

THE SCHOOL AS A PROTAGONIST IN COMBATING THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: DIALOGICITY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS

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Abstract

This article analyzes, from a theoretical and documentary perspective, the role of the school as a leading agent in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. It is grounded in the understanding that the educational institution is responsible not only for the transmission of knowledge but also for social protection, recognizing signs of rights violations, and mediating relationships among students, families, the community, and the intersectoral protection network. The discussion brings together Freirean principles of dialogicity, the concept of interdisciplinarity, and the Brazilian legal framework, with particular emphasis on the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente—ECA), Law No. 13,431/2017, Decree No. 9,603/2018, and Law No. 14,811/2024. The study also considers recent data from the United Nations Children's Fund (Fundo das Nações Unidas para a Infância—UNICEF) and the Brazilian Forum on Public Security (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública—FBSP), indicating an increase in reported cases of rape and statutory rape involving individuals aged 0 to 19 between 2021 and 2023. In light of this reality, the article aims to analyze, from a theoretical perspective, the role of the school as a leading agent in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, investigating how dialogicity and interdisciplinarity contribute to strengthening the protection network. Methodologically, this is a qualitative bibliographic and documentary study guided by the critical analysis of legislation, official documents, and educational literature. The findings indicate that effective school leadership requires teacher training, referral protocols, a cross-curricular approach,

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sensitive listening, and integration with healthcare, social assistance, the Guardianship Council, and the justice system. It is concluded that preventing the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents requires a school that is ethically committed, legally informed, and pedagogically equipped to transform silence into protective dialogue.

Keywords: Dialogicity, Interdisciplinarity, Protection of Children and Adolescents, School Leadership, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

The sexual exploitation of children and adolescents constitutes one of the most serious forms of human rights violations affecting children and adolescents, as it compromises the victims' physical, psychological, emotional, educational, and social well-being. It is a phenomenon that cannot be understood merely as a criminal occurrence or an issue confined to the justice system. Its effects permeate family, community, and school life, directly interfering with learning, social interaction, self-esteem, and the development of trusting relationships. For this reason, schools must be recognized as strategic spaces for prevention, protection, and responsible referral.

Educational institutions occupy a unique position in the lives of children and adolescents. It is through daily classroom routines, breaks, collective activities, and interactions with teachers and peers that many behavioral changes become noticeable. Sudden declines in academic performance, recurrent absenteeism, social withdrawal, fear, irritability, sadness, aggression, or difficulty concentrating may indicate distress and require qualified attention. None of these signs, in isolation, is sufficient to conclude that sexual violence has occurred. However, when such indicators recur or are associated with disclosures, emotional distress, or abrupt behavioral changes, they require a careful institutional response.

The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente—ECA) (Brazil, Law No. 8,069/1990) establishes the principle of comprehensive protection and provides that no child or adolescent shall be subjected to neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, or oppression.

Within this legal framework, the school is no longer viewed merely as a setting for formal education but as an integral part of a broader system for safeguarding rights. This requires recognizing that teachers, school administrators, pedagogical coordinators, and other education professionals bear ethical and legal responsibilities whenever there are suspicions or confirmations of violence.

The debate becomes even more urgent in light of recent data. The report *Overview of Lethal and Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents in Brazil (Panorama da Violência Letal e Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes no Brasil)*, prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Brazilian Forum on Public Security (FBSP), recorded 164,199 victims of rape and statutory rape aged 0 to 19 in Brazil between 2021 and 2023 (UNICEF; FBSP, 2024). These figures refer only to reported cases, highlighting the existence of substantial underreporting and reinforcing the importance of institutions capable of breaking the silence. In 2024, the Disque 100 national human rights hotline recorded 657,200 reports of human rights violations, with children and adolescents representing the group with the highest number of complaints among the vulnerable populations included in the official report (Brazil, 2025).

