

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO CHILDHOOD IN THE MAKING: CARE NETWORKS, PUBLIC POLICIES, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT IN RESPONSE TO THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ECOLOGY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This article analyzes the structure of public policies, care networks, and social support as mechanisms for guaranteeing the right to childhood in the face of the impacts generated by the ecology of sexual violence against children and adolescents in Brazil. It starts from the premise that childhood, although recognized as a fundamental human right by the 1988 Federal Constitution and the Statute of Children and Adolescents (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente—ECA), constitutes a condition that must be continuously constructed and protected by the State, family, and society. Through bibliographic and documentary research, using governmental, legal, and scientific sources, the study maps the articulation among health, social assistance, education, and justice (CRAS, CREAS, Guardianship Councils, schools, and hospitals) as a protection network; examines public policies such as the National Plan to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents and Law No. 13,431/2017; and discusses sexual violence from the perspective of the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner and Belsky, which understands it as a phenomenon determined by multiple individual, family, community, and cultural factors. Data from *Disque 100*, UNICEF, and the Brazilian Public Security Forum reveal a scenario of underreporting and an increase in violations, highlighting weaknesses in the integration of the protection network. It is concluded that guaranteeing childhood depends simultaneously on strengthening public policies, specialized listening, and coordinated intersectoral action, with recommendations presented for improving the child and adolescent protection network.

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood, although frequently treated in common sense as a natural and spontaneous stage of life, constitutes, from a legal and social perspective, a right that must be constructed, guaranteed, and continuously reaffirmed by the State, family, and society. Article 227 of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil established the legal framework for this conception by determining that it is the duty of the family, society, and the State to ensure children and adolescents, with absolute priority, the right to life, health, food, education, leisure, dignity, and family and community life, safeguarding them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression (Brasil, 1988). Two years later, Law No. 8,069, of July 13, 1990, known as the Statute of Children and Adolescents (ECA), regulated this constitutional provision and consolidated the doctrine of comprehensive protection within the Brazilian legal system (Brasil, 1990).

This doctrine breaks with the former conception of *minors* as objects of guardianship and recognizes children and adolescents as subjects of rights, recipients of absolute priority, and persons in a particular condition of development (Maia, 2010). This represents a paradigmatic shift that imposes on the State and society the responsibility to establish concrete protection mechanisms rather than merely formal declarations of rights. It is in this sense that childhood is understood as a *construction*: being born a child is not sufficient to experience childhood fully; rather, a network of institutions, laws, and social practices must sustain, in everyday life, the conditions of safety and healthy development established by law.

The guiding question of this study is: in what way does the articulation among public policies, care networks, and social support act as an effective mechanism for guaranteeing the right to childhood in

the face of the social impacts generated by the ecology of sexual violence against children and adolescents?

This effort to construct childhood is put to a particularly serious test in the face of sexual violence against children and adolescents. Data from the report *Panorama da Violência Letal e Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes no Brasil* [Overview of Lethal and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents in Brazil], produced by UNICEF in partnership with the Brazilian Public Security Forum, show that between 2021 and 2023 Brazil recorded a total of 164,199 cases of sexual violence against children and adolescents, following an upward trajectory: 46,863 cases in 2021, 53,906 in 2022, and 63,430 in 2023, equivalent to one child or adolescent victimized every fifteen minutes in the country (UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024). In 2023, girls accounted for 87.1% of victims, and in 67.4% of cases the violence occurred within the victim's own residential environment (UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024). Added to this is technology-facilitated sexual violence, which affected, in a single year, one in every five children and adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the country, approximately three million victims (UNICEF, 2023). It is also estimated that only 10% of cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation are actually reported to the competent authorities, revealing a significant situation of underreporting (Childhood Brasil, 2019).

