

## Forensic nursing in the care of sexual crimes against women: Integrative review

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to investigate the role of the Forensic Nurse in the care of women who are victims of sexual crimes. **Methodology:** this is an integrative review carried out according to the steps proposed by Mendes, Silveira and Galvão. The data search was carried out through the descriptors: Forensic Nursing, Violence Against Women and Sexual Offenses. **Aspects:** Because this is an integrative literature review, there was no need for an evaluation by an ethics and research committee, but the ethical principles that respect the references and the laws of Copyright No. 9.610, of February 19, 1998 and No. 12.583, of August 14, 2013 were observed (Brazil, 1998; Brazil, 2012). **Results and Discussions:** The main themes found in the articles included in this IR were: the training of health professionals to care for women victims; women's perception of violence; social services offered to these women victims and what professionals in the area can contribute to the lives of these women. **Final Considerations:** The fundamental and crucial role played by Forensic Nurses in helping victims of sexual crimes is highlighted, with their clinical skills, nursing knowledge and communication skills with the victim and with the bodies responsible for the search for justice. It is hoped that the findings of the present study may contribute to improving the care that has been provided to women victims of sexual violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

Human violence is universally recognized as the leading cause of trauma in the field of health and public safety worldwide, and in these circumstances the Forensic Nurse stands out in the context of crime and justice. While the traditional image of the nurse refers to compassionate care and health care, the reality is that these professionals who work in the forensic area play a fundamental role in the interface between health and the law and their importance goes far beyond the administration of treatments and care to patients, it encompasses the collection of evidence, the preservation of the integrity of the victims and even the prevention of crimes (Freitas; Oguisso; Takashi, 2021).

Forensic Nursing recognizes violence and its associated traumas through a perspective of knowledge of nursing, health, human rights, social justice, and injustice. Like other professions that support victims of crime, the Forensic Nurse has a key role in ensuring that victims receive the attention and care they need during a time of extreme vulnerability. They play an important role in gathering evidence that can help bring perpetrators to justice, nurses also work to help victims recover physically and emotionally (Silva, J. de O. M, 2021).

In addition to the detailed examinations and the collection of forensic traces, Forensic Nursing is responsible for having a differentiated view of the victims, providing an improved service, a qualified reception and a look at the situation. As we delve deeper into this subject, the understanding and importance of the Forensic Nurse in crimes becomes evident, it is fundamental not only for the nursing community, but also for society as a whole (Freitas; Oguisso; Takasi, 2021).

Sexual violence is not just a sexual act, but any attempt to obtain sexual contact that coerces, intimidates or manipulates the victim. This violence can occur anywhere and be perpetrated by anyone, being more common in the domestic environment, workplace, and intimate relationships. Importantly, most bullies are family members, partners, and friends. Sexual violence can reflect physical, psychological and social consequences for women, perpetrators of sexual violence harm the mental and physical health of victims. In addition, this abuse affects the victims' social life, their ability to fight Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), an unwanted pregnancy, their ability to trust someone again, and especially their ability to live (Oliveira, 2021).

Nurses working with these victims must understand the harms caused by violence and reduce it. This includes supporting victims through Forensic Nursing, caring for women, and treating any problems left behind, both physical and psychological. This action is necessary to improve the emotional and social well-being of the whole family (Nascimento; Freitas, 2020).

The Forensic Nurse must have knowledge of the functioning of the legal system, be able to document, preserve and collect evidence, offer legal advice and support to the authorities and act in various situations. The professional now has consent and authorization for the collection of data and traces that can help in the police investigation of the possible crime, especially in cases of sexual and domestic violence (COFEN, 700/2022).

With the reformulation of the law, all crimes against sexual dignity are considered to be subject to unconditional public criminal action, that is, whatever the crime, whatever the victim. The police authority has the obligation to initiate the investigation and, if there are sufficient elements, the complaint must be filed (BRASIL, 2018).

Specialty nurse testimony is intended to help the jury better understand aspects of the case so that they can make informed decisions. Forensic Nursing aims to investigate all criminal investigations, being a recent specialty, but with the rise in Brazil arousing great notoriety among nurses who seek knowledge in this specialty (Furtado et al, 2021).