Within this context, dialogicity and interdisciplinarity assume a central role. Dialogicity, inspired by Paulo Freire, enables the school to be understood as a space for listening, relationship-building, and recognizing the voice of others. Interdisciplinarity, in turn, makes it possible to integrate pedagogical, legal, psychological, social, and health-related knowledge in addressing a problem that cannot be contained within a single field of expertise. Combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents requires a school capable of engaging in dialogue, providing support, making appropriate referrals, and working collaboratively within a protection network, without assuming investigative responsibilities that belong to the competent authorities.

Given the complexity involved in guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents in contemporary society, it is essential to investigate the institutional and community mechanisms aimed at addressing violations that threaten their full development. Against this backdrop of complex

vulnerabilities, the following guiding research question emerges: How can intersectoral coordination among public policies, network-based care, and social support effectively guarantee the right to childhood and comprehensive protection in the face of the impacts of the ecology of sexual violence? Understanding this issue is fundamental to revealing both the strengths and the limitations of the current protection structures.

The rationale for this study rests on three central arguments. The first is social: sexual violence against children and adolescents remains a persistent and underreported phenomenon, deeply shaped by power asymmetries. Owing to their particular stage of development, children and adolescents are not always able to identify the violence they have suffered, understand their rights, or seek help independently. When the perpetrator belongs to the family, community, or institutional environment, silence may be reinforced by fear, economic dependence, guilt, and threats. Because it is one of the few places regularly attended by most children and adolescents, the school occupies a strategic position for recognizing warning signs and activating the protection network.

The second argument is legal and institutional. Law No. 13,431/2017 (Brazil, 2017) organizes the system for guaranteeing the rights of child and adolescent victims or witnesses of violence, distinguishing between specialized listening (*escuta especializada*) and the special testimonial (*depoimento especial*), with the aim of preventing revictimization and ensuring appropriate care. Decree No. 9,603/2018 (Brazil, 2018) regulates this system, reinforcing the need for coordinated procedures among public policies. More recently, Law No. 14,811/2024 (Brazil, 2024) established protective measures for children and adolescents against violence in educational institutions and similar settings and created the National Policy for the Prevention and Combating of Child and Adolescent Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. Together, these legal instruments move the school from a merely reactive position to one of shared responsibility.

The third argument is pedagogical. Preventing the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents cannot be reduced to occasional awareness campaigns. Isolated lectures, sporadic posters, or initiatives

concentrated solely in the month of May may raise awareness, but they are insufficient unless integrated into a continuous educational project. The National Common Curricular Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular—BNCC) (Brazil, 2018) and the Cross-Cutting Contemporary Themes (Temas Contemporâneos Transversais) (Brazil, 2019) indicate that issues such as human rights, health, citizenship, diversity, and social coexistence should be incorporated throughout the curriculum in an integrated manner. Consequently, preventive education must be ethical, evidence-based, age-appropriate, and aligned with the rights of children and adolescents.

The general objective of this article is to analyze, from a theoretical perspective, the role of the school as a leading agent in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, investigating how dialogicity and interdisciplinarity contribute to strengthening the protection network. To achieve this purpose, specific objectives are established to guide the investigation. First, the study discusses the concept of dialogicity within the school environment as a strategy for breaking the silence surrounding rights violations and facilitating their identification. Next, it reflects on the importance of interdisciplinarity in integrating pedagogical, legal, and social knowledge to understand the complexity of this phenomenon. It also examines the legal and theoretical foundations supporting the leading role of educational institutions in responding to the social and subjective impacts of these crimes against children and adolescents. Finally, it proposes theoretical guidelines to support teaching practice in developing preventive education that is ethical and integrated with protection networks.