The general objective of this research is to analyze the structure of public policies, care networks, and social support as mechanisms for guaranteeing the right to childhood in the face of the impacts generated by the ecology of sexual violence against children and adolescents. To achieve this purpose, the following specific objectives were defined: a) to understand the concept of childhood in the making and how sexual violations interrupt the full development of these fundamental rights; b) to map the articulation and functioning of the services that comprise care networks, including health, social assistance, education, and justice; c) to identify the role of public policies and community social support in the reception and rehabilitation of victims and their families; d) to investigate the variables that comprise the ecology of sexual violence, assessing its psychosocial and structural impacts on society.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative study of a bibliographic and documentary nature, based on primary legal sources (Federal Constitution, ECA, and related laws), government documents (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, and National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents—CONANDA), reports from national and international organizations (UNICEF, Childhood Brasil, and Brazilian Public Security Forum), and scientific articles indexed in databases such as SciELO and PePSIC. To support the discussion, the theoretical framework is structured around four thematic axes: the first discusses the theoretical and legal foundations of comprehensive protection; the second maps care networks; the third analyzes public policies and social support; and the fourth develops the ecology of sexual violence and its impacts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO CHILDHOOD IN THE MAKING: FOUNDATIONS OF COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTION

The contemporary conception of childhood as a right is relatively recent in Brazilian legal history. Prior to the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, the legislation then in force, the 1979 Minors Code, was guided by the so-called doctrine of irregular circumstances, according to which only children and adolescents in situations of abandonment, delinquency, or social risk were subject to state intervention, being treated as objects of guardianship rather than as subjects of rights (Maia, 2010). The rupture with this paradigm came with Article 227 of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, which inaugurated the doctrine of comprehensive protection by assigning the family, society, and State the joint duty of guaranteeing, with absolute priority, the fundamental rights of all children and adolescents, without any distinction (Brasil, 1988).

The Statute of Children and Adolescents, in regulating this provision, defined a child as a person under twelve years of age and an adolescent as a person between twelve and eighteen years of age, guaranteeing them all fundamental rights inherent to the human person, as well as all opportunities and

facilities necessary for physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and social development under conditions of freedom and dignity (Brasil, 1990). The doctrine of comprehensive protection rests on three interdependent pillars: the recognition of children and adolescents as subjects of rights, who cease to be passive objects of intervention; absolute priority in the formulation and implementation of public policies directed toward this population; and respect for their particular condition as persons in development, which requires differentiated protection in relation to adults (Maia, 2010).

It is precisely this particular condition of persons in development that underlies the idea of *childhood in the making* presented in the title of this work. Childhood is not a self-evident biological fact, but a socially mediated experience that depends on objective conditions, such as safety, affection, food, health, education, and the absence of violence, in order to be fully realized. When these conditions are disrupted, as occurs in cases of sexual violence, the child does not merely suffer an isolated harm but experiences an interruption in the continuous biopsychosocial development process that characterizes the very notion of healthy childhood.

Studies on the effects of childhood sexual abuse confirm this interruption across multiple dimensions of development. An integrative literature review identified that children and adolescents victimized by sexual abuse experience psychological, physical, sexual, and social repercussions that tend to persist throughout life, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and socialization difficulties that may extend into adulthood (Cruz et al., 2021). Another study identified risk indicators and consequences of sexual abuse for child development, reinforcing that trauma compromises not only the victim's immediate mental health but also their cognitive, affective, and relational developmental trajectory (Borges; Dell'Aglío, 2008). These findings corroborate the thesis that sexual violence constitutes a direct violation of the right to childhood enshrined in Article 227 of the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), insofar as it compromises precisely the conditions of *freedom and dignity* that the ECA establishes as parameters for full development (Brasil, 1990).

Therefore, guaranteeing comprehensive protection cannot be limited to the formal recognition of rights: it requires the creation of concrete institutional mechanisms capable of preventing violations, identifying risk situations at an early stage, and providing qualified support to victims. It is this institutional arrangement, described in the literature and official documents as a *protection network or care network*, that will be examined in the following section.

