Protection of Children and Adolescents from Sexual Violence in Brazil: Legislation and Experiences in a Specialized Police Department

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Abstract—The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 represents a milestone due to the provision for comprehensive protection of children and adolescents. It was by this document with which the Police Department for the Protection of Children and Adolescents was created. This department is responsible for investigating sexual crimes. This research reflects the problems faced at the Police Department for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, in the city of Manaus, Amazonas state, Brazil. The study was based on bibliographic and documentary research, which prioritized the relevant legislation, records and institutional reports. It also employed direct observation at the police department and held interviews with 11 police sargeants and 3 psychologists, who were responsible for handling the complaints. The results reveal the high workload of these professionals in attending the public and solving the cases that come to their knowledge.

Index Terms—Sexual violence, child, adolescent, public security.

I. INTRODUCTION

As a rule, sexual violence is a form of violence based on the mechanism of domination, in which contact or interaction may occur between the aggressor and the victim, and he or she, due to their young age, often has no volitional capacity to deny or even understand the act. In most cases, sexual violence occurs through a relationship of kinship, trust or responsibility, since, in this particular situation, the adult has easy access to the child or adolescent. Because of this bond, and the strong coexistence, it is difficult for others to become aware of the problem, for any complaints to come to the attention of the relevant authorities and for investigations to be concluded satisfactorily.

Despite all the efforts and advances regarding the legal apparatus, the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents is still far from being consolidated. This is due to the various forms of violence to which they are exposed and related to the spaces where they usually occur; spaces which should be considered safe, or, in the case of sexual exploitation, “marginal” spaces, where there is no control or limited control by the State and/or society.

Violence occurs in situations of neglect, omission, physical, psychological and sexual aggression. It is common to read in the newspapers of the city of Manaus, the abandonment of minors and punishments (including beatings) for non-compliance with school or household activities. Due to the complexity of each situation, which mostly involves domestic violence, this study focuses on sexual violence reported in the city.

Sexuality is present in all human development, but at each step of development, the manner of experiencing this phenomenon has its particularities. Among the ways of protecting children and adolescents, ensuring their normal evolution and the development of their personalities, without their physical and psychological integrity being violated is fundamental, so that when they reach the adult stage they can consciously decide their sexual behavior without their physical and mental integrity being violated.

The introduction of Law 12.010/2009 in the Brazilian legal system created the concept of “rape of a vulnerable person”, but favored a quite ample interpretation, and, as such, considers any action that has sexual connotation as a criminal act. In this context, sexual violence against children and adolescents is not restricted to the sexual act itself, and may cover any act involving the sexualization of the victim.

The mobilization regarding the process of hearing children and adolescents who have suffered various forms of sexual violence and the gaps in knowledge on the subject gives way to the need to understand the events that influence the professionals who work directly with the gathering of information in the legal field, in order to deal with crimes of sexual violence.

In this sense, it is worth emphasizing that most sexual crimes that affect children and adolescents consist of moral violence, through psychological pressure or without physical aggression, and are difficult to prove as an offence, since it is a crime that leaves no traces and no direct evidence.

This study addresses the historical evolution of the legislation that deals with sexual crimes against children and adolescents and the dynamics of criminal prosecution in the police, in which the procedure of disclosure of the victim regarding the sexual violence suffered is involved, as well as the victim’s reception by the specialized police. This study also offers an insight into the problems experienced by the criminal justice system regarding the working conditions and procedures adopted in the police department.

When attending the occurrences involving children and adolescents, often the sergeant is the first to have contact with the victim when the complaint is lodged. Therefore, it is important to highlight the difficulties faced by this professional when working with children and adolescents in order to deal with initial procedures and criminal investigations of a sexual nature. The complexity of this matter in the context of police work in relation to the delicacy of the reported cases is remarkable. In addition to taking care of the target group there is also the difficult job...
of elucidating such reported cases. Thus, we ask: what are the challenges faced in the daily life of the police departments?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE EVOLUTION OF BRAZILIAN LEGISLATION FOR COMBATING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

The rights granted to children and adolescents were recent achievements at the national level. Throughout the history of Brazil, cultural changes and consequently legislative changes were constructed through constant transformations. In view of this, the Federal Constitution of 1988 represents a watershed in the commitment made for a public that is still in formation.

In regards to a historical past, the first Constitution after the independence of Brazil was the Political Constitution of the Empire of Brazil, and was granted in 1824. Despite making some references to social rights, there is no mention of children and adolescents. Therefore, the State waives the obligation to take care of this group of people.