Methodologically, this study is characterized as a qualitative bibliographic and documentary investigation guided by the critical analysis of legislation, official documents, and educational literature. Its theoretical and analytical framework is based on the examination of legal sources, public data, and pedagogical references, with particular emphasis on the contributions of Paulo Freire. This foundation supports the argument that a school assumes a leading role when it is capable of recognizing signs of vulnerability, listening responsibly, communicating identified concerns to the appropriate authorities, and developing continuous preventive actions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

DIALOGICITY IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: FREIREAN FOUNDATIONS

In Freirean thought, dialogicity is not merely informal conversation. Rather, it is a pedagogical stance grounded in recognizing the other as a subject endowed with voice, history, and dignity. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire criticizes the banking model of education, characterized by the vertical transmission of knowledge, and advocates dialogue as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1987). This principle is especially relevant when schools address sensitive issues such as sexual exploitation, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, and psychological suffering. Silence cannot be broken through imposition; rather, it is broken when the school environment becomes sufficiently trustworthy for children and adolescents to believe that their voices will be taken seriously.

Within the field of child and adolescent protection, dialogicity requires sensitive listening, age-appropriate language, and a commitment to preventing revictimization. Schools should not pressure children to recount details, conduct interrogations, or gather evidence. Such responsibilities belong to the competent authorities, as established by Law No. 13,431/2017 (Brazil, 2017) and Decree No. 9,603/2018 (Brazil, 2018). The school's initial pedagogical role is to provide support, document relevant information, protect the victim, and activate the appropriate protection procedures. School-based listening must therefore be carried out with great care: it should foster trust without exceeding the ethical and legal limits of educational practice.

Dialogicity also enables prevention to move beyond the status of a social taboo. Combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents requires clear communication about rights, bodily autonomy, consent, personal boundaries, self-protection, reporting channels, and the recognition of situations of risk. When sexuality education is delivered in a scientific, ethical, and age-appropriate manner, it does not sexualize children. On the contrary, it contributes to their protection by providing vocabulary, body awareness, and the capacity to identify and report situations of violence. UNESCO (2018) emphasizes that structured educational approaches addressing sexuality, relationships, rights, and

health can contribute to informed decision-making, respectful relationships, and the prevention of violence.

THE SCHOOL AS A LEADING AGENT WITHIN THE PROTECTION NETWORK

The school's leadership in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents must be understood within the broader protection network. Leadership does not mean institutional isolation. Schools do not act alone, nor do they replace the Guardianship Council, social assistance services, healthcare providers, the Public Prosecutor's Office, specialized police units, or the judiciary. Their leadership lies in recognizing their privileged position for observation, prevention, and referral. Consequently, schools must establish clear internal procedures, provide continuous staff training, and maintain close coordination with local support services.

The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Statute of the Child and Adolescent—ECA) (Brazil, Law No. 8,069/1990) establishes that cases involving suspected or confirmed child maltreatment must be reported to the Guardianship Council, without prejudice to any other legal measures that may be required. This provision is fundamental for schools because it removes violence from the realm of personal judgment and places it within the sphere of institutional responsibility. Absolute certainty is not required before activating the protection network. A well-founded suspicion alone warrants referral, since the investigation is the responsibility of specialized authorities. Conversely, omission may prolong the victim's exposure to the perpetrator.

Law No. 14,811/2024 (Brazil, 2024) further reinforced the central role of educational institutions in preventing violence. By establishing protective measures against violence in educational settings and creating a national policy for the prevention and combating of child and adolescent sexual abuse and exploitation, the legislation recognizes schools as essential spaces for identifying risks, preventing harm, and promoting safe educational environments. This legislative development expands the responsibilities

of education systems and underscores the need for established protocols, ongoing professional development, and integration with public policies.

The Faça Bonito Guide, developed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Roberto Marinho Foundation, and Childhood Brasil (Fundação Roberto Marinho; UNICEF; Childhood Brasil, 2023), provides guidance for municipalities and public services in organizing awareness activities for the National Day to Combat the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, established by Law No. 9,970/2000 (Brazil, 2000). However, combating sexual exploitation cannot be limited to a commemorative date. Awareness campaigns serve as an entry point, but schools must transform public mobilization into a sustained educational policy. This involves annual planning, teacher training, qualified listening, family participation, and continuous collaboration with the local protection network.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS: WEAVING KNOWLEDGE FOR COMBATING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is a complex phenomenon and therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach. Pedagogy contributes to understanding curriculum, school coexistence, learning, and ethical education. Psychology assists in interpreting subjective impacts and signs of emotional distress without turning teachers into therapists. Law defines institutional duties, guarantees, and procedures. Social assistance helps explain family, territorial, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Healthcare provides comprehensive care for victims, while public security and the justice system are responsible for investigation and accountability. By integrating these different fields, the school becomes a point of connection rather than one of substitution.