CARE NETWORKS: INTERSECTORAL ARTICULATION IN THE PROTECTION OF CHILDHOOD

The protection of children and adolescents against sexual violence is not the responsibility of a single body but requires coordinated action by different sectors, such as health, social assistance, education, public security, and justice, so that no stage of care (identification, reception, notification, treatment, and follow-up) remains the sole responsibility of a single institution. The Unified Social Assistance System (Sistema Único de Assistência Social—SUAS) organizes, within the territory, two central facilities of this network: the Social Assistance Reference Center (Centro de Referência de Assistência Social—CRAS), which operates within basic social protection, serving as the user's gateway to the social assistance network, with a focus on prevention and strengthening family and community ties; and the Specialized Social Assistance Reference Center (Centro de Referência Especializado de Assistência Social—CREAS), responsible for special social protection, serving families and individuals experiencing rights violations, such as violence, abandonment, neglect, and child labor, through the Specialized Protection and Assistance Service for Families and Individuals (Serviço de Proteção e Atendimento Especializado a Famílias e Indivíduos—PAEFI) (Picolini, [n.d.]; Brasil, 2011; Brasil, 2009).

The Guardianship Council, created by the ECA (Brasil, 1990) and regulated with the support of Law No. 8,242, of October 12, 1991, which also established the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Criança e do Adolescente—CONANDA), constitutes another essential link in this network. It is a permanent and autonomous, non-jurisdictional

body composed of five members chosen by the local community for a three-year term, with one reappointment permitted, responsible for ensuring compliance with the rights of children and adolescents established by the ECA (Brasil, 1990; Brasil, 1991). In everyday practice, the guardianship counselor works directly with schools, health units, hospitals, CRAS, CREAS, social organizations, police stations, and the Public Prosecutor's Office, functioning as a connecting node among the different services that comprise the network (Fundação Abrinq Pelos Direitos da Criança, 2025).

CONANDA, in turn, is responsible for establishing the general rules of the national policy for addressing the rights of children and adolescents, monitoring its implementation, managing the National Fund for Children and Adolescents (Fundo Nacional para a Criança e o Adolescente—FNCA), and coordinating cooperation between governmental and nongovernmental organizations (Brasil, 2018).

In the field of health, the Ministry of Health established, in 2010, the *Care Pathway for Comprehensive Health Care for Children, Adolescents, and Their Families Experiencing Violence* (Linha de Cuidado para a Atenção Integral à Saúde de Crianças, Adolescentes e suas Famílias em Situação de Violências), a document intended for managers and professionals that organizes the health system's response into four interconnected dimensions: reception, care, mandatory notification, and follow-up of the victim within the care and protection network (Brasil, 2010). Mandatory notification of suspected or confirmed cases of violence against children and adolescents is a central stage in this process, because it is through notification that the other services in the network, such as the Guardianship Council, CREAS, specialized police station, and Public Prosecutor's Office, become aware of the case and can act in a coordinated manner.

Within the justice system, Law No. 13,431, of April 4, 2017, in force since April 2018, represented a significant advance by establishing the System for Guaranteeing the Rights of Child and Adolescent Victims or Witnesses of Violence, creating mechanisms for prevention and response and establishing two central procedures: specialized listening, conducted by a body within the protection network without an investigative purpose and limited to the account strictly necessary for providing care

to the victim; and special testimony, collected before a police or judicial authority in a welcoming environment capable of reducing the child's exposure to multiple interviews (Brasil, 2017; Childhood Brasil, 2018). This distinction is fundamental because it addresses a problem historically identified in the legal literature: institutional revictimization. Studies on secondary victimization show that traditional forms of intervention by the justice system, in which children were repeatedly interviewed by different authorities for the purpose of gathering evidence, constituted a form of institutional violence that compounded the original trauma (Roque et al., 2014). By restricting, whenever possible, the child's testimony to a single procedural occasion, special testimony specifically seeks to prevent this duplication of suffering (Brasil, 2017).

The functioning of this network, however, depends on the quality of the articulation among its nodes. When communication among CRAS, CREAS, the Guardianship Council, schools, health units, and the justice system is fragmented, whether due to a lack of defined procedural flows, insufficient professional training, or scarce human and financial resources, the protection network begins to operate reactively and discontinuously rather than preventively and in an integrated manner, thereby compromising precisely the *mechanism* that should ensure the comprehensive protection established by law.

