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## ON THE (DIS)CONTINUITY OF THE CASES IN THE NEWSPAPERS:

the coverage of domestic violence against  
children and adolescents

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**ABSTRACT** - This paper discusses the presences and absences that journalistic stories put into play to address violence against children and adolescents committed by people with whom they have ties of kinship or trust and coexistence. The analysis focuses on texts (letters from readers, articles, editorials, news and reports) published in 2008 and 2009, in three daily newspapers in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais: Estado de Minas, O Tempo and Super Notícia. Based on Content Analysis, we have systematized reports, pointing out the types of violence that appear more frequently as well as the locations in which these events unfold and the actors identified as responsible for the violent gesture. We also discuss how the analyzed newspapers confirm the existence of "preferential victims" and how certain events receive more attention than others.

**Keywords:** Children and adolescents. Daily press. Violence.

### DA (DES)CONTINUIDADE DOS CASOS NAS PÁGINAS DOS JORNAIS: A cobertura sobre a violência contra crianças e adolescentes em seu grupo doméstico

**RESUMO** - Este trabalho discute as presenças e as ausências que os relatos jornalísticos colocam em jogo ao abordar a violência cometida contra crianças e adolescentes por pessoas com as quais eles possuem vínculos consanguíneos ou de confiança e convivência. A análise parte de textos (cartas de leitores, artigos, editoriais, notícias e reportagens) publicados nos anos de 2008 e 2009, em três jornais diários do estado brasileiro de Minas Gerais: Estado de Minas, O Tempo e Super Notícia. Com o auxílio da Análise de Conteúdo, sistematizamos os relatos e apontamos os tipos de violência que aparecem com mais frequência, assim como os locais em que essas ocorrências se desenrolam e os atores apontados como responsáveis pelo gesto violento. Discutimos então como os jornais analisados confirmam a existência de "vítimas preferenciais" e de que maneira determinadas ocorrências recebem mais atenção do que outras.

**Palavras-chave:** Crianças e adolescentes. Imprensa diária. Violência.

### DE LA (DIS)CONTINUIDAD DE LOS CASOS EN LOS PERIÓDICOS: la cobertura sobre la violencia contra niñas, niños y adolescentes en su grupo doméstico

**RESUMEN** - Este trabajo analiza las presencias y ausencias que los relatos periodísticos ponen en juego al abordar la violencia cometida contra niñas, niños y adolescentes por personas con las que tienen vínculos de sangre o de confianza y convivencia. El estudio parte de textos (cartas de lectores, artículos, editoriales, noticias y reportajes) publicados en 2008 y 2009 en tres diarios del estado brasileño de Minas Gerais: Estado de Minas, O Tempo y Super Notícia. Con el auxilio del Análisis de Contenido, se sistematizaron los relatos, señalando los tipos de violencia que aparecen con más frecuencia, así como los lugares en los que esos hechos ocurren y los actores que son identificados como responsables del gesto violento. A partir de ese análisis, se discute cómo los periódicos analizados confirman la existencia de "víctimas preferenciales" y de qué modo ciertos sucesos reciben más atención que otros.

**Palabras clave:** Niñas, niños y adolescentes. Prensa diaria. Violencia.

## INTRODUCTION

In this article, we share part of the results of the research "Among deeply moving cases and daily news: (in)visibilities engendered by the coverage of violence against children and adolescents in three newspapers from Minas Gerais", carried out in the Social Communication Postgraduate Programme of the UFMG and completed in March 2013. The work investigated how journalistic discourse produces different levels of visibility when covering violence against boys and girls in their domestic group. The motivation for this study arose from the intense media coverage that the Brazilian press dedicated to the murder of Isabella Nardoni, who died when she was five, after being thrown from the sixth-floor window of a middle class apartment building in São Paulo, and to the trial of the accused, Alexandre Nardoni and Anna Jatoba, the girl's father and stepmother.

As in Isabella Nardoni's case, hundreds of Brazilian children are also victims of violent crimes committed by relatives or people who are close to them and with whom they have bonds of trust, such as teachers and priests. These stories do not meet with expectations - since the aggression is committed by someone whose expected attitude would be of protection and respect - and they reach different visibility levels when the media tackles them. Such stories can unfold over the course a few days or they can be confined to a short text published in only one edition of the newspaper. Despite the latter reaching the pages of the newspapers, they do not arouse the same public attention. Because of this scenario, we decided to observe the dynamics of news coverage for "deeply moving cases" (PEDEMONTE, 2010) and the coverage of daily news.