Interdisciplinarity is not merely the superficial accumulation of knowledge from different disciplines. According to Japiassu (1976), it emerges from the need to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge when confronting problems that transcend rigid disciplinary boundaries. Fazenda (2011) likewise associates interdisciplinarity with an attitude of openness, cooperation, and dialogue among

fields of knowledge. In addressing sexual exploitation, this perspective prevents schools from treating the issue solely as a science topic, a legal lecture, or a disciplinary matter. Rather, the phenomenon is simultaneously educational, legal, social, and psychological.

However, a cross-curricular approach must not come at the expense of academic rigor. The topic should be addressed in ways appropriate to students' age, maturity, and the guidelines established by the education system. It should avoid exposing real cases, moralistic discourse, alarmist language, or practices that may embarrass students. The objective is to educate for protection and human rights, not to create widespread fear. Consequently, teacher training is essential to ensuring quality. Teachers need to understand basic concepts, warning signs, referral protocols, reporting channels, and the limits of their own professional responsibilities. Good intentions alone, without adequate preparation, may result in harm.

THE IMPACTS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION CRIMES AND THE EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE

The impacts of the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents are multifaceted and extend far beyond the moment when the violence occurs. They may affect emotional bonds, self-esteem, physical development, relationships of trust, mental health, school attendance, and learning. In the classroom, emotional distress may manifest itself in various ways, including silence, aggression, regression, self-harm, frequent crying, premature sexualized behavior, fear of certain adults, declining academic performance, school dropout, sleep disturbances, and difficulty concentrating. No individual sign is sufficient to establish a diagnosis; however, persistent changes require careful attention and appropriate referral.

The UNICEF and FBSP report (2024) shows that sexual violence has a marked gender profile. Between 2021 and 2023, the majority of victims of sexual violence aged 0 to 19 were female, with a particularly high concentration among those between 10 and 14 years of age. These findings reinforce the need for educational practices that address rights, power relations, bodily protection, and gender

inequalities in an ethical and age-appropriate manner. Ignoring these issues does not protect students. On the contrary, silence tends to benefit perpetrators by preventing children and adolescents from recognizing abusive situations and knowing where to seek help.

Schools must also recognize that sexual exploitation can occur in digital environments. The widespread use of smartphones, social media, online games, and messaging applications has created new forms of grooming, blackmail, non-consensual sharing of intimate content, and technology-facilitated sexual violence. Comprehensive protection must therefore include digital literacy, guidance on privacy, awareness of the risks associated with sharing images, information about reporting channels, and safe online interactions. Addressing this dimension also requires dialogue with families, since exclusively punitive forms of control rarely solve the problem.

THEORETICAL GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTIVE TEACHING PRACTICE

Preventive teaching practice may be organized around five key guidelines. The first is continuous professional development. Teachers and school administrators need to understand the legal framework, referral procedures, warning signs, and the distinction between pedagogical listening, specialized listening (*escuta especializada*), and the special testimonial (*depoimento especial*). The second guideline is the creation of a dialogic school environment. Students should be able to identify trusted adults within the school, know the available communication channels, and have access to spaces where they can speak about fear, discomfort, or violations of their personal boundaries (Santos & Ippolito, 2011).

The third guideline is curricular interdisciplinarity. Efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents should not depend solely on commemorative dates. Instead, they should be integrated into pedagogical projects addressing human rights, health, citizenship, ethics, social coexistence, digital culture, and protection. The fourth guideline is coordination with the protection network. Schools must know which agencies to contact, how to document cases, how to safeguard information, and how to monitor referrals without encroaching upon the responsibilities of other

institutions. The fifth guideline is the participation of families and the community. Prevention becomes more effective when schools clearly communicate their objectives, address misunderstandings, and foster a culture of care among parents, guardians, and the broader community (Japiassu, 1976).