The initial discussions on the developing human being involved only the criminal area, referring to the limitation of criminal liability. The Criminal Code of the Empire (1830) was expressive in stating that minors under fourteen years of age could not be subjected to serving sentences, unless, the judge understood that the offender at this age had full discernment in relation to the crime committed. However, in this situation, prison could not exceed the age of sixteen.

On February 24th, 1891, the first Constitution of the Republic of Brazil was promulgated (the second of the homeland constitutionalism), which remained in force until 1930, when the so-called Old Republic ended. During the period of this Constitution the First Code of minors (Decree No. 17.943-A/1927) entered the Brazilian legal system. It should be noted that in this period, the legislation referred to the child and the adolescent by the term “minor”.

It is observed that at the time, although Brazil had a tender idea about the peculiarity of childhood, it was restricted to the criminal sphere, aimed at children and adolescents who violated the criminal rules and posed a threat to security and public order.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, discussions began regarding the actions of care and protection of children and adolescents, linked not only to the private sphere, but also to public entities. This process of characterization of the concept of childhood and adolescence emerges, mainly, in the context of pediatricians and hygienists, who developed work aimed at the health and well-being of the child, and also of trade unionists who demanded protectionist laws for child labor [1].

Thus, the Code for Minors of 1927 limited the minimum age of twelve years for the minor to be able to participate in the labor market and was a pioneer in prohibiting night work for those under eighteen years of age, a prohibition that is still supported by law.

It is undeniable that the first Code for Minors, at the time when it was instituted, represented a historical milestone in terms of the protection of the person in the phase of development. In the words of Azambuja (p. 69) [2]: “It contributed to Brazil occupying, in legislative terms, a leading position in Latin America, due to the taking care of children without support, through a law of its own”.

The Code for Minors of 1927 had a very unique characteristic, i.e., the judicialization in regards to the idea that existed in relation to childhood and adolescence, since justice began to have full responsibility and decision making power over children and abandoned adolescents and offenders [3].

The economic crisis of 1929, allied to various social movements, contributed to the promulgation of the Constitution of 1934, when several classical rights were maintained, i.e., prestigious labor protection, limiting work to children of fourteen and over, prohibiting night work for children under sixteen and in unhealthy places for children under eighteen.

In 1937, a new Constitution was promulgated, nicknamed “Polaca” (or “Polish” in English), due to the influence suffered by the fascist Polish Constitution of 1935. Despite its authoritarianism, this Magna Carta represented a significant advance in the implementation of greater attention and protection for children and adolescents. In this context, the Charter of 1937 assigned the State the duty to establish educational guidelines regarding the physical, intellectual and moral formation of childhood and youth. In addition to setting standards of health protection, it is clear about the child requiring special care.

In the period that this Constitution was in force, the National Children's Department (Decree-Law 2.024/1940) was created. This was the department responsible for coordinating national activities aimed at the protection of maternity, childhood and youth, in addition to providing financial compensation to families who had many children (Decree-Law 3.200/1941).

In 1946, another Constitution was promulgated, with the aim of democratizing the country, repudiating the totalitarian State that had been in force since 1930. In it, it sought to combat child labor, and it established the obligation of child and adolescent care and began to provide support to families who had many children of up to eighteen years of age or who were unable to work, who lived at their parents’ expense.

In 1964, Brazil suffered a military coup. Therefore, along the same lines as the 1937 Constitution, the 1967 Constitution sharply concentrated the power of decisions at the federal level. However, in addition to this concentration of power, it also caused damage to the achievements of child and adolescent protection.

In the same period, the second Code for Minors (Law 6.697/1979) was promulgated, extending the rules regarding minors who should be taken into institutional care. That is, the target group was no longer only the underage delinquent and without care, and included in this list the minors deprived of essential conditions for their subsistence, and the State’s position was known as the Doctrine of the Irregular Situation. Therefore, the new Code for Minors (Law 6.697/1979) gave powers to the State so it could apply preventive measures to every minor under eighteen years of age, regardless of his or her situation.

As a result, under the pretext of care, the State had the discretionary power to remove the child from poor and criminalized parents, whenever it deemed convenient. The
Irregular Situation of the Minor came into force, which established a distinction between abandoned minors and offenders.

[... ] the existence of malnourished, abandoned, ill-treated children, victims of abuse, perpetrators of infractions and other violations was attributed to their own nature, all falling under the same ambiguous and vague category called irregular situation. Being in an irregular situation meant being at the mercy of the Juvenile Courts whose responsibility arbitrarily mixed legal duties with duties of care (VOLPI, p. 33) [4].

