


## THE IMPORTANCE OF REPORTING IN CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ELDERLY

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### ABSTRACT

This study addresses violence against the elderly, highlighting the alarming prevalence in Brazil and the need for preventive actions. The aim is to explore the forms of violence, their consequences on the physical and mental health of older people, and the importance of reporting for effective interventions and protection policies. The methodology includes a literature review with analysis of scientific articles and medical books. The results indicate that violence against the elderly can be physical, psychological, financial and negligence and is more pronounced in the female elderly population. In addition, notification is crucial

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to implement protective measures and public policies, but it faces barriers such as fear, lack of knowledge about reporting channels, and social stigma. The discussion emphasizes the awareness of society and the training of health professionals to identify and report cases of violence. Ongoing training and clear reporting protocols are essential. It is concluded that notification is a fundamental tool for the protection of the elderly and that joint efforts between government, civil society and health professionals are necessary to make this practice effective and ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly.

**Keywords:** Violence against the elderly. Notification. Prevention.



## INTRODUCTION

Brazil will be the sixth country with the highest number of elderly people by 2025, according to estimates by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Thus, the problem of violence against the elderly has increased exponentially in Brazil. In the first four months of 2024, approximately 400 thousand human rights violations were recorded against this population, according to data from the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship. The Statute of the Elderly in its Chapter IV defines violence as: "any action or omission that causes death, damage or physical or psychological suffering" (Chapter IV, art. 19, §1), covering not only physical aggression, but also negligence, financial abuse, abandonment and psychological violence.

This increase in cases reflects both the aging of the population and the vulnerability of the elderly to different forms of mistreatment, often committed by close people, such as family members or caregivers. In addition, the underreporting of these abuses also aggravates the problem, since many victims, out of fear, financial or emotional dependence, fail to report it (Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, 2024). Thus, awareness of the rights of the elderly and the importance of reporting cases of violence are essential to combat this reality.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the feminization of old age is a growing phenomenon that attracts the attention of scholars such as Ramos (2003) and Freitas (2020). This term refers to the proportional increase of women in the elderly population. This trend stems from greater female longevity, influenced by factors such as greater adherence to preventive health care and healthier lifestyles throughout life (Lima-Costa et al., 2003). This phenomenon illustrates that the majority of the elderly population is made up of women. However, this female longevity brings with it specific challenges, such as a higher incidence of chronic diseases, a higher risk of widowhood and loneliness, as well as lower social and economic support compared to men (Kalache, 2021). These conditions make elderly women more vulnerable to situations of dependence and fragility, requiring public policies and health interventions that take into account the particularities of female aging.

The objective of this study is to analyze the types of violence against the elderly and the importance of notification as an essential tool for the protection of the elderly, promoting effective interventions and appropriate public policies.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The elderly population is differentiated by presenting its own characteristics in the health-disease process, with a higher incidence of multiple and chronic pathologies, such as diabetes, hypertension, kidney diseases and neurodegenerative diseases. The complexity of this condition causes the symptoms to result from interactions between the conditions, which can mask other diseases or make it difficult to treat different problems simultaneously.

In addition, the deterioration of functional capacities with advancing age and the impact of chronic diseases demand more intensive and specialized care for the elderly (Gusso, 2019). Thus, the factors mentioned make the elderly more vulnerable not only in the field of health, but also in social terms, which includes a greater susceptibility to violence. The increase in violence against the elderly is linked to this fragility, as dependence on intensive care and living with multiple pathologies can result in situations of abuse, neglect and mistreatment.

Although violence against the elderly is not a new situation, it has started to gain visibility and recent notifications. Studies show that, as the elderly become more dependent, power relations can emerge that culminate in violence, often perpetrated by family members or caregivers. There are estimates that 1 of 10 elderly suffer some type of abuse per month. Since 1 from 24 occurrences are reported, this estimate is believed to be underestimated (Gusso, 2019).

Although Law No. 10,778 of 2003 establishes the obligation for health professionals to carry out compulsory notification, throughout the national territory, of suspected or proven cases of care for victims of violence, the underreporting of violence against the elderly remains present in the current scenario. This underreporting compromises the understanding of the real prevalence of this form of abuse and the creation of effective public policies. Consequently, several factors contribute to underreporting, and scientific studies highlight both individual and systemic barriers that hinder reporting.

Individually, many older adults do not report abuse for fear of retaliation or emotional and financial dependence on the aggressor, who is often a family member or close caregiver. According to the author Gusso (2019), the affective bonds between victims and aggressors make reporting difficult, as the elderly may fear losing the support relationship, even if this relationship is abusive. Additionally, many seniors face cognitive and physical barriers that make it difficult to seek help, such as dementia, limited mobility, or social isolation. Stigma and shame can also be important factors that lead to concealment of abuse, especially when the abuse involves neglect or psychological violence.