METHODOLOGY

This article was developed through bibliographic and documentary research employing a qualitative approach and a theoretical-reflective purpose. The bibliographic research was based on the criteria proposed by Gil (2002) and focused on authors who discuss dialogicity, critical education, interdisciplinarity, curriculum, sensitive listening, teacher education, and the social role of the school. Among the principal theoretical references consulted are Freire (1987, 1996), Fazenda (2011), Japiassu (1976), Furlani (2011), Sacristán (2013), Araújo (2014), Carvalho (2021), Paixão (2021), Maia (2006), Lima and Maio (2014), Brino and Williams (2009), among others.

According to Marconi and Lakatos (2011), the documentary research encompassed Brazilian legislation, official documents, institutional reports, and guidance materials related to the protection of children and adolescents. Priority was given to official and verifiable sources, particularly federal legislation and documents produced by governmental or international organizations. The principal legal sources included the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente—ECA) (Brazil, Law No. 8,069/1990), Law No. 13,431/2017 (Brazil, 2017), Decree No. 9,603/2018 (Brazil, 2018), and Law No. 14,811/2024 (Brazil, 2024). The technical and institutional sources comprised data from the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship (Brazil, 2025), the United Nations Children's Fund (Fundo das Nações Unidas para a Infância—UNICEF) (Brazil, 2024), the Brazilian Forum on Public Security (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública—FBSP) (Brazil, 2024), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as pedagogical materials focused on violence prevention.

Following the methodological principles proposed by Severino (2017), the analysis was organized around four interpretative axes: school leadership and teacher education; cross-curricular integration and sensitive listening; referral protocols and coordination with healthcare and social assistance; and the Guardianship Council and the justice system. These analytical axes were selected because of their direct relationship with the central argument of the study, namely that the school's role in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents requires professional preparation, institutional organization, a continuous cross-curricular approach, and effective intersectoral coordination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As this is a bibliographic and documentary study, the findings presented are analytical in nature. The literature review supports the argument that a school exercising a leading role in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents is not one that assumes investigative responsibilities, but rather one that pedagogically structures prevention, strengthens practices of attentive listening, identifies signs of vulnerability, activates the protection network, and contributes to the development of an institutional culture grounded in human rights. The analysis of legal documents, public data, and the specialized literature validates four central dimensions: school leadership and teacher education; cross-curricular integration and sensitive listening; referral protocols and coordination with healthcare and social assistance; and the Guardianship Council and the justice system (Brazil, 1990; Brazil, 2017; UNICEF; FBSP, 2024).

The first analytical finding reveals that school leadership depends directly on teacher education. A school that assumes a central role in protecting children and adolescents is not limited to transmitting curricular content. Rather, it recognizes its social function, understands students as whole individuals, and serves as a space for citizenship education, social interaction, care, and the safeguarding of rights. From this perspective, Maia (2006) contributes to the discussion by emphasizing that sexuality, when addressed

pedagogically, must be approached in a broad, ethical manner that is attentive to the specific characteristics of learners, particularly those living in contexts of vulnerability.

Brino and Williams (2009) argue that schools can act as agents in preventing child sexual abuse, primarily because teachers and other education professionals interact continuously with children and adolescents. This ongoing relationship enables them to recognize signs that often do not emerge during isolated or occasional interventions. As an institutional environment that exists, to some extent, outside the domestic sphere, the school can become a trusted space for students experiencing fear, threats, or enforced silence.

Lima and Maio (2014) emphasize that teacher education is a fundamental prerequisite for enabling schools to respond effectively to sexual violence against children. Teachers who are insufficiently prepared may ignore warning signs, interpret situations merely as disciplinary issues, or, conversely, act prematurely, exposing children to further harm and contributing to revictimization. Teacher education should therefore not be regarded as an ancillary component but rather as an essential requirement for ethical professional practice.