The law in question had a protective nature and had the idea of criminalizing poverty. There was no perception of the need of the State to improve the distribution of income, or invest massively in education, basic sanitation, housing, employment, etc. Therefore, faced with the criminalization of poverty, it was noted that, throughout the duration of the Code for Minors, there was an indiscriminate increase in children and adolescents being taken into care.

It should be noted that many of the minors taken into care had not committed any crimes. According to Azevedo (p. 32) [5], “in the clientele cared for by the National Foundation for the Welfare of the Minor (FUNABEM), approximately 80% are needy, poor, socially inequal minors, 10% are abandoned minors and 10% are minor offenders”.

To aggravate the situation, the magistrate, who was responsible for deciding whether or not to take the minor into care, was not obliged to give reasons for his decision. Therefore, the decision was not subject to objective criteria, or rather, the judge possessed practically unlimited powers when deciding the life of a person who was still in their formative years. In this context, Azambuja (p.43) [2] mentions a good example of the powers concentrated in the hands of the judge: “[... ] decide the taking into care of a child or adolescent, indefinitely, because of the fact that he/she is wandering the street”.

The Juvenile Court judge became the highest authority with subjective and discretionary powers, under the aegis of juvenile protection. Guardianship and criminal duties fell to him, because he had the functional duty to manage situations of poverty and abandonment, as well as situations characterized as crimes, involving children and adolescents.

The State Foundations for the Welfare of the Minor (FEBEM)s, in turn, were in charge of carrying out the measures sentenced by the magistrate. It should be noted that there was no distinction of establishments according to the reason for the minor being taken into care. Abandoned children and offenders alike occupied the same space in the place of care.

In the course of the 1980s, there was a lot of criticism and questions regarding the policy aimed at childhood and adolescence. Numerous were the complaints about the situation of how Brazil had been confronting this problem in relation to its children and adolescents, mainly in regards to the degrading conditions of treatment in FEBEMs. This fact is supported by Azevedo (p. 32) [5], who states:

In several testimonies of detained boys, there are vehement accusations of punishment, beatings and even torture. However, the image portrayed by the institutions is of promoting well-being through training courses for minors in their care.

Faced with such indifference and the constant violation of fundamental rights in relation to children and adolescents, many questions were raised about the way in which childhood and adolescence were perceived and dealt with. These questions were then used as a basis for different public groups to organize the start of their mobilization in and around the National Constituent Assembly, which resulted in the inclusion of Articles 227 and 228 in the Constitution of 1988. The new Constitution abandoned the Doctrine of the Irregular Situation, and put it in its place, the Doctrine of Integral Protection, sharing the responsibility of the family, the society and the State in the rights afforded to those who were still in the phase of development. Under these perspectives, children and adolescents ceased to be objects of rights and became subjects of law.

In the international context, the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, in 1989, brought great reinforcement in the sense of protection and guarantees of the rights for children and adolescents. In the Brazilian context, it established and generated the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), officially promulgated on July 13th, 1990 under Law 8.069, which came to fill some legislative gaps left by the old Code for Minors. Under the new paradigm of the current Magna Carta of 1988, the old Code was shown to be entirely dissonant in relation to the modern democratic principles arising from the new constitutional order.

Even after the ECA came into force, several laws were reformulated, following constitutional principles, to expand and strengthen the protection of guarantees and rights intended for those who are still growing up. However, there were still legislative gaps. A good example that can be cited in this case is the fight against sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, since a law incriminating this practice did not yet exist in the legal system. Such a failure in the legislative framework allowed scope for the practice of an act condemned by society, though which had no consequences under criminal law. The Statute for Children and Adolescents was improved with the introduction of Art. 244-A, approved in 2000, which considers it a crime to subject children or adolescents to sexual exploitation. It is appropriate to mention that this article was received with great celebration by the legal field and the child and adolescent protection networks that fight the crime in question. However, shortly after this law came into force, a failure was found, particularly with regard to the criminal responsibility of the client, that is, the one who uses the victim’s body for paid sexual services.

The Brazilian Penal Code came into force in the 1940s, which, because of the ideas that existed at the time, such as the authoritarian exercise of power, social stigmas, prejudicial values attributed to individuals and the purpose of protection, formed an insufficient form of repression of sexual violence, especially when such crimes were directed against children and adolescents.

With the passing of time, due to changes in perception about sexuality and recognition of the peculiarities of phases of developing people, legislators became aware of
the constitutional non-compliance with Article 227 §4 of the Federal Constitution that “the law will severely punish the abuse, violence and sexual exploitation of children and adolescents”.