The deeply moving cases unfold over several days in the restricted space of the newspapers. If they achieve this feat, it is a sign that society should also pay special attention to them. As stressed by Pedemonte, "when a journalistic case breaks in the public agenda, the other two parties (politicians and opinion polls) are required to express themselves on the issue that relates to the case" (PEDEMONTE, 2010, p. 22, our translation). So, by indicating a certain break in a framework of normality, this notion remains very close to the definition of a journalistic event and presents itself as a productive concept because it draws attention to specific aspects of media behaviour. Consequently, the disruption these cases cause not only reflects the shock brought into the audience's lives, but it also interferes in the actual production routines of

the media that have to undertake extraordinary procedures to cover such events (PEDEMONTE, 2010).

From this perspective, the hyper-visibility of a case, its permanence in the public agenda and the debates it triggers reveal that we are dealing with a "deeply moving media case". Also, as Pedemonte highlights, this is the result "of the journalists' decision, which is to some extent random, at least if you compare such deeply moving cases with similar events that go by virtually unnoticed" (PEDEMONTE, 2010, p. 21, our translation). To understand the dynamics of journalistic events, scholars in the field have two typical forms of separating them. They either choose to observe "big" cases or they do a longitudinal roundup of newspapers over a long period of time to identify coverage recurrences. In our study, we use elements of both approaches when dealing with the Isabella case - and other cases that achieved a larger scale effect - so as to compare them to cases that do not seem to affect the routines of the public and the media. This was carried out in such a way as to allow us to understand "visibility regimes": the work of producing memory.

In addition to acting as memory articulators for journalism itself, the cases also leave a mark in the collective memory. Focus on the present is seen as one of the foundations of journalism, but one must also take into account that journalism needs to make use of the retrospective memory (past) to place public events in a certain context (ZELIZER, 2008). This happens in two ways. 1) A recent episode can be read in relation to past events, which helps make the unexpected familiar. 2) Current and past events can be connected by the news report so as to provide a historical and interpretive context to the narrative of the latest news (BERKOWITZ, 2011). That is why thinking about which of the "long-lasting cases" are capable of making memory seems to be such an important marker for us. Events that take up a privileged place in memory serve as reference for understanding the present and the future and help make reports familiar and understandable, while also allowing newspapers to expand on how things should be or should occur (TENENBOIM -WEINBLATT, 2011).

## 1 WORK METHODOLOGY

We collected texts published by three newspapers from Minas Gerais (*Estado de Minas*, *O Tempo* and *Super Notícia*) over two different periods. Firstly, we collected all texts related to violence against children and adolescents in their home setting published by the three newspapers

in the period from February 28 to May 28, 2008, to monitor the news coverage one month prior to Isabella Nardoni's death and two months after her murder. Secondly, we used the same period (February 28 to May 28), but in 2009, so as to observe the news coverage one year after that major case.

Altogether, the analysis spanned 543 newspaper editions, considering the sum of all three papers. We found 955 texts in which boys and girls under 18 years of age appeared as the victims of violence in their domestic group. Our observation was guided by how journalism works in treating violence against children and adolescents, so we decided to collect texts of different genres and types, such as news, reports, editorials, articles and letters from readers, mainly inspired by Bridge's (2005) work. This strategy proved to be relevant for two main reasons. The first reason is that it helped identify situations that went beyond the boundaries of "ordinary" news reporting and that reached the most valued space in the newspaper where one can find texts with opinions. Letters from readers, particularly, provide a glimpse into which stories resonate with the public and how the public reacts to them. The second reason is that all these texts undergo a journalistic selection. This means that even if they were not written by journalists or editors, newspapers decide that they deserve visibility because of how the topic was approached. We also take into account the editorial peculiarities of the medium (whether it is a broadsheet newspaper or a tabloid; the "proximity" factor; and the fact that newspapers still markedly publish short notes and news about violent crimes).

We had to deal with a large volume of texts and had to systematize features that could not be identified just from reading the reports, so our study deployed the Content Analysis methodological strategy in its thematic modality. This consists of finding "kernels of meaning" in the chosen object (BARDIN, 1977; BAUER, 2008).