PUBLIC POLICIES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

If the care network describes the institutional arrangement for service provision, public policies are the instrument through which this arrangement is planned, financed, and strategically guided at the national level. The principal public policy framework specifically aimed at addressing sexual violence against children and adolescents in Brazil is the National Plan to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents (Plano Nacional de Enfrentamento da Violência Sexual Infantojuvenil—PNEVSCA). Originally formulated in June 2000, during a national meeting held in Natal (RN), and approved by CONANDA on July 12 of that year, the plan was revised and reapproved by CONANDA

Resolution No. 162, of January 28, 2014 (CONANDA, 2000). Although it does not derive from a specific law, its approval by CONANDA grants it legitimacy as a public policy, aligned with the rights enshrined in Article 227 of the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil and in the Statute of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA, 2000). The plan serves as a methodological reference for structuring policies, programs, and services to address the issue throughout the national territory, guiding states and municipalities in organizing their own ten-year plans.

These normative frameworks, in turn, only translate into effective protection when associated with direct social support for victims and families. Social support, in this sense, encompasses both the psychological and material assistance provided by the State through CREAS, health units, and legal assistance services, and the community and emotional support mobilized by schools, civil society organizations, and neighborhood and family networks. Specialized literature indicates that family support and intervention by the social assistance network constitute protective factors capable of minimizing the emotional and behavioral effects of trauma suffered by children (Cruz et al., 2021), reinforcing the importance of policies that do not limit themselves to the criminal-legal response to the perpetrator but also invest in the psychosocial rehabilitation of the victim and the strengthening of protective family bonds.

Civil society organizations play a relevant role in this support. Childhood Brasil, for example, has worked for more than two decades to coordinate public authorities, the private sector, and civil society in the development of prevention methodologies, training of network professionals, and dissemination of data on the subject, having contributed to the formulation and dissemination of Law No. 13,431/2017 within the protection network (Childhood Brasil, 2018). Similarly, UNICEF, in partnership with the Brazilian Public Security Forum, produces periodic assessments, such as the aforementioned *Panorama da Violência Letal e Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes no Brasil* [Overview of Lethal and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents in Brazil], which support the design and monitoring of public

policies at the federal, state, and municipal levels (UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024).

On the other hand, the effectiveness of these policies encounters important practical limitations. The most recent data from *Disque 100*, the reporting channel of the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, reveal the scale of the challenge: in 2024, the service recorded 657,200 complaints across all forms of rights violations, an increase of 22.6% compared with 2023, with children and adolescents being the group most frequently reported as victims, with 289,400 complaints during the year, ahead of older persons (179,600) and women (111,600), and with the majority of violations occurring in the victim's or suspect's own residence, in 301,400 cases (Brasil, 2025). This increase in the number of complaints may reflect both a worsening of the problem and greater public confidence in official reporting channels; in any event, it demonstrates growing pressure on a protection network whose response capacity does not always keep pace, in terms of human and budgetary resources, with the magnitude of demand. Added to this is the aforementioned underreporting: only approximately 10% of cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation come to the attention of the authorities (Childhood Brasil, 2019), indicating that the situation revealed by official statistics represents only a fraction of the sexual violence actually perpetrated against children and adolescents in the country.

THE ECOLOGY OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE: RISK FACTORS AND PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS

Understanding sexual violence against children as an ecological phenomenon means moving away from an explanation that reduces it to an isolated act committed by a deviant individual and instead analyzing it as the result of interactions among multiple levels of the environment in which the child is situated. This approach originates in the bioecological theory of human development formulated by Urie Bronfenbrenner, which describes the developmental environment as a series of concentric structures, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, which interact with one another and collectively influence the course of child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 as cited in Zillmer et

al., 2011). In later formulations, the author also incorporated the dimensions of process, person, context, and time, in what is known as the PPCT model, reinforcing that human development results from the continuous mutual accommodation between the developing individual and the changing properties of the contexts in which they live (Zillmer et al., 2011).

Belsky (1980) proposed a model for understanding violence against children as a phenomenon determined by multiple factors—individual, family, community, and cultural forces—integrating previously divergent explanations that emphasized, at different times, psychological disorders among perpetrators, characteristics of the children themselves, dysfunctional patterns of family interaction, social forces inducing stress, or cultural values that tolerate or normalize violence. This model remains central to contemporary literature on the subject because it makes it possible to understand why child sexual violence is not randomly distributed throughout society but is concentrated in contexts marked by specific structural vulnerabilities.