Paixão (2021) further argues that educational initiatives aimed at preventing child sexual abuse must be carefully planned, continuous, and pedagogically intentional. Occasional lectures or isolated awareness campaigns are insufficient. Prevention requires schools to cultivate an institutional culture of protection in which teachers, administrators, students, and families recognize that the issue forms an integral part of human development and education.

Furlani (2011) likewise maintains that school-based sexuality education, when grounded in respect for diversity, gender relations, and human rights, can make a significant contribution to preventing violence. According to the author, the classroom can serve as a space for meaningful discussions about the body, care, personal boundaries, equality, and mutual respect. This perspective challenges the misconception that discussing sexuality poses a threat to childhood. On the contrary, silence tends to

benefit perpetrators, whereas appropriate knowledge strengthens children's and adolescents' capacity for self-protection and help-seeking.

Accordingly, school leadership requires well-prepared teachers because identifying situations of violence depends on more than an individual educator's sensitivity. It requires knowledge, procedural confidence, and institutional commitment. A leading school understands that it should neither investigate crimes nor ignore warning signs. Its role is to welcome, document, protect, and refer cases in accordance with the limits established by the protection network (Brazil, 2017; Lima & Maio, 2014).

The second analytical finding indicates that preventing the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents must be integrated into the curriculum through a cross-curricular approach, accompanied by practices of sensitive listening. Sacristán (2013) conceptualizes the curriculum as a social and cultural practice rather than simply a neutral sequence of subject matter. From this perspective, topics such as human rights, child protection, health, citizenship, social coexistence, gender, digital culture, and violence prevention cannot be treated as issues external to the educational process.

Araújo (2014) contributes to this analysis by discussing cross-cutting themes and project-based pedagogy as pathways for educational transformation. When prevention of sexual exploitation is addressed only through isolated activities, its impact is likely to be limited. However, when incorporated into interdisciplinary projects, discussion circles, age-appropriate reading materials, debates on rights, citizenship activities, and initiatives that promote positive social interaction, it becomes embedded within the school's culture.

Nevertheless, cross-curricular integration must not be confused with improvisation. A curriculum committed to protection should be planned according to students' age, developmental stage, and the guidelines established by the educational system. In the early grades, activities may focus on body autonomy, identifying trusted adults, understanding personal boundaries, and recognizing the right to refuse uncomfortable situations. With adolescents, educational activities may include discussions on

consent, power relations, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, digital exposure, privacy, and reporting mechanisms (Brazil, 2018; Brazil, 2019).

Carvalho (2021) provides an important foundation for understanding sensitive listening as a core element of educational leadership. Sensitive listening is not limited to passive hearing; it requires presence, attentiveness, empathy, respect for the student's own pace, and the ability to recognize both verbal and nonverbal expressions. In the context of the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, this practice is particularly important because children and adolescents do not always disclose violence directly.

Barbier (1998) expands this understanding by advocating a form of listening that is open to the complexity of human experience. Within the school environment, this means recognizing students not only as cognitive learners but also as emotional, social, and historical subjects. Sensitive listening enables educators to identify vulnerabilities without turning the school into a setting for interrogation.

Thus, a cross-curricular curriculum and sensitive listening constitute an inseparable whole. The curriculum establishes collective conditions for preventive dialogue and human rights education, while sensitive listening enables schools to recognize individual situations of suffering and respond responsibly. Without a cross-curricular curriculum, prevention remains confined to isolated events. Without sensitive listening, schools may speak about protection while failing to recognize the students who need it most (Sacristán, 2013; Carvalho, 2021).

The third analytical finding demonstrates that combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents requires clear referral protocols and effective coordination with healthcare and social assistance services. Schools alone cannot provide comprehensive responses to situations involving domestic violence, psychological suffering, social vulnerability, threats, neglect, and violations of rights. Consequently, school leadership should not be mistaken for institutional self-sufficiency, but rather understood as coordinated and responsible action within the protection network (Brazil, 2017; Brazil, 2018).