Therefore, we organized a classification framework that allowed us to systematize the types of aggression present in journalistic accounts, the places where such violence occurred, the perpetrators mentioned, the pace of publishing when deeply moving cases broke out, the number of texts published in each newspaper and its distribution throughout the two periods into which the collection was divided, among other information. This led to the creation of a reference map, which made the main aspects in the coverage clear and revealed important information about what was published in the newspapers and how these stories appeared.

## 2 "WHAT" DO NEWSPAPERS PUBLISH?

We believe that the first important "find" of the work lies in the very fact that 955 texts relating to violence against children and adolescents in domestic groups were mapped in the three newspapers monitored. Although the research does not prioritize a quantitative approach and although the instruments used to perform the collection have limitations, we consider that the number of texts found in the six-month period is significant because we had chosen to focus only on violence taking place in the domestic environment.

This also indicates that despite the three papers showing interest in this type of occurrence, there is a varying gradation there. While *Super Notícia* presents 49% of texts on the theme, *Estado de Minas* dedicates 26% and *O Tempo* 25% of their texts to that. Thus, the publication that belongs to the so-called popular journalism accounts for almost double the hits when compared to the other two newspapers, considered as being reference journalism. Yet, this difference is mainly expressed in numerical terms; because, in terms of the type of coverage carried out, it is not acutely so.

**Table 1** Distribution of texts that make up the corpus of each newspaper

Newspaper	Number of published texts	Percentage of texts published
Estado de Minas	468	49%
O Tempo	248	26%
Super Notícia	239	25%
Total	955	100%

Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the type of violence, interesting variations are also recorded from one year to the next. In the following table, we present a ranking of the different types of violence according to the research periods.

**Table 2 Ranking of different types of violence considering the years of 2008 and 2009**

Type of violence	2008	2009	Average 2008/2009
Homicide	40%	20%	29%
Sexual violence	13%	40%	28%
Physical violence	15%	13%	14%
Negligence	11%	8%	9%
Psychological violence and Abandonment	19%	15%	8%
General violence, In utero maltreatment and Abusive labour	1%	2%	2%

Source: Own elaboration

Taking all of the texts into consideration, "homicide" and "sexual violence" are the types of violence that appear most frequently, being virtually tied at 29% and 28%, respectively. However, the classification by year points to particularities which need to be considered. In 2008, 40% of texts were linked to the theme of "homicide". Yet, in 2009, with the same percentage, the first place is taken over by "sexual violence" which, a year earlier, came only in fourth place, with 13%. Noteworthy is the fact that there is still a significant amount of texts in the "homicide" category, which ranked second in 2009.

Two high-profile cases help us understand the composition of the top places in the ranking. In 2008, of all the texts collected, about 26% relate to Isabella Nardoni's death. So the fact that the "homicide" category ranked first can be attributed to this case. In 2009, however, no occurrence which had such influence is recorded, with "sexual violence" then outweighing "homicide". Yet, it is possible to identify that a situation that took place in Alagoinha, in the countryside of Pernambuco, achieved considerable prominence. In February, the newspapers began to publish the story of a girl who, despite being only nine years old, had become pregnant with twins as a result of being sexually abused by her stepfather. The doctors responsible for the girl's care suggested an abortion. Consequently, the archbishop of Olinda, Dom José Cardoso Sobrinho, and the president of the republic at the time, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, spoke out about the case, which unfolded over several days in the news. 13% of all articles from 2009 are specifically related to this case.

In 2009, two cases from the "homicide" category had a greater impact than others. In one case, the father kidnaped his five-year-old daughter, stole a plane and crashed it into the parking lot of a mall in Goiânia. They both died in the crash, which accounted for 15% of all murder reports that year. In the other case, a 12-year-old girl was dismembered by a neighbour in Uberlândia, in the Triângulo Mineiro region. News related to this case accounted for 11% of murder reports in 2009. As the sum of these two high-profile cases came to only 26%, we found that it was a set of reports on "smaller crimes" that mostly made up the homicide category. This made homicide second in the ranking.

In 2008, "abandonment" came in third place, with 14% of collected texts relating to that. In 2009, it appeared only in sixth place, with 4%. It is interesting to note that in 2008 there were no cases that had great influence on this result. The most mentioned occurrence took place in Ribeirão das Neves and concerned the abandonment of a one-year-old boy found near some woodland. However, articles relating to this event account for just 22% of the total number of texts pertaining to "abandonment" in 2008. So, it is also the sum of occasional reports that result in this category occupying a prominent place in 2008.