This study is important because Forensic Nursing plays a fundamental role in assisting victims of sexual crimes against women. This area of nursing combines nursing knowledge with the application of forensic science to collect, preserve and document evidence related to sexual crimes, and here the role of the Forensic Nurse in assisting women who are victims of violence is highlighted. In this sense, the research will be guided by the question: what is the role of the Forensic Nurse in assisting women who are victims of sexual crimes?

In summary, the present study aims to investigate the role of the Forensic Nurse in the care of women who are victims of sexual crimes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is an integrative review that will be developed according to the steps proposed by Mendes, Silveira and Galvão (2008) the integrative review is the analysis of relevant research that supports decision making and the improvement of clinical practice, enabling the synthesis of the state of knowledge of a given subject, this synthesis allows the research of multiple published studies and enables general conclusions about a particular area of study.

The authors Souza, Silva and Carvalho (2009) mention that it is the broadest methodological approach regarding reviews, allowing the inclusion of experimental and non-experimental studies for a complete understanding of the phenomenon analyzed, dealing with a study with data collection carried out from secondary sources, through a bibliographic survey and based on the experience lived by the authors on the occasion of an integrative review.

The first stage is the identification of the theme and selection of the hypotheses or research

question to prepare the integrative review, the second stage: I established the criteria for the inclusion of studies/sampling or search in the literature, third stage: I defined the information to be extracted and selected/categorization of the studies, fourth stage: I evaluated the studies included in the integrative review, fifth stage: I interpreted the results and in the sixth stage: I presented the review/synthesis of knowledge (Mendes; Scott; Galvão, 2008).

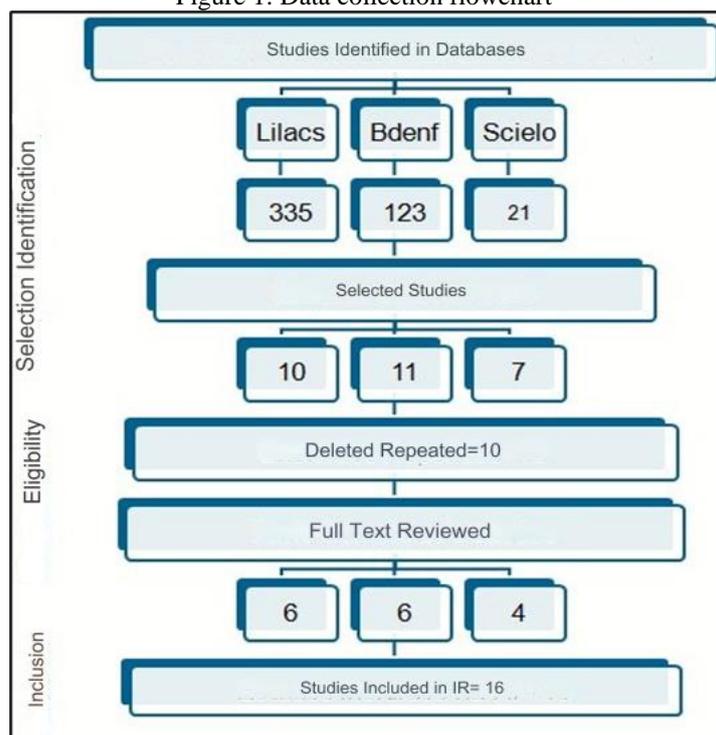
Thus, this study presents the following guiding question: what is the role of the Forensic Nurse in assisting women who are victims of sexual crimes?

Evidence-based practice involves the definition of a problem, the search for and critical evaluation of the available evidence, the implementation of the evidence in practice, and the evaluation of the results obtained (Mendes; Scott; Galvão, 2008).

This stage consists of selecting the criteria for selecting studies. In the present research, the following were included: original articles that answered the guiding question, resulting from primary research, published in the last 5 years (2019 to June 2024), free of charge, in Portuguese and available in full in the following databases: Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS), Nursing Database (BDENF) and Scientific Electronic Book Online (SCIELO). Review articles, theses, dissertations, course completion papers, articles from non-scientific journals, and reports from newspapers, manuals, and books were excluded.

