WOMEN TRAFFICKING: AN ANALYSIS OF EPIDEMIOLOGICAL RECORDS IN CEARÁ

TRÁFICO DE MULHERES: UMA ANÁLISE DOS REGISTROS EPIDEMIOLÓGICOS DO CEARÁ

TRATA DE MUJERES: UN ANÁLISIS DE LOS REGISTROS EPIDEMIOLÓGICOS EN CEARÁ

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ABSTRACT

The present manuscript aims to stimulate a reflection on the practice of Women Trafficking as a form of violence against women and, consequently, a public health issue. The central objective is to analyze the epidemiological data present in the Information System of Injuries and Notification - SINAN, regarding Women Trafficking in Ceará. A quantitative approach was adopted as the method, involving tabulation and data analysis. The results reveal epidemiological underreporting but allow the identification of prevalence within the victims' profile. The discussion is based on intersectional feminism, considering the confluence of vulnerabilities gathered from the records. The final considerations point to the need for the expansion and strengthening of public policies to address the issue.
Keywords: *Human Trafficking; Violence against women; Underreporting.*

RESUMO

O presente manuscrito pretende estimular uma reflexão sobre a prática do Tráfico de Mulheres, enquanto um tipo de violência contra mulher e, portanto, uma questão de saúde pública. O objetivo central é analisar os dados epidemiológicos, presentes no Sistema de Informação de Agravos e Notificação – SINAN, sobre o Tráfico de Mulheres no Ceará. Como método, foi adotada abordagem quantitativa, com tabulação e análise de dados. Os resultados revelam subnotificação epidemiológica, mas permitem a identificação de prevalências no perfil das vítimas. A discussão é feita a luz do feminismo interseccional, a partir da confluência de vulnerabilidades coletadas nos registros. As considerações finais apontam a necessidade da ampliação e fortalecimento das políticas públicas para o enfrentamento da questão.
Descritores: *Tráfico de Pessoas; Violência contra a mulher; Subnotificação.*

RESUMEN

Este manuscrito pretende estimular la reflexión sobre la práctica de la Trata de Mujeres, como un tipo de violencia contra las mujeres y, por tanto, un problema de salud pública. El objetivo central es analizar los datos epidemiológicos, presentes en el Sistema de Información y Notificación de Enfermedades – SINAN, sobre Trata de Mujeres en Ceará. Como método se adoptó un enfoque cuantitativo, con tabulación y análisis de datos. Los resultados revelan subregistro epidemiológico, pero permiten identificar prevalencia en el perfil de las víctimas. La discusión se hace a la luz del feminismo interseccional, a partir de la confluencia de vulnerabilidades recogidas en los registros. Las consideraciones finales apuntan a la necesidad de ampliar y fortalecer las políticas públicas para abordar el tema.
Descriptores: *Trata de personas; Violencia contra la mujer; Subregistro.*

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INTRODUCTION

The exploitation and trading of individuals as commodities date back to the earliest days of our society[1] and persist into contemporary times, under a new guise. Human Trafficking (HT) is a complex type of crime, often conflated with migratory processes, refugee movements, and/or prostitution. To define this phenomenon, will be adopted the concept of Human Trafficking as defined by the Palermo Protocol[2], ratified in several countries. This protocol specifies that HT involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat, force, or other forms of coercion, including abduction, fraud, deception, or abuse of power. It also acknowledges situations of vulnerability leading to acceptance of payments or benefits for the purpose of exploitation, which encompasses at least sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, servitude, or the like and, even for the purpose of removing organs.

The same conceptualization is present in Health Descriptors[3] and in the Policy for Confronting Violence Against Women[4]. Initially, the subject may seem somewhat distant from the daily practice of basic, outpatient, or hospital care services[5], but when considering the impacts on the physical and psychological health, as well as on the social relationships of the victims, it becomes undeniable that it is a public health issue, intrinsically related to Social Determinants of Health.

The central objective here is to analyze the epidemiological data present in the Information System of Injuries and Notification – SINAN[6], regarding Women Trafficking in Ceará. It is assumed in this research that there is underreporting in the health statistics of the State. The temporal scope covers the years from 2009 to 2022.

The specific objectives are: To stimulate reflection on the issue at hand; tabulate social markers; indicate data prevalence for the elaboration of a profile of trafficked individuals (gender, race, age group, education, income, gender identity, and sexual orientation); discuss the results based on Intersectional Feminism.