In 2009, "psychological violence" came in fourth place, with 11% of the texts, more than double the amount recorded in 2008 (5%). This change in position is influenced by two cases. One is related to a boy's custody and the dispute between his father, the American David Goldman, and the boy's maternal family members, residents of Rio de Janeiro. The conflict mobilized Brazilian and American government representatives and resulted in worldwide repercussions. About 21% of all texts dealing with psychological violence in 2009 are associated with this case.

The work to identify the frequency with which the different types of violence appear, and to characterize elements that interfere with the indexes, revealed a high degree of randomness and uncertainty about what leads to media coverage. Extended longitudinal studies and media-monitoring over a long period of time can offer a lot of other information about the type of violence against children that receives the attention of journalists. However, it became clear that "violence against children and adolescents" is a way of looking at and grouping the different journalistic accounts. This is what our research proposes, as do the works of other researchers and organizations, such as Bridge (2005) and Andi (2006).

Nevertheless, this does not seem to be the guideline journalists follow in their daily work. The amount of reported cases shows that among the diversity of occurrences, newspapers make a "scenario reading". They

choose what will be reported according to a number of factors. Among these are competition, the moving potential of the story and, especially, the occasion, which is linked to aspects of the journalistic production: availability of staff to cover the incident, the guidelines of each paper, the existence of available sources, and other elements (MELO, 2010).

One must also consider that the involvement of children and adolescents as victims of the occurrences serves as an attraction for the press. Studies on the coverage of violent crimes reveal the existence of preferred victims. This means that more attention is aroused when certain segments of society are the target of violence. Consequently, such cases achieve greater prominence in the news (ANTUNES, 2012; GREER, 2007; MELO, 2010; VARJÃO, 2008). Thus, authors highlight age as a relevant factor since it is directly related to the victims' inability to defend themselves. This is taken into consideration together with other aspects, such as race, gender and social class. In general, what is observed in the analyzed texts is that there are some children who are more deserving of the status of victim (GREER, 2007).

### 3 WHO ARE THE AGGRESSORS AND WHERE?

Data systematization shows that, in the domestic group, the father is the main offender. Considering the years 2008 and 2009, in approximately 16% of the texts, violence is only perpetrated by the victim's father, i.e., the reports do not point to any other person having taken part in the aggression.

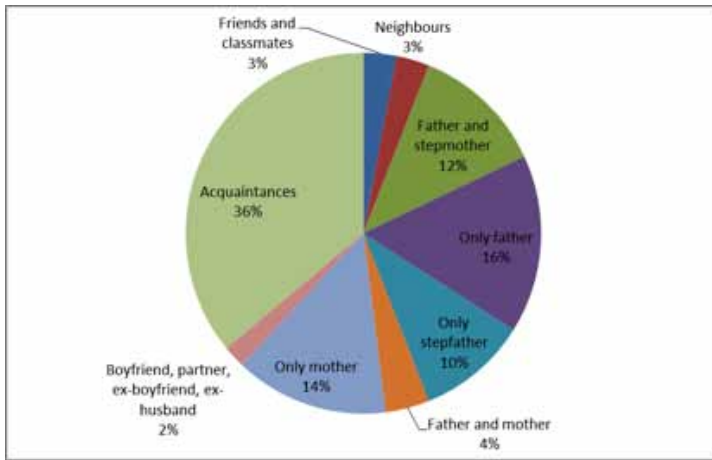
Mothers come second, being mentioned as the only ones responsible for the violence in 14% of the texts. Acting together, the mother and father appear as the aggressors in about 4% of the texts. As for the father and stepmother, these appear as the pair responsible for violence in 12% of cases. This index is composed almost exclusively by texts dealing with Isabella's death since, out of the 121 texts, only two are related to other cases. In fourth place are stepfathers, identified as the only perpetrators in 10% of the texts. On the other hand, there is no record in our research of any case in which the stepmother acted alone when committing the aggression.

