boyfriend, boss, groom, and

Silva AGC, Oliveira MM.

family) tend to practice violence against women, when compared to perpetrators of violence who do not have a bond (men who circulate on the streets), but this category obtained a higher percentage when compared to the answer keys: co-workers and religious leaders, in which, in both, the victim knows the aggressor.

According to Bueno *et al.*<sup>32</sup>, violence against women occurs in a public or private environment and in various contexts of daily life, however it often happens in the domestic environment. Among the participating men, this reality was confirmed, being this considered the environment of greater risk.

Bueno *et al.*<sup>32</sup> point to the family as the most sought help by women who suffered violence, followed by friends and church. As for seeking official bodies, there is a predominance of police stations specialized in assisting women, followed by ordinary police stations and Military Police. Nevertheless, when asking about the first attitude that women should take in a situation of violence, the answers showed prevalence in seeking help from bodies through reports against the aggressor, followed by seeking the Women's Police Station and finally, calling the police. The search for help by people living with the victim presented lower percentages, in which friends and family were more selected, followed by talking with the author of the aggression.

The approval of the Maria da Penha Law (Law 11,340/2006) is significant, because most participants are favorable. In force since October 2006, the Maria da Penha Law represents a milestone for this discussion by presenting several advances concerning women's right, the first to create effective measures to combat violence against women and to establish initiatives for the prevention, assistance and protection of women in this situation<sup>4</sup>.

According to the first article, every woman, regardless of class, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation, enjoys fundamental rights. Through Law 11,340/2006, women are assured of all opportunities and facilities to live without violence, to preserve physical and mental health and moral, intellectual and social improvement, as well as the conditions for the effective exercise of the rights to life, safety and health, which is accomplished by creating mechanisms to repress and prevent domestic and family violence against women<sup>4</sup>. However, the research has shown that a smaller portion has heard about the law, but has little knowledge about it.

Among the factors that contribute to the maintenance of violence against women, patriarchy and machismo appeared as the main ones for the maintenance of violence, which, according to Moura *et al.*<sup>33</sup>, are part of the mechanism of perpetuation of this phenomenon. In addition, they stated that this is due to cultural and historical issues that, in agreement with Veloso and Mendes<sup>34</sup>,

Silva AGC, Oliveira MM.

expose the social context as androcentric, discriminatory and does not recognize gender equality. Thus, the perpetrator of aggression is in an environment where the male domain is naturalized, a factor that is pointed out as the third cause of violence by men.

Marques and Batista<sup>35</sup> understand that, for the containment of the (re)incidence of violence against women, it is necessary to have actions that are aimed at the aggressor man in the perspective of education and accountability for the acts committed. In this sense, the participants agree that the creation of educational programs aimed at men is the main way to reduce violence. This corroborates item V of Art.35 and article 45 (single paragraph), which deal with the need to create centers for education and rehabilitation of aggressors, as well as the possibility for the judge to determine the mandatory attendance of the aggressor to programs of recovery and re-education of aggressors<sup>4</sup>. Punishing the perpetrator of the aggression presents itself as the second way to repress violence, followed by arresting the aggressor as the third most effective way. In this sense, Art. 44 stipulates as a penalty for the offender detention from three months to three years.

Given the mechanisms defined by the Maria da Penha Law, it is noticeable that only punitive action does not promote the necessary changes to reduce the rates of violence against women. An articulation is necessary, involving the resignification of the male gender role, the promotion of rights and existences between men and women, as well as an educational work in schools and communities, aiming to guide the issues of gender and domestic violence<sup>35</sup>.

## Final Thoughts

This research showed that men understand the various forms of violence; however, their position is based on sexist and patriarchal conceptions, visible through the issues that were proposed to them, characteristics considered masculine and gender stereotype related to the cultural attributions of the masculine and the feminine.

It was explicit that the men's knowledge about the nature of violence is greater in terms of physical practice, being the other forms of manifestation less known, which would possibly go unnoticed by most of them in a context of violence against women.

More studies of this type are necessary, since this research presented as limitations its focus on men, authors or not of violence, since this can contribute to the men's understanding about the various types of violence against women and their manifestations, which would allow an understanding of how this phenomenon occurs, as well as factors related to it in order to reduce the rates of these occurrences.

The limitations of this research are related to the partial clipping in the sense that the reach did not allow representing all 89 cities in the north of Minas Gerais, interfering in the sample, which, in a way, was limited when considering the number of male inhabitants of the region. In addition, in the construction of the questionnaire was placed the option of religion in order to contextualize it with the phenomenon of violence against women; however, part of the responses referred to geographic regions, which compromised the result of this question, having to disregard it from the study.

Given the high rates of violence and the results obtained through this research, it is necessary to create and implement actions/intervention strategies focusing on these structuring elements and markers of the subalternity and superior position of some men in modernity to minimize violent acts against women and contribute to greater understanding of the phenomenon.

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Silva AGC, Oliveira MM.

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