At the macrosystem level, Brazilian literature has identified the so-called *culture of silence* as a structural factor that is decisive in maintaining and rendering invisible sexual violence against children. Neto, Rezende, and Carvalho (2021) analyze child sexual abuse through the intersections of machismo, racism, and adultcentrism, arguing that these three axes of inequality—gender, race, and age—combine to hinder both the prevention and reporting of violence, especially when the perpetrator is a member of the child's own family or circle of trust. This analysis directly corresponds with the data already presented: the fact that 87.1% of victims are girls and that 67.4% of violence occurs in residential environments (UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024) is not accidental but reflects asymmetrical power relations based on gender, generation, and, often, socioeconomic status, which are reproduced at the level of the family microsystem and tolerated or normalized at the level of the cultural macrosystem.

At the mesosystem and exosystem levels, the weakness or fragmentation of the protection network described in the previous section—such as the absence of clear channels between schools, health services, social assistance, and justice, the insufficient number of professionals trained to identify signs of violence,

and the lack of safe channels through which children can be heard—also operates as a risk factor insofar as it delays the identification of cases and prolongs the victim's exposure to the situation of violence. Thus, the ecological model makes it possible to understand the care network and public policies discussed in the previous sections not merely as responses to violence that has already occurred, but as protective factors capable of acting preventively at multiple levels of the child's environment.

Regarding psychosocial impacts, the scientific literature consistently points to profound and lasting consequences. In addition to the aforementioned post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and socialization difficulties (Cruz et al., 2021), studies on risk indicators in child development identify impairments in the capacity for emotional attachment, emotional regulation, and school performance, as well as greater vulnerability to self-destructive behaviors and revictimization throughout life when the child does not receive adequate support and treatment (Borges; Dell'Aglío, 2008). At the broader social level, *Panorama da Violência Letal e Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes no Brasil* [Overview of Lethal and Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents in Brazil] demonstrates that these individual impacts add up to a collective cost: every case of sexual violence that is not adequately addressed also represents a loss to the country's social development insofar as it compromises the educational, occupational, and relational trajectory of a significant portion of the child and adolescent population (UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024). In this sense, the ecology of sexual violence is not merely an explanatory model but also a call to action: if violence is multidetermined, its prevention and response must likewise operate simultaneously at all levels of the child's environment—family, institutional, and cultural.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is characterized as qualitative research developed through bibliographic and documentary methods, with the objective of analyzing children's rights to childhood in the making, care

networks, public policies, and social support in response to the impacts of sexual violence against children and adolescents.

Regarding its objectives, the research is descriptive and analytical in nature, seeking to understand the normative and institutional structure for the protection of childhood, as well as to examine the integrated action of public policies and the protection network in addressing sexual violence against children and adolescents.

With regard to technical procedures, bibliographic research was conducted based on books, scientific articles, specialized periodicals, and other academic works related to the subject. According to Gil (2002), bibliographic research is developed on the basis of previously prepared material, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles. Likewise, Lakatos and Marconi (2003) emphasize that bibliographic research enables researchers to become familiar with the principal studies previously conducted on the object under investigation, thereby making it possible to construct the theoretical framework of the research.

With regard to methodological aspects, this article employed bibliographic research. Thus, it is characterized as:

[...] Developed from previously published material, consisting mainly of: books, magazines, journal publications and scientific articles, newspapers, bulletins, monographs, dissertations, theses, cartographic material, the internet, with the purpose of placing the researcher in direct contact with all material already written on the subject of the research. In bibliographic research, it is important for the researcher to verify the reliability of the data obtained, observing possible inconsistencies or contradictions that the works may present (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013, p. 54).

Gil (2002) points out that bibliographic research is developed on the basis of previously prepared material, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles. Lakatos and Marconi (2003) state that bibliographic research constitutes a general survey of the principal works already conducted, which are important because they are capable of providing current and relevant data related to the subject.

