

**Development of Common Mental Disorders in women in situations of sexual violence: an integrative review***Desarrollo de trastornos mentales comunes en mujeres en situaciones de violencia sexual: una revisión integradora**Desenvolvimento de Transtornos Mentais Comuns em mulheres em situação de violência sexual: revisão integrativa***Larissa Eufrásio Peixoto Mota<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

The aim was to identify, from the scientific literature, the common mental disorders developed in women in situations of sexual violence. It is an integrative literature review, whose databases were accessed: Virtual Health Library, service of the U.S National Library of Medicine of the National Institute of Health and Discovery Service (via CAPES portal). The search for the data took place in January 2019, using the keywords associated with the Boolean operator AND: "sexual violence" AND "woman" AND "common mental disorder", "sexual violence" AND "woman" AND "mental health" AND "Sexual violence" AND "women" AND "common mental disorder". Articles in Portuguese, English and Spanish were searched. According to the evaluation, complete articles were selected that confirmed the initial hypothesis: there is a significant association between sexual violence and the development of common mental disorders, especially Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

**Descriptors:** Sex Offenses; Violence Against Women; Mental Disorders.**Resumen**

El objetivo fue identificar, a partir de la literatura científica, los trastornos mentales comunes que se desarrollan en mujeres en situaciones de violencia sexual. Se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura, a cuyas bases de datos se accedió: Virtual Health Library, servicio de la Biblioteca Nacional de Medicina de EE. UU. Del Instituto Nacional de Salud y Servicio Discovery (a través del portal CAPES). La búsqueda de los datos se realizó en enero de 2019, utilizando las palabras clave asociadas con el operador booleano AND: "violencia sexual" Y "mujer" Y "trastorno mental común", "violencia sexual" Y "mujer" Y "salud mental" Y "Violencia sexual" Y "mujeres" Y "trastorno mental común". Se realizaron búsquedas de artículos en portugués, inglés y español. Según la evaluación, se seleccionaron artículos completos que confirmaron la hipótesis inicial: existe una asociación significativa entre la violencia sexual y el desarrollo de trastornos mentales comunes, especialmente el Trastorno de Estrés Postraumático.

**Descriptores:** Delitos Sexuales; Violencia Contra las Mujeres; Desordenes Mentales.**Resumo**

Objetivou-se identificar, a partir da literatura científica, os transtornos mentais comuns desenvolvidos em mulheres em situação de violência sexual. Trata-se de revisão integrativa da literatura, cujas bases de dados acessadas foram: Biblioteca Virtual em Saúde, serviço da U.S *National Library of Medicine do National Institute of Health e Discovery Service* (via portal CAPES). A busca dos dados ocorreu em janeiro de 2019, utilizando as palavras-chave, associadas com o operador booleano AND: "violência sexual" AND "mulher" AND "transtorno mental comum", "violência sexual" AND "mulher" AND "saúde mental" e "Sexual violence" AND "women" AND "common mental disorder". Foram pesquisados artigos nas línguas portuguesa, inglesa e espanhola. De acordo com avaliação, foram selecionados artigos completos que confirmaram a hipótese inicial: há associação significativa da violência sexual com o desenvolvimento de transtornos mentais comuns, principalmente o Transtorno de Estresse Pós-traumático.

**Descritores:** Delitos Sexuais; Violência Contra a Mulher; Transtornos Mentais.

## Introduction

Sexual Violence (SV) is a global phenomenon, characterized as a serious public health problem, because of harmful developments<sup>1</sup>. However, despite the high prevalence, it is still treated as an isolated event<sup>2</sup>.

Conceptually, sexual violence is characterized as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts directed at sex trafficking or, in some way, directed against the sexuality of a person using coercion, practiced by anyone regardless of their relationship with the victims”<sup>3:147</sup>.