The data search was carried out by crossing the following Health Sciences Search Descriptors (DeCS): Forensic Nursing, Violence Against Women and Sexual Offenses.

Figure 1: Data collection flowchart



Source: Souza, 2024

In this stage, the categorization of the studies was carried out, with the extraction of information, organization, summarization and formation of the database. According to Mendez, Silveira and Galvão (2008), in order to extract the data from the selected articles, it is necessary to use a previously prepared instrument capable of ensuring that all relevant data is extracted, minimizing the risk of transcription errors.

According to Souza, Silva and Carvalho (2009), the collection of data from secondary sources, through a bibliographic survey and based on the experience lived by the authors on the occasion of an integrative review. According to Mendes, Silveira and Galvão are analogous to the data collection stage of a conventional survey, the objective in this stage to organize and summarize the information in a concise way.

To this end, a guiding instrument developed by the author was used, which describes the identification of the article, the title, the authors, the year of the journal, the place of publication, the objective, the methodology, the main results and observations about the manuscript.

The stage of analysis and interpretation of the data corresponds to the discussion of the main results of the research. It is an approach that involved the search, analysis and synthesis of relevant studies in the literature. Allowing a more flexible approach to the inclusion of diverse types of studies, such as qualitative and quantitative research, reviews, and case studies. It offered a broad view of a field of research, allowed the consideration of a variety of perspectives and approaches, taking into account the diversity of methods and results (Mendes; Scott; Galvão, 2008).

To organize the selected studies, a synoptic table was used with the following information: article, title, authors, journal, year of publication and access link. The presentation phase of the review included critical analysis looking for explanations for the different or conflicting results in the different studies. The integrative method reduces exposure and comparison, as well as the conclusion and verification of data (Souza; Silva and Carvalho, 2009)

As this is an integrative literature review, there will be no need for an evaluation by an ethics and research committee, but the ethical principles that respect the references and the laws of Copyright No. 9,610, of February 19, 1998 and No. 12,583, of August 14, 2013 will be observed (Brazil, 1998; Brazil, 2013).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Articles A1 and A3 address the theme of the training of health professionals to care for women victims of violence, were cited by the thematic articles on the gender issue as promoting continuous debates, especially in the training of professionals who provide care to women, aiming to

dismantle machismo and the concepts that perpetuate gender inequality (SILVA, J.F e. et al., 2019; BRANCO et al., 2020).

According to a study published by the authors, they critically address the way genders are taught to women, mothers and adolescent daughters, with the aim of questioning and interrupting the passive acceptance of gender inequality. Primary health services are especially suitable for this initiative, as they are aimed at promoting well-being and preventing health problems (Machado et al., 2021).

With regard to articles A4, A10 and A13, the qualification of professionals is extremely important and necessary to provide shelter to women in situations of violence, and here there is a need to promote the complete registration of information in the notification/investigation form of this domestic violence. Through the qualification of health professionals, they become able to have perceptions of the occurrences of violence, being able to ask indirect questions to stimulate the verbalization of the episode of violence experienced, thus being able to have the dimension of the aggravation of the situation. Professionals will have a more welcoming approach that goes through prevention, diagnosis, intervention and coping actions with the disease, providing guidance and support and favoring the strengthening and empowerment of these women (MOTA; AGUIAR, 2020; SANTOS, C. A. dos. et al., 2022; GOMES et al., 2022).

In this context, as indicated by studies in the area, the importance of training professionals is emphasized, as a well-trained nurse strives to solve issues, helping to reduce the cycle of violence by preventing the complication of simple situations. It is essential that they are familiar with the resources available in the service network to ensure speed and effectiveness in care (Moreira et al., 2020).

In articles A4 and A8, it is necessary to include continuing education focused on the approach to sexual violence in the workload of health professionals, we perceive in the nurses' performance, a lack of preparation for them to deal with the situation of sexual crimes against women, many professionals are unaware of most of the reference services for referral of cases of violence that are presented in the unit, thus making it difficult to combat violence and crime (MOTA; AGUIAR, 2020; LIMA, et al., 2020).