The domestic group comes next in the sequence and can be subdivided into four categories: acquaintances (36%), friends and classmates (3%), neighbours (3%) and boyfriend, partner, ex-boyfriend and ex-husband (2%). Thus, we observe that a significant portion of the domestic group members, as well as those that are part of the family



itself, such as parents and siblings, are the perpetrators of violence against children and adolescents. Even restricting the group of victims to people under 18, boyfriends, partners, ex-boyfriends and ex-husbands already emerge as attackers. These do not account for a high percentage (making up about 2% of all material researched), but they do draw our attention because they point towards an early manifestation of violence in romantic relationships. The reports are also highly steeped in gender prejudice: in all of them the victims are female and the aggressors, male.

**Figure 1** Main aggressors considering the years of 2008 and 2009



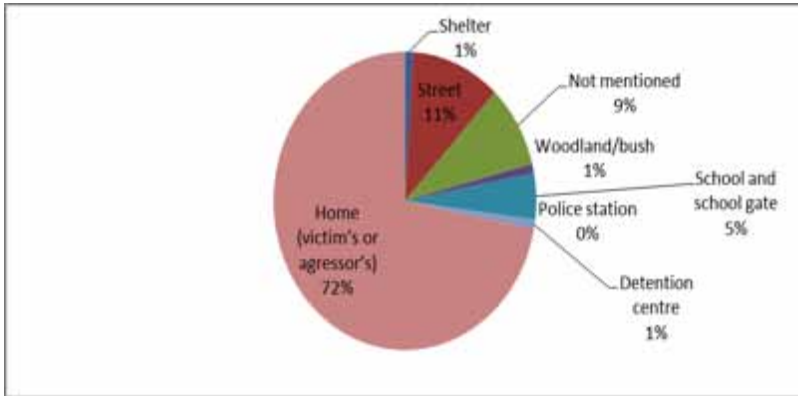
Source: Authors' elaboration

Regarding other kinds of violence, the relationship between genders repeats the same dynamics. Males have quite a marked presence in the offenders' group, with the father standing out as the main aggressor. Taking stepfathers into consideration, men appear as the only perpetrators in 26% of reports. Among the victims, however, the scenario is reversed. In cases in which it was possible to identify the sex of the victim, girls were the sole victims in 68% of texts, as opposed to 32% that only mentioned boys. In relation to this, one must consider that two high-profile cases, the Isabella one and that of the nine-year-old girl from Alagoinha, have men as aggressors (father and stepfather, respectively) and girls as victims.

As expected, since the father, mother and stepfather are the main perpetrators, the home features prominently as the location where aggression takes place. In 72% of the reports, violence takes place in the victim's or the abuser's home. After that comes the street, with a much

lower percentage of just 11%. In 9% of cases, there was no mention of where the aggression happened. School, shelter, detention centre and other locations appear in much lower percentages, as can be seen in the chart:

**Figure 2** Where aggression happens considering texts published in 2008 and 2009



Source: Authors' elaboration

#### 4 OF THOSE THAT ARE NOT "LONG LASTING"

In our research, single reports, published in only one edition of the newspaper, are the majority. This means papers do not pursue the consequences and the unfolding of these stories. They do not explicitly activate such stories as "memory" for a new story that will be published the next day. So, from this broad compilation of texts featuring an episode mentioned only once in the papers, we selected some with aspects that seem striking and reveal more about the whole collection.

#### 4.1 Institutional violence

To analyze this aspect, we chose two texts published on March 29, 2008. One is from the newspaper *O Tempo* and the other from the *Super Notícia*. Both report an allegation of abuse and false imprisonment at a shelter in São Gotardo, in the Triângulo Mineiro region. As the two newspapers belong to the same publishing group, both texts were by the same reporter. Also, we can see that the three-paragraph article from

*O Tempo* is a synthesis of the one from *Super Notícia*, which reports the case in five paragraphs.

What draws our attention is that, as opposed to what happens in over 70% of cases, the aggression did not take place in the victim's or perpetrator's home. Instead, it happened at a public institution created to shelter children and adolescents who are "victims of domestic violence", as explained in the two newspapers. The institutional nature of this violence makes it even more startling, as such places are created precisely to protect boys and girls who have already faced aggression in their families.