It is worth noting that the notification of violence cases is compulsory nationwide, as mandated by law[7]. Therefore, it is the duty of healthcare professionals to record epidemiological notifications. Among the health grievances cases, there is the notification form for interpersonal violence[8], which includes violence against women and Human Trafficking.

Even though it is a very old practice, there are still few existing and updated studies on the subject, especially in relation to violence against women and public health policy, since many studies give a jurisdictional bias, which gives relevance to this research.

METHODS

A quantitative approach study was conducted, involving data tabulation and analysis regarding Human Trafficking in the State of Ceará, with a focus on trafficking of women. Data were collected through the DATASUS platform[6] of the Ministry of Health, specifically from the Violence and Accidents Surveillance System (Viva)/ Grievances and Notification Information System (SINAN), which electronically compiles notification forms filled out by healthcare professionals and related fields across the entire national territory.

The access period ranged from 2023 to 2024. However, data from all available years in the database concerning Human Trafficking in Ceará were gathered. Therefore, the time frame covers the years from 2009 to 2022.

The information was organized year by year in a table created by the author for better visualization. Descriptive statistics were used, detailing the quantity of reported cases, and stratifying them by gender, race, age group, and level of education. The results were analyzed in a unique way, and compared with those of other studies, facilitating the discussion of a prevalence profile among victims of HT, within the framework of Intersectional Feminism.

This study did not require submission to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Paulo Marcelo Martins Rodrigues School of Public Health of Ceará (ESP-CE), as it involved publicly available data.

RESULTS

After extracting data from VIVA/SINAN, the following table was created, in raw numbers:

Table 1: SINAN Tabulation.

Year	Quantity of Cases	Quantity by Gender	Quantity by Race	Quantity by Age Group	Quantity by Education Level
2009	01	01 – M	01 White	01 - 5 to 9 years	01 – Incomplete Primary Education
2010	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero
2011	01	01 – F	01 Brown	01 - 10 to 14 years	01 – Unknown
2012	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero
2013	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero	Zero
2014	03	03 – F	01- White 02- Brown	02 - 20 to 29 years 01 - > 60 years	03 – Unknown
2015	05	03 – M 02 – F	M 02- Brown F 01 - Unknown 01 - Brown	M 01 - < 1 year 01 - 30 to 39 years F 01 - 10 to 14 years 01 - 20 to 29 years 01 - 30 to 39 years	05 – Unknown
2016	07	03 – M 04 - F	M 01- White 02- Brown F 04 - Brown	M 01 - 5 to 9 years 01 - 10 to 14 years 01 - 15 to 19 years F 01 - 1 to 4 years 01 - 10 to 14 years 01 - 15 to 19 years 01 - 30 to 39 years	M 01- Incomplete Primary Education 02 - Unknown F 04 – Unknown
2017	09	03 – M 06 - F	M 01- Black 02- Brown F	M 01 - 5 to 9 years 01- 10 to 14 years 01 - 15 to 19 years F	M 01- Unknown 01 – Incomplete Primary Education 01 - Complete Primary Education F

Year	Number	Gender	Race/ethnicity	Age	Education
			06 - Brown	02 - 10 to 14 years 01 -15 to 19 years 01 - 20 to 29 years 01- 30 to 39 years	01- Unknown 01 – Incomplete Primary Education 01 - Complete Primary Education 01 - Complete Secondary Education 01 - Complete Higher Education
2018	03	03- F	03 - Black	01 - 1 to 4 years 01 - 10 to 14 years 01 - 30 to 39 years	01 – Unknown 01 – Incomplete Primary Education 01 - Complete Primary Education
2019	02	01 - M 01 – F	M 01- White F 01 -White	M 01 - 15 to 19 years F 01- 20 to 29 years	M 01 – Incomplete Primary Education F 01 - Complete Secondary Education
2020	09	02 - M 07 - F	M 02 - Brown F 06 - Brown 01 – White	M 01 < 1 year 01 - 10 to 14 years F 01 < 1 year 01 - 10 to 14 years 01 - 30 to 39 years 01 – 40 to 49 years 01 – 50 to 59 years 01 - > 60 years	M 02- Unknown F 02 - Unknown 01 – Incomplete Primary Education 01 - Complete Primary Education 01 - Complete Secondary Education 02 - Complete Higher Education
2021	15	01-Unknown 01 - M 13 – F	01- Unknown M 01 -Unknown F 04 - White 01 - Black 08 – Brown	01 < 1 year M 01 – 1 to 4 years F 01 < 1 year 01 – 1 to 4 years 02 – 10 to 14 years 01 – 15 to 19 years 05 – 20 to 29 years 01 – 50 to 59 years 01 - > 60 years	01 – Unknown M 01 - Unknown F 03 - Unknown 01 – Incomplete Primary Education 05 - Complete Primary Education 01 - Complete Secondary Education 03 - Complete Higher Education
2022	05	5 – F	01 - Black 04 - Brown	01 – 10 to 14 years 01 – 15 to 19 years 02 – 40 to 49 years 01- > 60 years	01 - Unknown 01 – Incomplete Primary Education 01 - Complete Primary Education 01 - Complete Secondary Education 01 - Complete Higher Education