Based on all phases of this study, the data show that nursing professionals not only represent the victims' first contact with the health system, but also constitute an important point of support for these patients. However, they face the consequences of the lack of preparation in the care of these women. The field research highlighted the nurses' commitment to the care of these victims, but made it clear that there is an urgent need to develop a hospital care protocol to make the reception phases more effective and appropriate (Santos; Silva, 2022).

Women's perception of violence was cited in articles A1, A2, and A4 in which it says that women point out that it would be necessary to change social perception and discuss sexism and machismo so that we can have a legal advance and guarantee adequate assistance to victims of crimes. Psychological violence ends up affecting women's body image, compromising their self-esteem at various times, this is a global health problem, which affects women at different ages and realities, violence against women can occur in different ways, including physical, psychic and sexual violence (SILVA, J. de O. M., 2021; CARNEIRO, J. B. et al., 2019; BIKE; AGUIAR, 2020).

In articles A5, A6 and A12, the theme of strategies for seeking help and coping with the problem is addressed. They also report that this violence against women, especially the act of assaulting and controlling women, causes forms of manifestation, such as psychological and physical violence, to be ignored. It cannot fail to emphasize that, in many cases, psychological violence is the most striking. The change in the vision of the professional and society in the face of crimes against women has to be radically changed, since society has imputed that women are always to blame for the facts that happen to them (BATISTELLI; LIMA, M. SOUZA, 2020; MOREIRA et al., 2020; SILVA, A. S. B. das. et al., 2022).

According to the published study, it is evident that sexual violence against women remains a widespread and substantial problem in the country, with many cases not being reported due to the high incidence of aggressions committed within the domestic environment by the partners themselves, which makes it difficult to report. One of the main causes of this problem is the intensification of inequalities in gender relations, resulting in serious psychological and physical damage to victims, with significant repercussions for society as a whole (SANTOS, S. R. N. et al. 2024).

Violence against women is a serious and complex issue, in which municipalities and states play a crucial role in combating this problem. This is evident in Article A1, which addresses the expansion of social services aimed at supporting women and the legal progress achieved. Despite the support available, many battered women still face significant difficulties in seeking help and filing complaints. It is essential to promote an encouraging environment in these institutions to increase women's participation and protection (SILVA, J. de O. M., 2021).

Based on articles A2, the nurse is in a favorable position to identify the disease, the first step to help the woman to break with this experience, but for these actions, it is also necessary to articulate with the educational, legal, police and social spheres. The Maria da Penha Law is very clear when it refers to punitive actions, as well as preventive ones, such articles are essential for men to recognize the criminal nature of their actions and for women to empower themselves, assuming themselves as the subject of their lives (CARNEIRO et al., 2019).

The Maria da Penha Law was a significant milestone in the protection of women who are victims of violence in Brazil. This legislation is a historic turning point, but it faces considerable challenges for its effects to be truly effective in eradicating violence against women. It is essential that there is public investment to ensure the implementation of policies that provide humanized care to women in situations of violence, and that all services are integrated into an effective support network. The fight against gender inequality and the various types of violence it perpetuates must be a priority in all government instances. These actions are fundamental to achieve significant advances in the issue of violence against women, reinforcing the themes discussed in previous texts (Carneiro et al., 2022).

In articles A3, A6, A7 and A8, it is crucial that services are structured to offer protection and care to women in situations of sexual violence, positioning themselves against the trend of reducing rights. In view of this reality, it is up to health services to identify cases of violence and provide assistance, meeting the victims in their specific needs, this flow has to be organized and the disarticulation of services, focusing on issues such as the revictimization of women and the fragmentation of care (BRANCO et al., 2020; MOREIRA, 2020).