To show the extent of this phenomenon, studies report that, in 2017, about 393,980 cases of sexual violence / rape in people aged 12 and over were recorded in the United States<sup>4</sup>. In Brazil, in the same year, there were 61,032 cases of rape reported to public security agencies<sup>5</sup>. According to the World Health Organization, 71% of Ethiopian women have suffered some form of physical and / or sexual violence. They also mention that the first sexual experience of women was forced by 30%, in rural Peru; 17%, in rural Tanzania<sup>6</sup>.

Since sexual violence is a social problem<sup>7</sup>, may result in problems arising from changes in physical, mental, reproductive health, in addition to the use of alcohol, psychoactive substances and smoking<sup>5,8</sup>.

Due to the harmful effects associated with sexual violence, in the scope of this study, Common Mental Disorders (CMD) stand out, which are characterized by presenting the following non-psychotic symptoms: fatigue, irritability, insomnia, headache, forgetfulness, nervousness, lack of concentration and psychosomatic complaints<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding the prevalence of CMD in the world, data released by the World Health Organization refer to an increase of 18% globally between the years 2005 and 2015, estimating that more than 300 million individuals are in a situation of illness<sup>10</sup>, being more prevalent in females<sup>11,12</sup>.

In this sense, when it comes to women in situations of sexual violence, CMDs tend to manifest at any time, with post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, eating disorders, mood disorders, suicide attempts and use of psychoactive substances. the most frequently encountered<sup>13</sup>. Study that linked the development of CMD and sexual violence reinforces that women in situations of sexual violence remain years later with significant levels of post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>14</sup>.

It is in this context of illness that many women will need specialized interventions from different health equipment, and, therefore, the attention of professionals to expanded care for victims who have suffered sexual violence is extremely important to have comprehensive, human and ethical<sup>15</sup>.

Thus, from the questions that emerged during professional practice as a resident, it was realized how important it is that health professionals are prepared to care for women in situations of sexual violence who access different health devices, especially when dealing with psychological symptoms. and the overlapping of overly complex topics, such as VS and TMC, which result in serious

repercussions on women's health, this article emphasizes the relevance and urgency of questioning: what are the common mental disorders developed by women who have suffered sexual violence? in adulthood are described by the literature? Thus, the objective was to identify which common mental disorders developed in women in situations of sexual violence.

## Methodology

It is an integrative literature review, which aims to compile the scientific productions produced on a given subject, in a summarized way, emphasizing the practical applicability<sup>16</sup>.

To achieve the objective proposed in this study, the following steps were followed: (i) elaboration of the guiding question; (ii) literature search, (iii) literature selection, (iv) information extraction, (v) quality analysis of the proposed methodology, (vi) data summary, (vii) evidence quality and (viii) writing and publication of results<sup>17</sup>.

For the development of the guiding question, the PICO strategy was used, which consists of identifying P = participant, I = intervention, C = control and O = outcome<sup>17</sup>. The guiding question established for this review was based on the investigation of: which common mental disorders developed by women who suffered sexual violence in adulthood are described in the literature? Thus, P was used: women in situations of sexual violence; I: development of common mental disorders; C: without comparison; and O: association / relationship.

The search for information took place in January 2019, using the advanced modality, using the following keywords associated with the Boolean operator AND: “sexual violence” AND “woman” AND “common mental disorder”, “sexual violence” AND “woman” AND “mental health” and “Sexual violence” AND “women” AND “common mental disorder” (Chart 1). The descriptors were cross-linked, respecting the peculiarity of each database. Articles were searched in Portuguese, English, and Spanish.

Access to databases / libraries occurred through consultation with the Virtual Health Library (VHL), at the service of the U.S National Library of Medicine of the National Institute of Health (PubMed) and EBSCO Discovery Service (via CAPES portal).

