



HOMOPHOBIC CRIMES: EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMICIDES AGAINST BRAZILIAN MINORITIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To describe the epidemiological characteristics of homophobic crimes against Brazilian minorities.

Materials and Methods: A retrospective study was conducted at the Specialized Police for Homophobic Crimes. Information regarding year, age, schooling, sexual orientation LGBT identity, day of week, shift, place of occurrence, type of injury, number of wounds, weapon, numbers of perpetrators, sex, relationship, drug and alcohol use were collected. For bivariate analyses, the Chi-square and Fisher's exact, with significance level of 5% were used.

Results: The most affected age group was 19 to 28 years old (50.8%) and in relation to schooling, victims with high school education prevailed (62.3%). Regarding sexual orientation, 88.5% were identified as homosexual, 44.3% were gays and 22.9% were transvestite. Crimes occurred during weekdays (68.8%), at night (41%) and in public roads (63.9%). Of the 61 cases, 91.2% were characterized as homophobic crimes. Predominant lesions were lacerations (77%), and most victims presented multiple lesions (96.7%). Most homicides involve firearms (45.7%), followed by a white weapon (36.6%). Victims were assaulted by one perpetrator (59%). There was a statistically significant association for alcohol and drug use by perpetrators ($p = 0.004$).

Conclusion: Lethal violence against minorities showed a homophobic character, evidenced in the type of weapon used, number of lesions and the target regions. Given this scenario, there is an urgent need for the development of strategies linking security, health, education and legal sciences, enabling professionals in this area to deal with this problem.

Keywords: Sexual and Gender Minorities, Homosexuality, Violence, Homophobia, Aggression,

INTRODUCTION

External causes are events defined by the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) as a set of health problems of the individual, which may or may not lead to death, where violence is considered as intentional cause [1]. Among the various characteristics that comprise violence, homophobia is a neologism used to describe a revulsion against the affective and sexual relations between persons of the same sex [2].

The most recent worrisome aspect is the evidence that homosexual groups are proportionally more affected by different forms of violence. This aspect, together with a set of negative stereotypes about homosexuality, makes these individuals preferred victims of murders [3, 4].

The analysis of worldwide data of violence has attributed to Brazil the title of "world champion of murders of homosexuals" and homophobic violence is increasingly occupying the center of concerns of the organized homosexual movement [5]. Data revealed in the survey conducted by the Gay Group of Bahia (GGB) showed that from 2005 to 2006, murder against homosexuals increased 317%. In 2006, data showed 338 cases of homicides of Brazilian members of the so-called LGBT group (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals). This number represents a 27% increase in homicides compared to the year 2011 [5].

A hate crime is a criminal act committed with a bias motive, that is, a target with a protected characteristic (such as "race," language, religion, ethnicity, nationality) is intentionally selected [6]. It is related to intolerance of the victim's homosexual condition, which determines the action for the perpetrator.

Although violence against homosexuals is quite prevalent, it is a subject still limited to the scope of legal and social sciences. However, from the standpoint of public health, violence has been considered in the past decades as a concern for the health sector, mainly due to the understanding of the concept of health by the World Health

Organization as well as to the high costs generated with hospitalizations and rehabilitation of victims.

The fact that violence has a place in public health discussions revealed a breakthrough in the understanding and coping with health issues associated with social determinants and constraints. However, the issue of violence against homosexuals is still little known and discussed from the point of view of epidemiological aspects. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify the epidemiological characteristics of homicides against Brazilian minorities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Design

This cross-sectional study was conducted in the archives section of the Specialized Police for Homophobic Crimes - DECCH, located in the city of João Pessoa, Brazil. The study sample comprised 61 police and medical reports corresponding to reported cases of homicide in the period from 2009 to 2013.

In this study, sexual and gender minority was defined as people identifying themselves as homosexual, bisexual or nonbinary sexual, such as pansexual and polysexual, or people engaging in homosexual, bisexual or nonbinary sexual behaviour or identifying with or expressing as a different gender than the one assigned at birth (male, female or another), or intersex people [7].

Data Collection

Two well-trained researchers performed the data collection in the Statistical Archive Sector. Information was collected on socio-demographic data - year, age, schooling (illiterate or up to the 4th year of school, high school education, and higher education), sexual orientation, LGBT identity, day of week (weekdays and weekend), time of aggression, place of occurrence (home, school or other institution, public road; workplace), homophobic crime, type of lesion and number of wounds. The data analyzed relating to the perpetrators were number, sex, connection with the victim, use of drugs and alcohol.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows Software, version 18 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the absolute and relative frequencies, mean, median and standard deviation. Relationships between categorical variables were analysed using Chi-Square and Fisher's Exact tests. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Aspects

This research project was approved by the Ethics Research Committee of the State University of Paraíba (Protocol No. 18800513.0000.5187).