Both texts describe the situation found at the shelter from the testimony given by the president of the Municipal Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents. He visited the institution after an allegation was made by the Tutelary Council. The situation, he reported, is of extreme deprivation: seven girls were kept in a room where the windows were closed, there was no mattress or water, and they were fed old bread. Ages are not mentioned, all that is known is that they were sent to the shelter because of domestic violence. The texts do not explain what led them to be deprived of freedom, a healthy environment and adequate food. *Super Notícia* mentions that the Headmistress only said that she was "enforcing the norms of the institution." Such rules are, of course, legally incompatible with what should take place in locations designed to accommodate children and adolescents in Brazil.

Only *Super Notícia* makes it clear that besides the seven girls found in the room, the institution also sheltered 25 other children, from 3 months to 17 years old. In general, that text provides more information and helps us understand the allegation a bit better. However, there are many obscure points. Both texts mention the expulsion of a 17 year old, who had also been the victim of aggression at the shelter, but it is not possible to fully understand what happened. These and other questions remain unanswered since we could not find, in any of the newspapers, other articles on the unfolding of the case. The absence of news related to this case later on is confusing because the situation is rather serious. Even if the president of the City Council did confirm that the girls had been found locked up, there was still enough controversy to possibly prompt newspapers to continue investigating the case.

#### 4.2 Invisibility of psychological damage

Violence within institutions seldom appears in the material collected, and "psychological violence" is also an aspect that is

conspicuous due to its invisibility. Considering the texts published in 2008 and 2009, this type of aggression comes in fifth place, tied with "abandonment", which corresponds to 8% of the sample.

Frequently violence occurs in combination and this has to be taken into consideration. Although newspapers highlight physical injuries, psychological distress also clearly occurs when a child or adolescent is the victim of neglect, sexual abuse or abandonment, to name just a few. However, what we observe is that the reports do not broach this aspect of the aggression. Instead, they give priority to the description of the locations and physical conditions in which the victims were found.

Our classification is based on the aspects that the newspapers highlight, so the cases we place in the category of "psychological violence" are those in which there is clearly a situation of violence, but which do not imply physical harm. As a result, psychological damage only appeared prominently in cases of the attempted "sale" of children, abduction, parental alienation, violent acts committed against other people but witnessed by boys and girls, as well as a very specific situation in which the Public Prosecution Service filed a lawsuit against two couples who adopted two girls and then returned them to authorities, without explaining what led them to make such a decision.

The article "Another tragic ending," published by *Super Notícia* in May 2009 represents this well. Not coming to terms with their separation, a husband killed his wife with a knife "in front of their three-year-old son" (SUPER NOTÍCIA, 18/05/2009), as the main headline highlights. In the text, the child's presence and the suffering he is subjected to are described as follows: "at the time of the murder, the couple's son was at the scene and started crying, hearing the mother scream for help" (SUPER NOTÍCIA, 18/05/2009). Thus, the crying appears as an expression of the suffering. Also, it is interesting to note the chain of associations that the newspaper establishes: the child cries when he hears his mother's screams. So the story takes on a tone which seems to indicate that it was written by someone who not only witnessed the crime, but who was also able to interpret the boy's reaction.

## 5 THE "LONG LASTING" ONES

Although our research is comprised by a large number of texts, it was not difficult to identify the cases that lasted longer in the papers. To understand this "permanence", we used the number of days papers published references to a story as the criteria. As a result nine cases emerged as lasting longer than others. These, despite being grouped in

the same category, make for a rather heterogeneous mix in terms of how often they appeared in the papers, as shown in the following table:

**Table 3 “Long-lasting” cases**

Case	Number of days and year of publication
Isabella Nardoni: five year old girl is found dead in the garden of the apartment building where she lived with her father and stepmother who are accused of murdering her.	57 days in 2008 and 8 days in 2009 (Total: 65 days)
Alagoinha: nine year old girl becomes pregnant with twins as a result of abuse by her stepfather.	21 days in 2009
Fritzl: Austrian father kept his daughter imprisoned for 24 years and had seven children with her.	6 days in 2008 and 9 days in 2009 (Total: 15 days)
Sean: North-American father sues to regain custody of his son who was four years old when he was taken to Brazil by his mother and had no longer had any contact with his father since then.	10 days in 2009
Girl murdered in Uberlândia: twelve year old girl is murdered and dismembered. Her neighbour is the main suspect. Catanduva: a Senate Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (PIC) begins investigating a network of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Catanduva, São Paulo.	9 days in 2009 9 days in 2009
Janken: ex-footballer is accused of murdering his wife, in São Paulo, and running away with his one year old son. Girl tortured in Goiânia: twelve-year-old girl is tortured by businesswoman.	8 days in 2009 8 days in 2008
Boy is found in the woods in Ribeirão das Neves: one year old boy is found alone in the Woods in the municipality of Ribeirão das Neves, Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte.	4 days in 2008