Source: Self-prepared, based on DataSUS, 2024.

The SINAN notification[8] contains various pieces of information about the victims, such as: gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level, marital status, gender identity, sexual orientation, among others. However, most items on the physical form are not available for tabulation in DataSUS. Therefore, the chosen social markers to compose the table above were those that could be collected, considered relevant for addressing the

intersectionality of vulnerabilities that may make a woman more susceptible to trafficking.

The header of the instrument in question indicates that it is designated for suspected or confirmed cases of Human Trafficking, restricting cases of extra-familial/community violence only when they involve children, adolescents, women, elderly individuals, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, and the LGBT population. Therefore, cases of Human Trafficking against adult, cisgender, and straight men should not be recorded. However, the fields of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity are only included in the manual form, which may indicate that transgender women are being counted as male, since information from the adult male public should not be reported.

Upon initial analysis, it is already possible to infer that the numbers are low for a State like Ceará, which has high tourist demand (including sex tourism), easy access to other countries/continents via maritime and air routes (international airport), especially due to its location on the map[9]. The Research on Trafficking in Women, Children, and Adolescents for Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Brazil - PESTRAF[10] identified, in the early 2000s, the existence of 241 HT routes in Brazil and presented regionalized studies, highlighting Ceará as both an origin and transit State for Human Trafficking. It also emphasized that one of the main international destinations is Spain, with a predominance of women in illegal migrant situations engaging in prostitution in that country. Nearly 10 years later, Waldimeiry Silva[11] published a study revealing the same predominance of the Brazil - Spain flow.

It is evident that the SINAN form does not include the purpose of Trafficking, namely: whether for forced labor, sexual exploitation, organ removal, servile marriage, or others. However, according to the First Diagnosis on Human Trafficking: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Goiás, and Ceará[12], the majority of women and girls victims of Human Trafficking are for the purpose of sexual exploitation, with a worldwide estimate of 98% being women. Foreign studies indicate Brazil as the South American country with the highest number of trafficked women, mainly for sexual purposes, as warned by the Association for the Prevention and Reintegration of Prostituted Women - APRAMP[13].

Lima[14] presents a tabulation of data from individuals served at the Center for Combating Human Trafficking in Ceará – NETP/CE, from 2003 to 2012, quantifying a total of 134 suspected or confirmed cases of human trafficking per year. However, the years possible for cross-referencing with SINAN are from 2009 to 2012, thus, we have:

Table 2 – Comparison of SINAN/CE and NETP/CE case numbers:

Year	SINAN Quantity	NETP/CE Quantity
2009	01	41
2010	Zero	11
2011	01	06
2012	Zero	09

Source: Self-prepared, 2024.

It is evident that the data significantly diverge, which may indicate either that victims are not being attended to by healthcare teams or that healthcare professionals are

not properly reporting such violence, which is compulsory under the law. Either situation denotes the invisibility of the issue in the epidemiological records of the State of Ceará, confirming the hypothesis of underreporting, impacting the development and implementation of public policies, as well as academic and scientific production about the subject[15].

In 2022, the technical document on Combating Human Trafficking for Health Professionals[16] was released, which compiles information from the definition of the phenomenon to how to conduct care, listing guiding principles and presenting the available assistance network, with addresses, contacts, and services offered, mapped by federative States. The dissemination of this document is urgently needed.

When observing the same social markers tabulated in SINAN, namely: gender, race, age group, and education level, in the NETP/CE data, Lima[14] does not present them year by year, but rather in a general manner. It is highlighted that only three cases from the Center, out of a universe of 134, describe situations involving men; regarding race, it is a criterion not collected by the Center; concerning age group, a predominance is observed between the ages of 19 and 25 years; regarding education level, only 24 NETP/CE records contain information, from which it is inferred that the majority have low educational level.