The reality of the municipality, from the perspective of the professionals, signals a path to be followed in the search to overcome the gaps in the intersectoral network, articulating the services, qualifying the professionals and in the allocation of financial and human resources to respond to the complexity of sexual violence. Nursing professionals know important concepts about the theme of violence, but limited from the point of view of referral and tracking of its occurrence, having to have support from other agencies to perform excellent work (TRENTIN et al., 2020; LIMA et al., 2020).

The article reflects the study that addresses how the care of victims of sexual violence represents one of the great challenges for public health. This subject involves sexual violence, a subject recently recognized in its relationship with health, with two ancient and deeply linked practices of religious, moral and ethical significance: the violation of women's bodies. Facing this reality and guaranteeing women the right to health and autonomy over their bodies requires a continuous effort that has to be reviewed by various sectors of society (Batista et al., 2021).

Article A9 mentions the social distancing caused by COVID-19, which impacted the decrease in care for women victims of sexual violence that occurred in outdoor environments, such as on the streets, at parties and committed by unknown people, there was an intensification of sexual violence committed by family members or who had an affective relationship with the victim, In view of this, there is a need for strategies to combat violence against women in the post-pandemic period (SANTOS, D. G. et al., 2021).

This situation clearly highlights the urgent need for post-pandemic change, as there has been a significant increase in cases of domestic violence across the country. The pandemic has turned homes into places of cruelty, with social isolation increasing the continuous contact between victims and perpetrators, which makes it difficult for them to access outside help. These findings underline the importance of the measures taken to combat domestic violence during this period, the obligation of health professionals to report cases of aggression to the authorities. Temporary measures were implemented, such as the registration of police reports online or by telephone, and the authorization for police chiefs to decree emergency protective measures (Ferreira et al., 2021).

Articles A11, A12, A13, A15 and A16 reflect that the agencies also intervene in cases, through notification, assistance of the woman in the unit and referral to the network to combat violence against women, violence against women, which conditions its recognition and intervention to evidence of bodily harm and, in a way, It exempts the professional from investigating other common complaints that arise in primary health care, masking other forms of violence. The fear expressed by the professionals, added to the perception of violence against women circumscribed to physical violence, can hinder preventive and protective actions for women in the community, causing the omission of care, in addition to failure in the communication of the coping network. The results are relevant for care services for people in situations of sexual violence, since it generates greater knowledge, contributing to propositions that expand and qualify the offers of women's health care services. Actions can take place in any space of care and reception for women, such as consultations and reflective groups, the latter as it is a space that favors the sharing of experiences with the purpose of strengthening women to get out of violent relationships (CARNEIRO, J. B. et al., 2022; SILVA, A. S. B. das. et al., 2022; SAINTS. D. G. et al., 2002; LEITE et al., 2023).

The problem discussed below validates the importance of the theme related to women victims of violence, especially because this violence is often committed by people close to and known to the victim, and can result in a continuous cycle of aggression in various ways, not only physical. This highlights the need to understand what resources are available to these women and, even more crucially, to prepare the authorities and other public bodies to welcome them, especially when they do not have family support, as many are ashamed to be judged (Boscatti; Zanocco, 2024).

Nursing plays an extremely important role in the care of victims of sexual violence, since, through specialized care, nurses contribute to the recovery of self-esteem, mental health and quality of life of these women. Here are some relevant points on the subject taken from articles A2, health professionals can also use knowledge about the expressions of conjugal violence to support educational practices of women and men (CARNEIRO, J. B. et al., 2019).

As manifested in articles A3 and A4, the distancing of many professionals prevents them from recognizing support for women in situations of sexual violence as an integral part of their responsibilities. It is crucial that managers effectively incorporate care for women in situations of sexual violence into the service network, promoting multidisciplinary, collaboration between sectors and comprehensive care. Empathy on the part of nurses can enable sensitive and welcoming care, serving the victim in an equitable way; On the other hand, the absence of it by professionals during care can result in the removal of women from health services. The bond between the professional and the woman victim of sexual violence becomes essential to cope with violence and to establish a relationship of trust, respect and ethics in order to enable the victim to approach the victim for continuous care provided by the team was recognized for seeking to provide support and protection through listening and individualized care combined with procedures for disease prevention and health promotion (BRANCO et al., 2020; MOTA, AGUIAR, 2020).