Source: Own elaboration

By observing the articles collected, a huge discrepancy is clear when we compare Isabella’s case to the others. Altogether the case is mentioned in the papers for 65 days, considering both the years of 2008 and 2009. It should be noted that, in 2008, there were articles about the

case until May 28, which is the date we had set as the end of our data collection. Yet the case remained in the papers for more days than those considered in our research, although it is not possible to specify for how long.

One should also consider the long sequence of the publication. We identified articles about Isabella's case from March 31, 2008, to May 23, 2008. Thus for at least **54 days** newspapers in Minas Gerais reported the case without interruption. This means that texts related to her death were published throughout the month of April 2008. None of the other cases identified in our research had such consistent publication. An example would be that of the girl from Alagoinha whose case was published for 21 days and ranked second in the table.

Continuity in these two main cases differs. However, even more significantly different is how the coverage was carried out in each case. The texts dealing with Isabella's case maintain a close relationship with the girl, the attackers and the violence suffered, with practically a text a day related to the steps taken in the investigation. On the other hand, the coverage of the Alagoinha case has a rather different coverage, showing a gradual and marked distancing from the victim and the situation faced by her family.

The first texts we identified related to the Alagoinha case were published on February 28, 2009. The passage in *O Tempo*, besides mentioning the 9-year-old pregnant girl, says that the stepfather also abused her 14-year-old sister (O TEMPO, 28/02/2009). Subsequently, the *Estado de Minas* and *Super Notícia* also refer to the sister's abuse. Yet she is an invisible victim because, of the 71 texts related to the case, only seven refer to the sister and always in a very minor way. The invisibility conferred to the girl even reaches the point of being perverse, as is made explicit in the carelessness of the newspapers when referring to it. *Super Notícia* only says that she is 14. *O Tempo* and *Estado de Minas* mention she is disabled, but the information is mismatched. In the issues from February 28, March 5 and 11, *O Tempo* provides the following descriptions for the girl: "handicapped", "bearer of physical and mental disabilities" and "disabled 13 year old adolescent" (O TEMPO). Note that the latter changes her age, with all other texts stating that she was 14. In the *Estado de Minas*, the first article that mentions the adolescent says she has "physical disability" (ESTADO DE MINAS, 02/03/2009). Five days later, it says that the girl "has mental problems" (ESTADO DE MINAS, 07/03/2009). In the last text, the girl is described as "mentally handicapped" (ESTADO DE MINAS, 29/03/2009).

We cannot say, however, that as a result of that more attention was paid to the 9-year-old girl. On March 4, she is subjected to an abortion, with the procedure being authorized by the family and not violating Brazilian law since the pregnancy resulted from rape and posed a health risk to the mother. Yet the Catholic Church tries to prevent the abortion and, after it takes place, the archbishop of Olinda and Recife, Dom José Cardoso Sobrinho, is blunt in his position. "[He] stated that, with the exception of the actual girl, everyone involved in the surgery, including doctors and members of feminist NGOs that backed the termination had been excommunicated from the religious institution" (ESTADO DE MINAS, 05/03/2009) .

At the time, Health Minister, José Gomes Temporão, and the President of the Republic, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, expressed themselves as opposed to the archbishop. The political and religious leaders' views set the tone for the coverage, with a debate over who would be right: the Church or the State. The unfolding of the case itself became a peripheral issue. The girl, her sister and their suffering disappeared from the news.

The last two articles we found on this adopt a kind of "return to the case itself" approach, highlighting the fact that the girl's mother was also indicted by the police investigation. The texts published in the *Estado de Minas* and in *O Tempo*, on March 29, 2009, have several identical passages, indicating that they were reproduced from news agencies. What prompts the stories is suspicion about the mother's role in the case. The police commissioner's speech is emphasised: "The mother lacked responsibility in caring for her daughters; after all, she says she personally cared for the children's hygiene and kept up with her daughters' day-to-day routines. How could she not have noticed the rape and pregnancy in a situation such as this?" (ESTADO DE MINAS, 29/03/2009).