RESULTS

The highest number of cases was recorded in 2012 (27.9%). The distribution of victims per year had an increase in registrations from 2009 to 2012. The most affected age group was 19 to 28 years old (50.8%) and in relation to schooling, victims with high school education prevailed (62.3%).

Table 1. Distribution by sex according to the year of occurrence, age group and schooling of victims.

Variables	N	%
Year		
2009	9	14.8
2010	11	18.0
2011	13	21.3
2012	17	27.9
2013	11	18.0
Age group (years)		
16 - 18	8	13.1
19 - 28	31	50.8
29 - 38	14	23.0
39 - 48	7	11.5
49 - 58	-	-
59 - 64	1	1.6
Schooling		
Illiterate or up to the 4th grade	12	19.7
High school	38	62.3
Higher education	9	14.7
Not informed	2	3.3

Regarding sexual orientation, 88.5% were identified as homosexual and 11.5% as bisexual. 44.3% were gays and 22.9% were transvestite (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of victims according to sexual orientation and LGBT identity.

Variables	n	%
Sexual Orientation		
Homosexual	54	88.5
Bisexual	7	11.5
LGBT Identity		
Gay	27	44.3
Transvestite	14	22.9
Lesbian	7	11.5
Bisexual	7	11.5
Transsexual	6	9.8

Regarding the day of occurrence, 68.8% of crimes occurred from Monday to Friday, although rates recorded over the weekend are proportionately higher (31.2%), considering the amount of days in each category. Regarding time of aggression, 41% occurred at night and 13.1% in the morning. Concerning the place of occurrence, public road was recorded as the predominant scenario of aggression (63.9%) and 91.8% were characterized as homophobic crimes.

Table 3. Distribution of victims according today of occurrence, time of aggression, location and characterization of the crime as homophobic.

Variables	n	%
Day of occurrence		
Weekdays	42	68.8
Weekend	19	31.2
Time of aggression		
Morning	8	13.1
Afternoon	11	18.0
Evening	25	41.0
Night	17	27.9
Place of occurrence		
Public road	39	63.9
Victim's residence	15	24.6
Accommodation establishments	4	6.6
Perpetrator's residence	3	4.9
Homophobic crime		
Yes	56	91.8
No	5	9.2

Predominant lesions were lacerations (77%), and most victims presented multiple lesions (96.7%). With regard to the weapon, most involved firearm (45.7%), followed by a white weapon (36.6%) (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of victims according to the type and number of injuries and weapon.

Variable	n	%
Type of Lesion		
Laceration	47	77.0
Contusion	11	18.0
Traumatic brain injury	1	1.6
Intoxication	2	3.4
Number of wounds		
Single	2	3.3
Multiple	59	96.7
Weapon		
Firearm	27	45.7
White weapon	21	36.6
Blunt Object	11	18.7

With regard to the quantification of shots by firearm, there was an average of 4.85 projectiles, median of 4 projectiles and amplitude ranging from 2 to 9 projectiles per individual. Regarding the number of blows by Knife, an average of 21.3 blows (+/- 26.32), median of 14 and am-

plitude ranging from 1 to 106 blows was verified.

Table 5 shows that victims were assaulted by one perpetrator (59%) and these were predominantly male (96.7%), with no connection to the victim (50.8%) without suspicion for drug use (63.9%) and alcohol (60.7%). There was a statistically significant association for alcohol and drug use by perpetrators ($p = 0.004$).

Table 5. Distribution of perpetrators according to the number, sex, relationship, drug and alcohol use.

Variables	n	%
Number of perpetrators		
One	36	59.0
Two or more	24	39.3
Not informed	1	1.7
Sex		
Male	59	96.7
Female	2	3.3
Connection with the victim		
Unknown	31	50.8
Known	23	37.7
Former spouse	5	8.3
Lawman	1	1.6
Not informed	1	1.6
Use of drugs		
Yes	22	36.1
No	39	63.9
Use of alcohol		
Yes	24	39.3
No	37	60.7

DISCUSSION

Our study describes the epidemiological characteristics of homophobic crimes against Brazilian minorities and associated factors and we can conclude that the number of crime records has grown over the years.

Regarding sex, victims were predominantly male, corroborating with previous studies [8,9]. The prevalence of denunciations of male homosexuals suggests some questions: males are more vulnerable to violence compared to females? Female homosexuals denunciate less than male homosexuals? Are there more male homosexuals than female homosexuals? Gays are more persecuted than lesbians due to a historical social phenomenon in which male identity propagated in society, both by Christian ideals based on human reproduction, in which sexual relationship between two men was treated as a loss of vital seed, as by the hegemonic masculine identity cultivated in society [10].

Concerning sexual orientation, gays were the most affected by lethal violence, corroborating with previous study [8] in which the majority of homosexuals were presented as

gay. However, the occurrence of homicides against transsexuals was low. Trans people are particularly susceptible to hate crimes (physical assaults, physical assaults with weapons and verbal abuse), both in terms of prevalence and frequency [11]. Most transgender victims of murder are people of color, with low socioeconomic status and living in big cities; most are biologically male with some degree of a feminine presentation [12].

