

Vulnerable victims in court: from childhood to senescence

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the work developed by the Forensic Psychology Office (GPF) at Forensic Sciences and Psychology Laboratory located at the Egas Moniz Higher Education School. GPF's main goals are performing forensic psychological assessments, especially violence risk assessments, as well as scientific research. The main purpose of violence risk assessment is the prevention and development of management strategies to minimise risk and try to identify factors that may contribute to the violent behaviour [1] supporting the criminal justice system in allocating more appropriate measures (e.g. sentence, intervention) [2]. GPF presents itself as the main response to cases with higher complexity and it provides guidance about the necessary measures to protect victims [3,4].

Materials and methods: This is a quantitative study and the sample ($n=90$) is derived from violence risk assessments of GPF (2016–2019). We evaluate 52 victims: 39 women/girls and 13 man/boys, aged between 5 and 95 years old ($M=33.04$, $SD=21.82$); and 38 defendants: 30 men and 8 women, aged between 23 and 82 years old ($M=44.64$, $SD=14.75$). Data was collected from lawsuits, semi-structured interviews of the victims and defendants, collateral information and clinical and forensic assessment tools. All participants signed an informed consent term, which contained the purpose of the assessment, the limits of the confidentiality, and also information about the ethics and technicians impartiality. All ethical principles have been taken due to the sensitive nature of the data involved and the respective informed consent.

Results: In 90 criminal processes assessed, 66 cases was about reported situations of domestic violence. In these cases the relationship between victims and defendants was: 33 ex-partners; 12 ex-spouses; 10 ex-boyfriend/girlfriend; 6 married; 3 parents and 2 son/daughter. We assessed 11 child abuse cases (5 parents; 3 relatives; 2 son/daughter; 1 stepdaughter). We also evaluate 9 child sex abuse cases (2 son/daughter; 2 classmates; 2 stepdaughters; 2 relatives and 1 stranger). Finally, we evaluate 4 elderly abuse cases (2 relatives; 1 son/daughter and 1 parent). In the violence risk assessments, most of the cases presented high risk level ($n=33$, 36.7%), followed by moderate risk ($n=23$, 25.6%) and low risk ($n=11$, 12.2). In defendant's testimony credibility, 39.5% ($n=15$) was undetermined, 34.2% probably not credible ($n=13$), 7.9% ($n=3$) probably credible and 2.6% ($n=1$) did not collaborate in the assessment. In victim's credibility of testimony, 73.1% ($n=38$) was probably credible, 15.4% ($n=8$) undetermined and 3.8% ($n=2$) probably not credible.

Discussion and conclusions: Higher and moderate risk are the most common levels in the Office assessed cases. These results demonstrate evidences of violence risk assessment importance in criminal justice system and an good practices example between Forensic Psychology and Law. Currently, through psychological assessment protocols defined for this purpose, the GPF has contributed to supporting the criminal justice system in allocating measures that are more appropriate to protect victims.

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Vulnerable victims in court: from childhood to senescence

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The trial process is usually stressful for victims. Testifying in criminal court must cope potentially traumatising effects and implies recalling and evoking a crime. Such act tends to be a revictimization [1–3]. Several studies have shown that re-traumatization of victims in criminal justice process has serious problems [3]. The article 271 of the Portuguese Code of Criminal Procedure allows the prosecutors and the inquiring judge to record the victim's testimony

and use it during the future trial. This procedure, called future memory statements, prevents the victim to be exposed months or years later to the memories of a traumatic event [2]. Even this procedure has a traumatic outcome due to the normal anxiety felt by victims. To minimise this it is necessary to inform and prepare the victims for this diligence, explaining the court procedures. Prepare the vulnerable victim for future memory statements aims to avoid an emotional trauma event towards the criminal justice system. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the work developed by the Victims Information and Assistance Office (GIAV), and its role as technical advisor to the Public Prosecutor's Office, specifically about victim's attendance.

Materials and methods: GIAV was established in partnership with Egas Moniz Higher Education School and it is located at the Combat Unit against Domestic Violence, 7th Section of the Lisbon Public Prosecutor's Office. Data was collected between March 2013 and May 2015 from future memory statements protocol that comprises three phases: Pre-inquiry stage (1 or 2 days before inquiry), inquiry stage (trial hearing) and post-inquiry stage (after trial hearing) [1,2]. A total of 144 statements for future memory were performed by GIAV. All ethical issues have been taken due to the sensitive nature of the involved data involved and the respective informed consent, the confidentiality limits, and information about the ethics and technician's impartiality.

Results: The type of crime of vulnerable victims is mostly child sexual abuse ($n=55$, 39.5%), child abuse and neglect ($n=42$, 29.9%) and domestic violence ($n=26$, 18.8%). The other type of crime are sexual harassment ($n=7$, 4.9%), intimate partner violence ($n=4$, 2.1%), and exposure to violence ($n=2$, 1.4%), rape ($n=2$, 1.4%) and others (e.g. threats and sexual coercion, crimes against freedom). We evaluate 98 female victims and 42 male victims, aged between 4 and 79 years old ($M=14.06$, $SD=11.32$). The relationship between victims and defendants are: 55 sons and daughters, 49 others situations, mostly more than one defendant (like parent and stepfather, grandmother and uncle), 16 stepchild, 6 ex-girlfriend and others (neighbour, grandchild, unknow).

Discussion and conclusions: It can be seen that the statements for future memory diligence is properly present in the current reality, and it can be concluded that the use of a structured protocol allows to benefit the quantity and quality of information, promoting, within what is a particularly vulnerable victim experience, making it very effective. At the same time, it allows the articulation between law, criminal justice system and forensic psychology, allowing an effective management of the process, praising the superior interest of the victim as well as emotional stability. Victim's statements are crucial to our criminal justice system and give us a better understand of the experience of testifying and how we can reduce re-traumatization and revictimization of victims.

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Adolescent neck pain: association with the use of mobile telephone

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Neck pain has become a frequent problem in adolescents [1]. Multiple factors can be related to neck pain. The use of electronic devices has been suggested to increase the risk of neck pain, probably due to the static posture and with insufficient recovery after local muscle fatigue [2–5]. However, the data from a few studies are contradictory [1,6]. Thus, this study aimed to evaluate the prevalence of neck pain in adolescents and their association with mobile phone use.

Materials and methods: This is a cross-sectional study approved by Research in Education and Community Intervention (RECI) research centre. Written informed consent were obtained from all parents or guardians of the students participating in the study. The sample was comprised of 206 students, being 109 (52.9%) boys and 97 (47.1%) girls, aged between 12 and 19 years old (14.67 ± 1.51), enrolled in the 8th ($n=104$; 50.5%) and 10th ($n=102$; 49.5%) grades of the D. Martinho Castelo Branco, elementary school, and Poeta António Aleixo, high school, both in Portimão, south of Portugal. The measurement instruments included a self-report questionnaire of neck pain, including questions about the time