Costa et al. (2025) reinforce this discussion by emphasizing the need for biopsychosocial care for victims, perpetrators, and families affected by sexual violence. Their approach demonstrates that sexual violence creates not only legal consequences but also emotional, social, familial, and health-related impacts. Children and adolescents who have experienced sexual exploitation may require psychological support, medical assessment, social assistance, protective measures, and educational follow-up.

Freitas and Romites (2021), in discussing intersectoral intervention for preventing sexual violence in early childhood, underscore the importance of coordination among different public policy sectors. Intersectorality enables education, healthcare, social assistance, and child protection agencies to share responsibilities without fragmenting the care provided to victims. When each sector acts independently, there is an increased risk of repeated victim disclosures, delays in referrals, loss of critical information, and revictimization.

Within this context, referral protocols perform an indispensable function. They provide schools with guidance on how to proceed in cases of suspected or confirmed violence, specifying whom to notify, how to document information, how to protect victims, what precautions should be taken regarding family members, and which agencies should be contacted. Clear protocols reduce improvised decision-making and protect both students and education professionals (Brazil, 2018; Costa et al., 2025).

Coordination with healthcare services is essential because sexual violence may result in physical, emotional, and psychosomatic harm. Health services may provide initial support, clinical evaluation, psychological care, and referrals to specialized services. Social assistance, in turn, plays a fundamental role in understanding the child's or adolescent's family, territorial, and socioeconomic context, as well as monitoring situations involving vulnerability, neglect, dependency, and social risk (Freitas & Romites, 2021).

The analysis supports the conclusion that schools must be integrated into local protection systems. This requires familiarity with community-based services, maintaining dialogue with the Guardianship Council, Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centers (CREAS), healthcare units, the Public

Prosecutor's Office, and specialized police departments. Intersectoral coordination should not begin only after violence has occurred; it must be established proactively through training, meetings, protocols, and effective communication channels (Brazil, 2017; Brazil, 2018).

The fourth analytical finding concerns the role of the Guardianship Council and the justice system. Schools must clearly understand when and how to engage these institutions, thereby avoiding two common mistakes: failing to report serious suspicions and treating the Guardianship Council as a punitive authority for matters that are merely disciplinary in nature. The Guardianship Council is neither a punitive body nor an extension of the school administration. Rather, it is an institution responsible for safeguarding the rights of children and adolescents (Brazil, 1990).

Santos (2024) contributes to this discussion by relating sexual violence against children to the responsibilities of human rights education and the competent public authorities. Human rights education enables schools to understand that their actions should be guided not by fear, moral judgment, or prejudice, but by institutional responsibility. When there is suspicion of sexual violence, schools must activate the appropriate protection mechanisms without investigating the truthfulness of the report, confronting alleged perpetrators, or demanding evidence from the child.

Silva (2024) further explains that, in contexts of social vulnerability, the Guardianship Council serves as the link between the identification of rights violations and the implementation of appropriate protective measures. In cases of sexual violence, its role is to receive reports, apply or request protective measures, coordinate with public services, and refer cases to the competent authorities whenever necessary.

The relationship between schools and the justice system must likewise be understood with caution. The justice system is responsible for legal proceedings, accountability, legal protection, and the safeguarding of rights. Schools, however, must avoid practices that could compromise testimonies, expose victims, or contribute to revictimization. Law No. 13,431/2017 (Brazil, 2017) and Decree No. 9,603/2018 (Brazil, 2018) are particularly important because they distinguish specialized listening (*escuta*

especializada) from the special testimonial (depoimento especial), establishing that child and adolescent victims or witnesses of violence must be heard in protected settings by appropriately trained professionals.

Teachers' understanding of the appropriate moment to contact the Guardianship Council is therefore crucial. When educators are unfamiliar with the Council's responsibilities, they may hesitate in situations involving serious suspicions or, conversely, refer cases that should be addressed through internal pedagogical mediation. This paradox highlights the importance of institutional training. Schools must distinguish between school conflict, disciplinary problems, social vulnerability, and violations of rights. In cases involving the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, a well-founded suspicion requires referral because failure to act may leave victims exposed to continuing violence (Santos, 2024; Silva, 2024).