Documentary research was also employed through the analysis of official documents, legislation, and data produced by public bodies and national and international organizations.

Gil (2002) explains that it uses materials that have not yet undergone analytical treatment or that may still be reworked according to the objectives of the research. It is also descriptive research whose primary objective is to describe the characteristics of a given population or phenomenon or, alternatively, to establish relationships between variables, as Gil (2002) emphasizes.

Among other sources, the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Statute of Children and Adolescents (Brasil, 1990), Law No. 13,431/2017, documents from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship, and the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents (CONANDA), as well as reports prepared by UNICEF, Childhood Brasil, and the Brazilian Public Security Forum, were examined because they constitute important instruments for understanding the phenomenon under study.

The qualitative approach proved appropriate for the development of the study because it enabled a critical interpretation of legal norms, public policies, and specialized literature, allowing sexual violence against children and adolescents to be understood as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, as well as identifying the importance of coordinated action by the protection network for the realization of the fundamental rights of childhood.

Finally, data analysis was based on a critical interpretation of the sources consulted, seeking to establish relationships among the theoretical framework, current legislation, public policies, and the evidence presented in the scientific literature in order to respond to the objectives proposed in this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the scientific literature, legislation, and official documents made it possible to identify that the realization of the right to childhood depends on integrated action among public policies, the

protection network, and social support. Although the Brazilian legal system has a solid body of legislation aimed at the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents, it was found that the practical implementation of these guarantees still faces significant structural and institutional challenges (Brasil, 1988; Brasil, 1990; CONANDA, 2000).

The results demonstrated that the 1988 Federal Constitution and the Statute of Children and Adolescents consolidated a new protection paradigm by recognizing children and adolescents as subjects of rights and recipients of absolute priority (Brasil, 1988; Brasil, 1990; Maia, 2010). However, the research demonstrated that the existence of legal norms alone does not ensure the realization of these rights, making coordinated action among the State, family, and society indispensable (Maia, 2010).

Within the sphere of public policies, it was observed that instruments such as Law No. 13,431/2017, the National Plan to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents, and the guidelines of the Unified Social Assistance System represent important advances in the organization of the service network (Brasil, 2017; CONANDA, 2000; Brasil, 2010). Nevertheless, the literature consulted demonstrates that difficulties persist concerning integration among services, insufficient specialized human resources, regional inequalities in service provision, and the absence of uniform operational protocols (Childhood Brasil, 2018; Fundação Abrinq Pelos Direitos da Criança, 2025).

Another relevant aspect identified concerns the functioning of the intersectoral protection network. The research demonstrated that bodies such as CRAS, CREAS, Guardianship Councils, health units, schools, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Judiciary perform complementary and indispensable functions in receiving victims (Brasil, 1990; Brasil, 2017; Brasil, 2010). However, when there is no efficient communication among these institutions, care becomes fragmented, favoring delays in the identification of situations of violence, difficulties in monitoring victims, and, in many cases, institutional revictimization (Roque et al., 2014).

The documents analyzed also demonstrate that child sexual violence has complex and multidetermined characteristics, as explained by the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner and Belsky

(Belsky, 1980; Zillmer et al., 2011). In this context, individual, family, community, and sociocultural factors were found to interact simultaneously to facilitate the occurrence of violence, reinforcing the need for public policies that go beyond an exclusively repressive response and encompass preventive and educational actions and the strengthening of family and community bonds (Neto; Rezende; Carvalho, 2021).

Statistical data released by national and international organizations also reveal a concerning scenario of increasing reports of sexual violence against children and adolescents while simultaneously indicating high rates of underreporting (UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024; Brasil, 2025; Childhood Brasil, 2019). This scenario demonstrates that official figures probably represent only part of the reality, indicating the persistence of obstacles related to fear of reporting, victims' dependence on perpetrators, and the so-called culture of silence, especially when violence occurs within the family environment (Neto; Rezende; Carvalho, 2021).