In relation to the place of occurrence, public road was the place with the highest number of occurrences. The lack of safety in roads collaborates for all types of violence, and this aspect is not particular of homicides among homosexuals. The location of the homicide is in line with the assumption that the perpetrator selected an unknown victim randomly in a place in which there is high probability of meeting people belonging to the same target group [9].

There is also the exposure in which the victims themselves cause when attending deserted places without policing in the evening or night shifts; Prostitution - developed by some victims of the study such as transvestites and transsexuals - is seen as a factor that facilitates access of victims to deserted and vulnerable places. The findings of Toro et al. [13] differed from those of this study, where most homosexuals were murdered inside their own homes and apartments, while transvestites were murdered mostly in the streets; and from those in the study of Carrara [8], where it was found that the acts performed inside the victim's home accounted for 38% of the total, while assaults on the streets were 30%.

Among the means used in assaults, firearm and sharp objects were the most prevalent, followed by blunt objects. It was observed that perpetrators used impetuous means, thus demonstrating the intentional character of causing death. The findings of this research are consistent with previous findings [14], where 63.4% of victims were killed by shooting with firearms and 21.9% were killed by weapons. In this study, it was found that the amount of firearm shots and weapon blows demonstrated the intention to kill.

Characterizing the nature of injuries, cuts and punctures were the most frequent, in agreement with the types of weapons used. Most of the lesions were characterized as multiple, describing the act as a hate crime, with intention to kill. The use of firearm accounted for almost all crimes against homosexuals.

Perpetrators were mostly men, heterosexuals and unknown to the victim and a study in Italy found similar results [9]. We observed that the largest part of homicides was carried out by two or more perpetrators. These findings reaffirm the hypothesis that crimes against homosexuals are related to issues of intolerance, since there is no prior motivation triggering the aggressive act, since there was no link between victim and perpetrator. However, one should also consider the possibility of gratuitous violence and the influence of alcohol and / or drugs. A previous study showed that 51% of perpetrators were known of the victims, which may evidence family, marital and work conflicts as determinants of violence, which express other facets of violence against homosexuals [8].

In the present study, there is the record of a case of

murder committed by police, referring to abuse of authority, demonstrating the "illegitimate" use of force against sexual minorities performed in prostitution areas. Prostitution and homosexuality are not crimes but are labeled and seized by the repressive force as deviant behavior, seen as illegal. This fact has revealed the abuse of power by some authorities to punish acts that are not in accordance with their principles.

There was also a statistically significant association between use of drugs and alcohol by the perpetrator, showing the potential effect of the use of alcohol and / or drugs on the relationship established between violence and homosexuality. An example of this possibility is the study of Wilsnack [15], which compared drug use, violence experience, sexual and suicide behavior among young people who had had homosexual experiences and those who had had only heterosexual experiences.

This research showed limitations with regard to the impossibility of obtaining information in full because the victim had gone to death and could not have his version reported. Another limitation is the fact of working with secondary data, so that in many cases the incomplete recording of information prevents the faithful transcription of findings [16-19]. Furthermore, some victims showed resistance to denunciate situations prior to the murder such as blackmail, threats, as well as non-lethal physical violence, introducing an important factor in the investigation. It is important to specify that the cases included in this study are a representative sample of the lethal violence affecting homosexuals in the city of João Pessoa, Brazil. It is, according to available information, the first police station based on homophobic crimes ever established in Brazil; however, any generalizations based on data presented here must be done with caution.

This study clearly shows the many different contexts in which homosexuals end up by being fatally victimized. It was observed that under the generic heading of "violence against homosexuals" diversified dynamics are hidden. Thus, it becomes necessary to better understand the lethal violence manifested within relationships established between partners and known people. Moreover, it is of fundamental relevance a deep exploration of cases involving drug addiction and prostitution, especially with regard to the vulnerability of male homosexuals who are part of the clientele of sex professional prostitutes and transvestites.

Given the epidemiological reality shown and the legislative, social and political context that violence against homosexuals is inserted, there is an urgent need for the development of policies linking public safety in the legal field, enabling experts in crime investigation; health care through the training of professionals to deal with prevention, treatment and mitigation of the consequences of victims; education, creating environments of elucidation to combat intolerance and legal sciences, formulating strategies to restrain and judge crimes against homosexuals, thus seeking to reduce the high mortality rates.

CONCLUSION

Violence against homosexuals is conceived as an outstanding issue, involving various sectors of society to face

this problem. Mortality is undoubtedly one of the most tragic faces of violence. Victims of homicide are mostly young male homosexuals with up to high school, murdered on public roads on the night shift by firearm, blows with sharp and blunt objects. It was also observed that lethal crimes against homosexuals are homophobic.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This study was supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) Fellowship of Research Productivity (Process 302850/2016-3) and the Brazilian Coordination of Higher Education, Ministry of Education (CAPES).

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