This article echoes themes previously discussed, highlighting that, despite the challenges faced, such as the lack of nurses qualified in matters of violence, nursing plays a crucial role in the care of women victims of sexual violence. With sensitivity, empathy, adequate training, and collaborative work, nurses can play a key role in supporting and recovering victims, ensuring access to quality health care, and offering reliable support for the search for justice and the prevention of this type of violence (SILVA, E. A. de S. et al. 2024).

Articles A6, A11, A12 talk about sharing experiences of violence and how to ensure that the professional offers an accessible, private and empathetic listening environment, ensuring complete and inclusive care. It is important to emphasize that, even today, the arrival of women in health services is marked by a lack of privacy and discriminatory attitudes with the issuance of value judgments. There is also a fragile articulation between the services that make up primary health care and between the professionals who are part of the teams of the Health Centers, which compromises the protection of women who are victims of violence and contributes to their continued exposure, facing situations that are often mutilating, even though they are users of services that have the duty to protect them (MOREIRA et al., 2020; CARNEIRO, J. B. et al., 2019; SILVA, A. S. B. das. et al., 2021).

Even in the face of the nursing team's limited familiarity with the topic, it is crucial to highlight the essential role they play in ensuring that victims feel safe and welcome. This is essential to prevent them from abandoning treatment and, consequently, to reduce the damage suffered by these women (Santos; Silva, 2022).

Articles A13, A14 and A16 state that, in the perception of the professionals, women who did not receive care were susceptible to unfavorable outcomes, including death, while those who

received help were strengthened to break the violent relationship. The study allows professionals, especially health professionals, to understand abuse as a relational and complex event, which makes many women unable to break the relationship. When the reception is carried out, the service is carried out privately and as quickly as possible, starting with the collection of the history of violence and directing it to other professionals involved in the care and, when requested by the woman, to the body responsible for the examination of the body and delito. Com the application of the recommended conducts, respect for women in situations of sexual violence is a point that is often raised when dealing with the conducts carried out, in addition to the need for non-judgment on the part of the professional. In relation to the conducts developed by nurses, the importance of adopting protocols is highlighted, with "welcoming" occupying a prominent position; nurses, in their social representations, highlight the importance of changing the flow of care for women in the institution where they work, with the purpose of improving the humanization of care (CARNEIRO, J.B. et al., 2019; SANTOS, D. G. et al., 2021; HORNUNG. H. et al., 2023).

This analysis is in line with the cited article, as it highlights that the reception of women victims of violence is conducted by the nurse and her team, with an approach that respects the particularities of each case. This avoids any form of embarrassment or judgment on the part of the staff involved, making this approach an essential tool to gain the trust of patients. This care helps to strengthen their emotions, while clarifying their rights and the importance of reporting (Figueiredo; Silva, 2023).

In conclusion, the crucial role of the forensic nurse in the care of women who are victims of sexual crimes cannot be underestimated. In addition to providing specialized medical and emotional care, these professionals play a key role in gathering forensic evidence that can be essential for justice. Their empathetic and sensitive approach not only facilitates the victim's recovery process but also fosters an environment of trust and support crucial to overcoming trauma. Investing in the training and appreciation of these professionals is essential to ensure that all women have access to quality care and that their rights are fully respected in such delicate moments.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

From the present study, it was possible to determine the role of the Forensic Nurse in the care of women who are victims of sexual crimes. The main themes discussed in the articles included in this IR are: They address the theme of training health professionals to care for women victims; women's perception of violence; social services offered to these women victims and what professionals in the area can contribute to the lives of these women.

The fundamental and crucial role played by Forensic Nurses in helping victims of sexual crimes is highlighted, with their clinical skills, nursing knowledge and communication skills with the victim and with the bodies responsible for the search for justice. It is hoped that the findings of the present study may contribute to improving the care that has been provided to women victims of sexual violence.

This study was very pleasant to be done, the difficulty I expected would be the scarcity of specific data, but I was surprised by the rich materials found, making the limitations practically nil.

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