In relation to the family's future, the *Estado de Minas* reports that the stepfather remains in prison and that "the mother and daughters are expected to live in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Recife and be integrated into government social programs" (ESTADO DE MINAS, 29/03/2009). This is consistent with how the story developed up to then, but it is not a very promising outcome. Beyond the outskirts of the capital, there are few possibilities for poor women from Pernambuco's countryside. However, the news coverage does not present this as a problematic aspect, even though it means that there is the possibility that they will continue to be exposed to violence.

## 6 PERMANENCE AND MEMORY

The organization of the cases in decreasing order of permanence (Table 3) once again reinforces the heterogeneity of the group formed by the children and adolescents that are victims of violence. In this set of victims, considered "ideal" (GREER, 2007; BRIDGE 2005), an internal hierarchy can be observed. This goes from those who are living an "idyllic childhood" to those whose childhood is marked by various adversities. Moreover, we also need to consider that "aspects such as social class, gender, age and ethnicity are variables that affect how interested the media becomes in publicizing violent crimes" (ANTUNES, 2012, p. 279).

This helps us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between "long-lasting" cases and the ability to trigger them in our memory. The first four cases illustrate this rather well. It is unnecessary to mention how well known Isabella's case became to Brazilians. Quick references to the cases of Austrian Joseph Fritzl and the Brazilian boy Sean Menezes also trigger memories. Yet the same does not seem to occur with the story of the Alagoinha girl, despite its international repercussion at the time due to Vatican representatives also speaking out once the Brazilian archbishop had made his statements.

Certainly "erasing" the girl during the coverage because of the debate of broader issues contributed to that. However, this movement cannot be analysed independently from the how the victims are ranked. If we take social class as a filter for the analysis, Isabella Nardoni's, Elizabeth Fritzl's and Sean Menezes' cases are more similar to each other than the incident with the girl from Alagoinha.

Thus, an observation of the set of "long-lasting cases" shows that the continuity of the Alagoinha story in the papers is not enough to make it gain the status of "case", in that it would become a model or reference for future coverage. For journalistic work, the case has a projective function because it simultaneously refers to what has already been covered, while also providing input towards defining what may become news.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

How long or how permanently a case remains in the papers can separate incidents that gained the most journalistic attention from those that were only occasional or episodic. However, that is not the only aspect that can distinguish them. In relation to cases that are less "permanent",



their recurrence in the newspaper contributes to their being forgotten, however paradoxical that may seem.

Daily reports of violent acts against boys and girls seem to further strengthen the regularity of the interpretation schemes triggered. These make the cases be perceived in a particular way – as a certain form of "starting" the story and establishing causality – as opposed to conferring unique aspects to these occurrences. By highlighting this continual sequence, journalism reduces the possibility of such cases occupying a privileged place in the collective memory.

To understand the reasons why reports unfold in different ways in relation to their visibility and, hence, in relation to how they feature in people's memory would require efforts that lie outside the scope of this article. These could be undertaken in other works. Our aim here is to show the limitations of the "permanence" criteria when it comes to defining what will or will not become a "case" in the journalistic sphere.

In general, the analyses carried out allow us to state that "violence against children and adolescents" appears in the newspapers marked by a great variety of types, aggressions, perpetrators and victims. We understand this to be the result of how journalists see these occurrences as random. From their point of view, such events do not occur in an articulate way, as a sole phenomenon classified as "violence against children ...". However, the way we use this term in our research can make it appear to be so.

Nevertheless, amid this large assortment, we did map recurrences. The newspaper *Super Notícia* covers this type of case regularly, showing a clear preference for those that result in death. Yet children and adolescents are also preferred victims in the *Estado de Minas* and in *O Tempo*, despite there being an internal hierarchy in the group formed by boys and girls.

Parents are the main offenders. However, stepmothers do not assume this role (apart from what happened in Isabella's case), contrary to what the classic stories might make us suppose. In the group of absences, the low number of articles related to violence within institutions and within wealthy and middle class families made us uneasy. In this sense, Isabella Nardoni's case unfolded in such a way as to make it unique. We can follow the investigation of that crime step-by-step. On the other hand, there are situations, such as the coverage of the Alagoinha girl's case, in which victims and perpetrators disappear from the news and are then replaced by political and religious conflicts.

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