The selection of databases occurred due to the diversity of indexed journals contained. For the eligibility of articles, the following inclusion criteria were adopted: full articles, available in full, from the years 2013 to 2019, written and / or published in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, having the objective in line with the theme of this study. This research did not include dissertations, theses, letter to the reader, opinion article, systematic, integrative reviews and opinion articles, articles with ill-defined study design or that did not provide access to the article for free. The choice of time frame was due to Law No. 12.845 / 2013, which provides for mandatory and comprehensive care for people in situations of sexual violence in the hospital network of the Unified Health System.



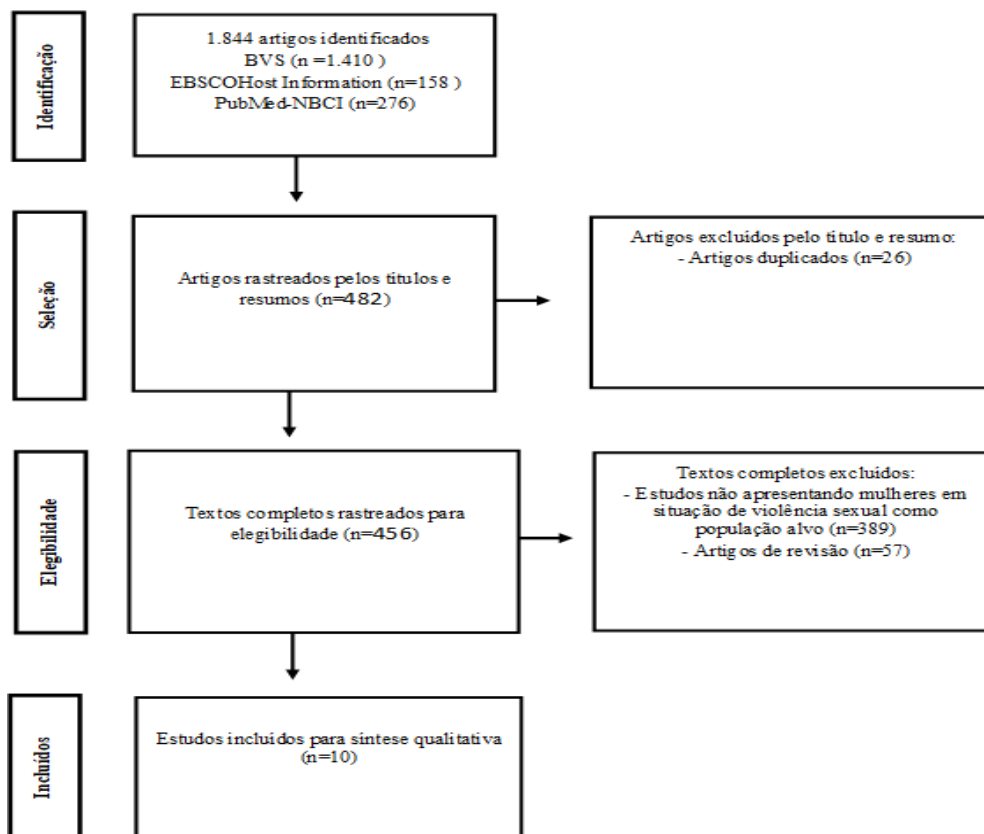
The selection of articles followed the PRISMA checklist - Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses<sup>18</sup>. The research, selection and initial cataloging process of the studies was carried out by two researchers, independently and separately. In this process,

three filters were applied for selection and evaluation. The initial filter selected articles by relevance; the latter filter was applied for selection according to the quality criteria and the latter selected the relevant data.