Although SINAN has few registered cases, upon comparison, it can be affirmed that there is a prevalence of female victims; regarding race, it was not possible to compare since this criterion is not included in the NETP form; concerning age group, it is inferred that SINAN presents a more diversified range, not confirming the predominance identified by the Center; and regarding education level, it is observed that both tabulations reveal neglect in filling out the criterion, but also highlight low educational level. Thus, the following table is presented:

Table 3 – Prevalence of Profile of Trafficked Individuals in Ceará:

	SINAN/CE	NETP/CE
Gender	Majority Women	Majority Women
Race	Majority Black and Brown	No records
Age Group	Very Diversified	19 to 25 years
Education	- Majority Unknown - Majority Low Education when registered	- Majority Unknown - Majority Low Education when registered

Source: Self-prepared, 2024.

It is important to note that neither in SINAN nor in NETP/CE was it possible to compile information regarding the work and income of trafficked women. However, Lima[14] highlights that the professional experience of the Center attests to the predominance of low income, revealing social class as another vulnerability factor.

Another highly relevant source is the National Report on Human Trafficking, with data from 2014 to 2016[17]. However, it does not regionalize or divide by State, but it is of fundamental importance as it brings together information from the Judiciary, Penitentiary System, Police, and Ministry of Labor. Nevertheless, it signals the lack of concentration and standardization of data. It highlights various difficulties, such as: manual collection;

inconsistency of systems; absence of important variables; divergence in concepts; inadequate presentation of data; lack of periodicity in information gathering; non-publication of data; among others, concluding that this crime, besides being inherently underreported, is improperly recorded, keeping it hidden - only statistically.

DISCUSSION

Considering the results obtained, especially regarding the profile of the victims, it is possible to establish a dialogue with the Intersectional Feminism perspective, which elucidates that multiple and simultaneous forms of inequities are experienced by women, advocating for an anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-capitalist, and anti-LGBTQ+phobic feminism[18]. To combat gender discrimination, there is a need to avoid hierarchizing oppressions[19].

Typically, violence against women (including human trafficking of women) benefits from the confluence of social vulnerabilities and risks for its recruitment[20]. The National Policy to Combat Human Trafficking[21] brings as one of its principles the cross-cutting nature of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic or social origin, background, race, and age dimensions in public policies.

Although Human Trafficking is recognized as a global phenomenon, there are no exact statistics on the number of occurrences per year, especially because it is a significantly underreported crime. According to data from VIVA/SINAN, between 2011 and 2018, 1,125 cases were registered in Brazil[16].

These numbers only represent cases where trafficked individuals were properly identified and reported by healthcare professionals or other relevant sectors, far from reflecting the reality of the issue in the country. There is a need to strengthen the support network, both in terms of investment/financing and in the training of professionals on violence against women in general[22].

Frontline workers in the fight against violence against women should also advocate for abolitionism. In a culture of domination, everyone is socialized to normalize violence[23]. Sexist thinking needs to be dismantled as it perpetuates male dominance. It is necessary to break down the fragmentation of struggles and validate the collective as a "potential agent" of change[24]. Bringing visibility to the issues, causes, consequences of Human Trafficking, and the refractions and intersections that surround it, is of utmost importance, as it is necessary to understand a phenomenon to intervene properly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the brief exposition, it can be inferred that the results obtained from VIVA/SINAN generally corroborate with the profile of victims highlighted in extensive research on the subject, as presented and compared here, and reveal a serious underreporting issue in epidemiological records.

Considering that there are still few research on the topic - particularly with an intersectional approach with feminism and/or violence against women, as well as with public health policy, since most assume a jurisdictional bias - this manuscript holds significant relevance for future studies that can contribute to the expansion and strengthening of public policies.

Therefore, it is intended, following the publication of this research, to submit it to public agencies, such as NETP/CE and the epidemiological surveillance of the State of Ceará, to stimulate reflections that can contribute to the reduction of underreporting. For example, the possible adoption of the SINAN form within NETP could be considered. Additionally, there is a need for standardization of records and inclusion of data (such as the purpose of Human Trafficking), as these are essential elements to construct the profile of trafficked individuals, assisting in directing prevention and intervention actions.

Finally, it is asserted the urgency of expanding training and awareness-raising initiatives targeting society, particularly the teams within the support network. It is necessary to equip professionals with the ability to identify and accurately record cases, providing qualified, comprehensive, and non-revictimizing assistance to women experiencing violence.

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