Law 12.015/2009 brought innovations to sexual crimes against children and adolescents. In this sense, there is the figure of rape of vulnerable people in which the chronological age of 13 years was chosen to represent the dividing line for the practice of this crime. Since, up to this age, any act that has sexual connotation will be infringing criminal norm, and the presumption of violence became absolute.

It is important to mention that the law allows certain sexual freedom of adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18, but protects them against enticement or perversion that compromises such freedom. In addition, it includes among the vulnerable, in the crime of rape and in that of favoring prostitution, persons who, due to illness or mental disability, do not have the necessary discernment for decisions regarding the act.

Among the changes brought by Law 12.015/2009, there is Article 218-B of the Penal Code, under the title of favoring prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation of children or adolescents or vulnerable people. As mentioned, before this law came into force, the submission of children under the age of 18 to sexual exploitation was contemplated in Art. 244-A of the ECA, but this had the failure of not contemplating the figure of the client as the author of the fact.

In this case, Art. 244-A of the ECA was tacitly repealed, since all its elements were described in the new Article 218-B of the Criminal Law. Indeed, the insertion of this new law seeks to punish not only those who subject, induce or attract the minor to prostitution, but also the client, who is the one who pays for sexual services.

Another significant modification that occurred in the ECA was the introduction of Law 11.829/2008, which improved the fight against the production, sale and distribution of child pornography, as well as, criminalizing the acquisition and possession of such material and other conduct related to pedophilia on the Internet.

The police represent a service that is more often identified with dealing with issues of violence. It is a service with a 24 hour uninterrupted operation and is a crucial element that society has for the reporting of domestic crises.

This is a qualitative study. A bibliographic and documentary survey was carried out on the subject, which prioritized legislation, both as an object of analysis and as a parameter for observing its implementation, in addition to the state of the art on the subject. We also conducted direct observations of the environment of the Specialized Police Department for Child and Adolescent Protection in the city of Manaus, in addition to interviews with the police sergeants who work there. The field research was carried out in 2016 and 2017; therefore, the information on the operation of the police department refers to this period. The results and the discussion on them are presented below.
for Child and Adolescent Protection.

Usually, the work of the police department is limited to the investigation to prove the authorship and materiality of the crime. However, the Specialized Police Department for Child and Adolescent Protection has other burdens. Since it has specific skills, it deals not only with criminal issues, but works by giving support to the victim while respecting his or her special condition. For this reason, the police department, in 2017, had a body of professionals that was not part of the police staff.

The sergeants were responsible for the general care of those seeking help in the police department. They provided legal guidance and relevant referrals when the case did not constitute a crime; they were responsible for the decision to initiate the proceedings when the event that came to their knowledge was considered a crime.

Usually, since there was no official order on the measures to be adopted, the duty sergeant began the police investigations, which came to his knowledge during the shift and passed them on to the day sergeants to complete. Also, the less serious crimes, which required only the preparation of a detailed crime report, their conclusion and referral to the courts were the responsibility of the duty sergeant.

In this sense, all crimes involving sexual violence against children and adolescents, due to the severity of the crime and the length of the sentence, which may affect the conviction of the perpetrator, are investigated and referred to the courts through a police investigation.

We highlight the importance of creating the sector for runaways and missing children in the police department, which is justified by the significant number of young people who leave home because of family conflicts or because they were victims of crimes, such as sexual violence and/or mistreatment.

The DEPCA is located in a residential complex, in a side street that is not very busy, where the police department was identified by an old sign that was not very visible. This made it difficult for people who lived on the outskirts of town to access it, since the location of its building was not in a central region of the city.

Due to the fact that the police department was not being in a central area of the city (located in the Planalto district), the victim would have left his/her home early, often without having eaten in the morning. There were certain cases in which the procedures were very time-consuming. The DEPCA did not have its own budget and neither the physical structure and personnel to provide assistance with the feeding of the victims. Despite several unsuccessful attempts to arrange this kind of agreement with the state government.

The first contact with the victim required care and time, especially when it came to sexual crimes and the children were too young to talk about the subject. When sexual violence was confirmed, either by the examination for carnal and anal copulation or by the simple report of the victim, the sergeant determined the filing of the crime report; the issuing of the request for an examination of carnal and anal copulation; the appointment for care by the psychosocial sector; the referral to the Service for Assistance to Victims of Sexual Violence (SAVVIS) and the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS). CREAS is the public unit of municipal, state or regional responsibility for the provision of services to individuals and families who are in a situation of personal or social risk, for violation of rights or contingency, requiring specialized interventions of special social protection, included by Law No. 12,435 of 2011.