Accordingly, the Guardianship Council and the justice system should not be viewed as external institutions disconnected from the school. Rather, they are integral components of the protection network. School action becomes more effective when education professionals understand institutional procedures, recognize the limits of their own responsibilities, and engage the appropriate authorities without exposing victims. Such coordination preserves the school's pedagogical mission while ensuring that violations of rights receive an appropriate institutional response (Brazil, 1990; Brazil, 2017).

The analysis of these four dimensions confirms that combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents requires a school that is well prepared, well coordinated, and pedagogically committed. School leadership depends on teacher education because teachers and administrators must know how to recognize warning signs, respond appropriately to disclosures, and refer cases without causing revictimization. A cross-curricular curriculum strengthens prevention by incorporating human rights, citizenship, health, body autonomy, digital culture, and positive social interaction into everyday school life. Sensitive listening enables educators to identify vulnerabilities that are not always expressed explicitly (Furlani, 2011; Araújo, 2014; Carvalho, 2021).

These findings also demonstrate that prevention cannot rely solely on the initiative of individual teachers who happen to be particularly committed to the issue. Instead, it must be institutionalized. This requires incorporating the topic into the school's pedagogical project, organizing continuing professional development, establishing internal procedures, implementing permanent curricular initiatives, and strengthening partnerships within the local community. A leading school is one that transforms protection into an everyday educational practice rather than treating it as an emergency response or an occasional awareness campaign (Paixão, 2021; Brazil, 2024).

Finally, the findings indicate that schools must act with balance. They must neither remain silent in the face of signs of sexual exploitation nor assume investigative functions. They must not regard the Guardianship Council as an institution of punishment but rather as an agency dedicated to protection. They must not reduce sexuality education to biological content but instead approach it as an essential dimension of human rights education. Nor should they confine prevention to commemorative dates; rather, it should be incorporated into both the curriculum and the school's institutional culture. This is the essential condition for transforming silence into protective dialogue (Brazil, 2017; Santos, 2024; Silva, 2024).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article examined the role of the school as a leading agent in combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents by bringing together the concepts of dialogicity, interdisciplinarity, and the protection network. The discussion demonstrated that, owing to its daily presence in the lives of children and adolescents, the school occupies a strategic position for identifying warning signs, welcoming disclosures, implementing preventive actions, and activating the appropriate authorities. However, this role is not fulfilled spontaneously. It depends on professional training, established protocols, curriculum development, ethical commitment, and intersectoral coordination.

Dialogicity, inspired by Paulo Freire, proved to be an indispensable pedagogical foundation for breaking the silence surrounding sexual exploitation. A dialogic school neither transforms sensitive issues into taboos nor treats students as passive recipients of rules. Instead, it creates conditions in which individuals can speak responsibly, become aware of their rights, and have their suffering recognized. At the same time, dialogicity must be accompanied by clear institutional boundaries, since school-based listening does not replace specialized listening (*escuta especializada*) or the special testimonial (*depoimento especial*) established by law.

Interdisciplinarity likewise proved to be essential because the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents cannot be addressed by a single field of knowledge. Education, healthcare, social assistance, the Guardianship Council, and the justice system must work in a coordinated manner. Within this process, the school fulfills the roles of observation, prevention, support, and referral. Its greatest strength lies precisely in its ability to recognize students as whole individuals and to connect identified situations with the appropriate protection services.

It is therefore concluded that school leadership consists of acting preventively and making responsible referrals. Schools should not investigate crimes, expose victims, or replace the specialized protection network. They must, however, recognize warning signs, avoid trivializing well-founded suspicions, preserve relevant information, notify the Guardianship Council, and foster a pedagogical culture centered on protection. At a time when public data continue to reveal the persistence of serious violations against children and adolescents, institutional omission is incompatible with the social mission of education.

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