The literature also converges regarding the consequences of sexual violence for child development. Psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social impacts were identified that may persist throughout life, compromising victims' school performance, interpersonal relationships, mental health, and biopsychosocial development (Cruz et al., 2021; Borges; Dell'Aglío, 2008). These findings reinforce that comprehensive protection is not limited to holding the perpetrator accountable, requiring psychological care, social follow-up, and permanent prevention policies (Brasil, 2017; Cruz et al., 2021).

Thus, the research findings confirm that guaranteeing the right to childhood depends on effective coordination among legislation, public policies, and intersectoral action by the protection network (Brasil, 1988; Brasil, 1990; Brasil, 2017). It was found that strengthening communication among the responsible bodies, providing continuous professional training, investing in specialized services, and expanding prevention strategies are essential measures for reducing the incidence of sexual violence and ensuring the effectiveness of the fundamental rights of children and adolescents (Brasil, 2010; CONANDA, 2000; Childhood Brasil, 2018).

Accordingly, the findings corroborate the understanding that childhood should be understood as a permanent social and legal construction whose preservation requires an ongoing commitment from the State and society (Maia, 2010; Brasil, 1988). Thus, rather than merely expanding normative production, it is necessary to invest in the effective implementation of existing public policies, the integration of the protection network, and the promotion of a culture of prevention, support, and respect for the rights of children and adolescents (CONANDA, 2000; UNICEF; Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article analyzed the structure of public policies, care networks, and social support as mechanisms for guaranteeing the right to childhood in the face of the impacts of the ecology of sexual violence against children and adolescents in Brazil. The results of the bibliographic and documentary research confirm that childhood, as enshrined in the 1988 Federal Constitution and the Statute of Children and Adolescents, is a right that requires permanent construction: formal recognition of its holders' rights is not sufficient; coordinated action by a complex set of institutions, including health, social assistance, education, the Guardianship Council, and the justice system, is necessary for the comprehensive protection established by law to become effective protection in the concrete life of each child.

Analysis of the care network revealed a robust institutional architecture at the normative level, with CRAS, CREAS, the Guardianship Council, CONANDA, the Ministry of Health's care pathway, and the System for Guaranteeing Rights established by Law No. 13,431/2017, but it also identified risks of fragmentation when communication among these services is not properly managed and continuously monitored. The discussion of public policies and social support, in turn, showed that instruments such as the National Plan to Combat Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents offer important methodological guidelines, but their effectiveness depends on sustained investment, continuous professional training, and coordination with organized civil society, as exemplified by the work of organizations such as Childhood Brasil and UNICEF.

The investigation of the ecology of sexual violence, grounded in the models of Bronfenbrenner and Belsky, made it possible to understand violence not as an isolated act but as a phenomenon determined by multiple factors, including individual, family, community, and cultural factors, among which the culture of silence stands out, intersected by inequalities of gender, race, and generation. The data analyzed, originating from *Disque 100*, UNICEF, and the Brazilian Public Security Forum, reveal a significant increase in the number of complaints and recorded cases between 2021 and 2024, associated with a concerning situation of underreporting, which reinforces the urgency of more effective and sustained interventions over time.

Based on these findings, the following are recommended: a) strengthening informational integration among CRAS, CREAS, the Guardianship Council, schools, health units, and the justice system through standardized intersectoral protocols and shared information systems in order to reduce the fragmentation currently observed; b) expanding continuous training for teachers and health and social assistance professionals to enable the early identification of signs of sexual violence, especially in residential environments, where most cases are concentrated; c) expanding the implementation of specialized listening and special testimony provided for under Law No. 13,431/2017 in all Brazilian municipalities, in order to reduce institutional revictimization of victims; d) investing in campaigns to confront the culture of silence, using an intersectional approach that considers gender, race, and power relations between adults and children; e) strengthening continuous psychosocial support for victims and families beyond the criminal-legal response to the perpetrator, recognizing rehabilitation as an inseparable component of comprehensive protection.

In view of all the foregoing, it is concluded that guaranteeing the right to childhood in the face of sexual violence does not result from any isolated measure but from the quality of coordination among norms, institutions, and care practices: a mechanism that, in order to function, depends both on the commitment of the State and on the active involvement of civil society and the communities in which children live.

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