In this sense, the National Policy for the Reduction of Accidents and Violence of the Ministry of Health (BRASIL, 2009) defines the main types of violence and establishes categories and typologies to designate the various forms of violence most practiced against the elderly population:

Physical abuse, physical mistreatment or physical violence: these are expressions that refer to the use of physical force to compel the elderly to do what they do not want to do, to hurt them, cause them pain, disability or death.

Psychological abuse, psychological violence or psychological mistreatment: correspond to verbal or gestural aggression with the aim of terrorizing the elderly, humiliating them, restricting their freedom or isolating them from social life.

Sexual abuse, sexual violence: these are terms that refer to the sexual act or game of a homo or hetero-relational nature, using elderly people. These abuses aim to obtain arousal, sexual intercourse, or erotic practices through enticement, physical violence, or threats.

Abandonment: it is a form of violence that is manifested by the absence or desertion of governmental, institutional or family officials to provide help to an elderly person in need of protection.

Negligence: refers to the refusal or omission of due and necessary care for the elderly, by family or institutional guardians. Negligence is one of the most present forms of violence against the elderly in the country. It often manifests itself associated with other abuses that generate physical, emotional and social injuries and traumas, particularly for those who are in a situation of multiple dependence or incapacity.

Financial and economic abuse: consists of the improper or illegal exploitation of the elderly or the non-consented use by them of their financial and patrimonial resources. This type of violence occurs, above all, in the family environment:

Self-negligence: refers to the conduct of the elderly person that threatens their own health or safety, by refusing to provide necessary care to themselves (BRASIL 2022).

In addition, many elderly people are afraid to report domestic violence, often because they fear the loss of emotional ties with the family. Although they are able to tell their stories of anguish in great detail, the idea of going to the competent authority to file a complaint of a crime committed by their own family causes them more pain than the physical, psychological, economic and neglect aggressions suffered on a daily basis.

According to the Statute of the Elderly (Law No. 10,741/2003), in its article 10, it is the duty of the State and society to ensure the freedom, respect and dignity of the elderly, recognizing them as human beings and subjects of civil, political, individual and social rights, guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology adopted in this study consists of an integrative literature review focusing on the analysis of the national medical literature on violence against the elderly and the importance of reporting these cases. The search period covers the last 10 years, comprising publications from 2014 to 2024, in order to ensure the inclusion of recent studies on the subject. The survey was conducted in October 2024.



The following databases were consulted: *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SciELO), Journals of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), PubMed (Public Medline), Department of Informatics of the Unified Health System (DataSUS) and also official documents of the Ministry of Health, including the Information System for Notifiable Diseases (SINAN) and the IBGE to obtain data on the compulsory notification of violence against the elderly in Brazil. The Health Descriptors (DeCS) used were: "Violence against the elderly", "Notification of maltreatment", "Verbal violence", "Physical violence", "Health of the elderly" and "Quality of life of the elderly". These descriptors were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to broaden the search. In this case, inferential statistics will help identify causal relationships or significant trends (Magalhães, Lima, 2016).

The inclusion criteria applied in the selection of articles were: full-text studies published between 2014 and 2024, written in Portuguese and dealing with violence against the elderly in the Brazilian context, addressing the notification or underreporting of these cases. Quantitative and qualitative studies, integrative reviews, and systematic reviews were included. The exclusion criteria involved studies that dealt with other types of violence that did not involve the elderly or that addressed the topic only in a hospital context, without focusing on notification in primary care services and health surveillance.

After applying the criteria, around 90 studies were initially identified. The analysis of the selected studies was organized around the following aspects: (1) incidence of violence against the elderly and its underreporting; (2) impact of different types of violence (verbal and physical) on the quality of life of the elderly; (3) challenges faced by health professionals and surveillance services in case notification; (4) importance of notification for the formulation of public policies and combating violence against the elderly.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

As mentioned, the underreporting of violence against the elderly is a significant problem, which compromises the understanding of the real prevalence of this form of abuse and the creation of effective public policies. In addition, several factors contribute to underreporting, and scientific studies highlight both individual and systemic barriers that hinder reporting.

At the systemic level, health professionals and social services also encounter challenges in identifying and reporting cases of violence against older people. Studies indicate that a lack of adequate training on how to recognize subtle signs of abuse is



common, especially in cases of neglect or psychological abuse, which can be more difficult to detect compared to visible physical injuries (Fulmer et al., 2014).