The results of the exams, when they were ready, were forwarded to the Metropolitan Police department and then sent to the DEPCA. This procedure had a time lapse of 30 to 90 days from the day of the examination. However, there were occasions when the result of the forensic exam was urgently requested by the police authority, and this was sent directly to the requesting police department, by agreement, as soon as possible.

The care of the psychosocial sector included in addition to the victim, their legal representative (father, mother, grandparents, aunts, etc.), who accompanied the child and gave them due support throughout the complaint. For greater smoothness of the work, all consultations in the psychosocial sector were previously scheduled.

The average time for the victim to be followed-up by the psychosocial sector was approximately thirty days starting from the filing of the crime report. However, during this study, it reached the point that the care by the psychosocial sector would take more than four months, which became a worrying situation. Thus, many police inquiries no longer went to court because of this delay. In addition, to aggravate the situation, this long time lapse compromised what information or important facts the victim could provide about the reported crime.

In October 2016, in the period in which the fieldwork of this research began, the state appointed a team of two psychologists and three social workers in order to improve delays in the consultation schedule of the psychosocial sector. Due to the lack of space, the room where the sergeants worked was given to this new team in the psychosocial sector, which left the police officers without a specific place to develop their own work.

The placement of this new team at the DEPCA was unfortunately only short term, and in December 2016, when the scheduling of the psychosocial sector began to have a reasonable waiting time, these staff members were dismissed from the police department and returned to their former workplaces.

Although the dynamics of the police department in cases of sexual violence seemed to function well, the number of recorded occurrences was significant compared to the staff that worked in the solving of such crimes. In 2016, the police department had 31 staff and 1,003 sexual violence crime reports were registered. Despite this alarming number, it is worth mentioning that due to the complexity of this type of crime, statistics are not faithful, therefore totals can reach even higher numbers. The disparity between the number of staff and the number of sexual crimes reported represents only one of the misfortunes to be circumvented by DEPCA.

V. Final Considerations

The passage of time and the occurrence of certain
historical moments provided changes in perceptions regarding children and adolescents, because, from mere objectification, they became objects of rights, and today they are considered subjects of rights.

The Federal Constitution of 1988 had already incorporated in its text new proposals to be adopted, such as the Doctrine of Integral Protection. In view of the new principles to be implemented in relation to the state of vulnerability of children and adolescents, there was a need for a revision of the legislation, and this permitted the approval of the ECA (Law 8.069/1990). Sexual violence, which was previously embroiled by prejudice, shame or even lack of family support, gained visibility, requiring the State and society to become more involved with the protection of children and adolescents, allowing for changes in laws.

In this context, the Specialized Police Department for the Protection of Children and Adolescents represents one of the gateways for complaints concerning cases considered crimes, which have as victims those that are still growing up. The police department is responsible for determining the cases of sexual violence that come to its knowledge. In addition, the police sergeant is in charge of conducting investigations into the authorship and materiality of the fact.

In an attempt to understand the problems and challenges of the work performed at the DEPCA, this research consisted of readings focused on the topic, as well as direct observation regarding the performance of its activities within the police department. The findings of the study on the subject provide interesting evidence of how the government conducts criminal cases involving children and adolescents. It is clear that the victims’ personal and social costs are very high, and the quality of the services provided by the police department also contributed to this. Thus, due to the lack of investment of all types, the police department cannot cope with the demand.

Moreover, existing investments do not guarantee adequate conditions for the activities of their staff and the efforts that they produce do not aid in reducing the high incidence of crime.

It can be concluded that, in order to achieve the full protection of children and adolescents that are victims of sexual violence, and that the effective punishment of the perpetrators of these crimes occurs, it is necessary that the State train the professionals involved regarding the needs of this specific public and guarantee staff adequate working conditions, since these simple attitudes can contribute significantly to reducing the problem.

This research had the opportunity to elucidate the problem that involves the fight against sexual violence involving children and adolescents through the historical analysis of legislation. In the field research, this problem can be observed from the perspective of institutional subjects, infrastructure and available personnel. In future research, it will be necessary to analyze how the users of the service see it, especially those who made the complaints and/or accompanied the victims. Another possibility of research consists in monitoring the cases arising from complaints, verifying their effects on criminal justice and on the families affected and on the protection of children and adolescents. There is also a need for future research on the care of children and adolescents that are victims of sexual violence, because, in compliance with Law 13.431/2017, the Specialized Police Department for the Protection of Children and Adolescents is in transition to implement specialized interviews using audios and videos, so that there is no institutional re-victimization of those who suffered the violence.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Literature Review, JSP; Methodology, DJCM.; Analysis, JSP and IRN; Investigation, JSP; Writing—original draft preparation, JSP and IRN; Writing—review DJCM. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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