Recent studies show that psychological violence, although often less visible, has a devastating impact, and can lead to emotional disruption and social isolation of the victim. The worsening of the situation is evident when we consider that the health and social assistance systems are not always prepared to identify these subtle forms of abuse, as highlighted in the specialized literature (Fulmer et al., 2014). Thus, the other problem identified by studies is the absence of standardized protocols in health systems for the systematic screening of violence against the elderly, which leads to inconsistent detection.

In addition, underreporting can be exacerbated by cultural and social issues, which affect both victims and professionals who should intervene. In some cultures, intrafamily violence against older people can be minimized or normalized, making it difficult to recognize certain behaviors as abusive. According to Pillemer et al. (2016), these cultural barriers may be deeply rooted in communities where deference to family authority prevents older adults from reporting abuse.

Finally, the lack of robust policies and adequate resources to deal with reported cases aggravates the problem of underreporting. Even when an older person reports abuse, the institutional response can be slow or ineffective, leading to a sense of futility in relation to reporting.

Thus, the underreporting of violence against the elderly is a multifaceted problem, involving individual, systemic and cultural factors. Overcoming these barriers requires a multidisciplinary approach that includes raising public awareness, training health and social care workers, and implementing stricter policies to ensure that cases of abuse are identified, reported, and treated effectively.

In addition, greater awareness of the types of violence and the implementation of screening protocols are fundamental measures to ensure that the elderly receive the necessary care and protection, ensuring their rights and dignity. Community engagement and inter-agency collaboration are essential to create an efficient support network that can identify and combat violence against this population more effectively.

Over the years, violence against the elderly has become something recurrent and in most cases silenced due to lack of knowledge in society. These forms of violence can be visible or invisible, in which the first is when there is death or injuries and the other where the suffering does not occur by bodily means, but psychologically, both being considered necessary violence of notification and denunciation (Statute of the Elderly, Chapter IV, art. 19).



The present study highlights the extreme relevance of reporting in cases of violence against the elderly population, which can compromise their physical and mental health. By notifying cases of violence, it becomes feasible to mobilize resources and implement public policies for the protection of the elderly and the guarantee of their rights. Notification is a crucial step towards building a safer and more welcoming environment for the elderly, in order to restore the dignity and care they need in situations like these, which make them vulnerable to adopt certain attitudes, especially when fear prevents them, thus ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs properly met.

In view of the above, the complexity of care for the elderly is highlighted, associated with functional dependence and the presence of chronic diseases, aggravating the risk of violence, also highlighting the importance of public policies, making the population aware of the types of violence, focused on both the health and social protection of this population. Compulsory reporting of cases of violence against the elderly is crucial for a more accurate understanding of the prevalence of this problem and for the development of effective public policies. These measures not only help prevent abuse, but also ensure comprehensive and humanized care, promoting the quality of life of the elderly and ensuring that they receive the necessary support.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that violence against the elderly is a growing problem in Brazil. Population aging occurs at an accelerated rate, without an adequate perception of caregivers about the personal needs of the elderly, leading to frustration and stress in daily life. It is essential to analyze the different types of violence, both verbal and physical, and their impacts on the holistic aging of the elderly. Underreporting is constant, either due to the lack of perception of the elderly about the violence suffered or due to the difficulty of reporting through legal channels. Domestic violence is difficult to break, especially when the aggressor is a member of the family circle itself (Bittencourt et al., 2018).

Therefore, violence against the elderly has social characteristics that make elderly women the greatest victims. Within the culture, gender-related representations impose on these women social roles that make them suffer more abuse in their homes, with the family, in the workplace, in social relations, in institutions, and in the distribution of income and property. In addition, the symbolic violence associated with the image of aging exposes these women to a series of stereotypes. Therefore, women live longer, but in worse conditions (Silva, 2023).





The present study sought to highlight the need for a closer look at the different forms of violence and how they affect the quality of life of the elderly. Underreporting of cases is a critical challenge, driven by fear, stigma, and lack of knowledge about the appropriate channels for reporting. It is essential to promote a culture of awareness and continuous training among health professionals, in addition to implementing clear protocols for case notification. Notification is a vital tool for the protection of the elderly, enabling the identification of patterns of abuse and the creation of effective public policies.

Combating violence against the elderly requires joint action between government, civil society and health professionals, with the aim of ensuring the safety and well-being of this vulnerable population. The strengthening of Primary Health Care (APS) is essential to offer continuous and comprehensive care, addressing the specific and individualized needs of the elderly. A thorough evaluation, including physical, neurological, social, and other relevant aspects, is crucial to identify and properly treat the health problems of this population.

Finally, a joint commitment is needed to promote the autonomy and quality of life of the elderly, ensuring that the aging process in Brazil is accompanied by quality care. Only in this way will it be possible to build a more just and respectful society, where the rights of the elderly are ensured and promoted.



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