**Chart 1.** Studies selected for integrative review, according to the crossing of keywords and inclusion / exclusion criteria. Fortaleza, CE, Brazil, 2020

Crisscross	Library/ base	Keywords	Found	Selected	Duplicated	Included
01	BVS	“violência sexual AND “mulher” AND “transtorno mental comum”	05	05	03	01
02	BVS	“violência sexual AND “mulher” AND “saúde mental”	1.405	302	13	04
03	PubMed	“Sexual violence” AND “women” AND “common mental disorder”	276	80	05	05
04	EBSCO	“violência sexual AND “mulher” AND “transtorno mental comum”	158	95	05	00
<b>Total</b>						<b>10</b>

**Figure 1.** Flowchart adapted for identification, selection and inclusion of publications about sexual violence and the development of CMD. Fortaleza, CE, Brazil, 2020



The results were presented in a descriptive manner, using consolidated tables, so that it was possible to synthesize the knowledge produced. The data was analyzed from the thematic analysis<sup>19</sup>, where first the material to be analyzed was organized, after systematizing the initial ideas, it was sought to group into categories. Soon after, a treatment of the obtained results was carried out and the condensation and highlighting of the information for analysis, lastly, a reflexive and critical analysis confronting the current literature.

Although the present study did not need approval from the Research Ethics Committee, the ethical principles

## Results

In the initial selection, 1,844 articles were identified, according to the selected databases. In the screening phase, 482 articles met the selection criteria, of these, 482 titles and abstracts were read, in which 26 were excluded because they were duplicated, leaving 456. Of these, 389 were outside the scope of the study and 57 were review articles. Thus, 10 articles were included for qualitative synthesis.

**Chart 2.** List of articles that made up the research corpus, according to variables, journals, article titles, objectives, types of research and numbers of participants. Fortaleza, CE, Brazil, 2020

Journal	Title	Objectives	Research types
Acta Obstetricia et Gynecologica Scandinavica	Tonic immobility during sexual assault – a common reaction predicting post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression <sup>20</sup>	Assess the occurrence of tonic immobility during rape and subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression.	Quantitative research
Revista de Saúde Pública	Violência por parceiro íntimo e incidência de transtornos mentais comuns <sup>21</sup>	To verify the incidence of CMD in women who suffered intimate partner violence, both in the last 12 months and in the last seven years.	Quantitative research
General Hospital Psychiatry	High-frequency intimate partner violence during pregnancy, postnatal depression and suicidal tendencies in Harare, Zimbabwe <sup>22</sup>	Investigate the relationship between postpartum depression and suicidal ideation with intimate partner violence, both psychological, physical, and sexual.	Quantitative research
Psychol Trauma	Disgust and Imaginal Exposure to Memories of Sexual Trauma: Implications for the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress <sup>23</sup>	Investigate how disgust and anxiety were associated with post-traumatic stress disorder caused by sexual trauma and, from there, formulate interventions to try to reduce these feelings.	Quantitative research
Journal Interpersonal violence	Intimate partner violence and its association with physical and mental health symptoms among older women in Germany <sup>24</sup>	Relate the different forms of intimate partner violence and its relationship with the physical and psychological health disorders of middle-aged women.	Quantitative research
PLOS ONE	Associations between exposure intimate partner violence, armed conflict, and probable PTSD among women in rural Cote d'Ivoire <sup>25</sup>	Recognize the relationship between intimate partner violence, violence in places affected by war and the likelihood of post-traumatic stress disorder in women living in rural Ivory Coast.	Qualitative research
BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth	Intimate partner abuse before and during pregnancy as risk factors for postpartum mental health problem <sup>26</sup>	Identify risk factors for intimate partner violence, before and during pregnancy, for the mental health of postpartum women.	Quantitative research



Journal	Title	Objectives	Research types
Global Health Action	Intimate partner violence and poor mental health among Thai women residing in Sweden <sup>27</sup>	Investigate the harms of intimate partner violence in the mental health of Thai women, aged between 18 and 64, who have lived in Sweden since 2006.	Quantitative research
Revista Saúde Pública	Common mental disorders and intimate partner violence in pregnancy <sup>28</sup>	To verify the association between intimate partner violence and the prevalence of CMD in pregnant women.	Quantitative research
European Journal of Pain	Pain and somatic symptoms are sequelae of sexual assault: Results of a prospective longitudinal study <sup>29</sup>	Evaluate and understand the relationship between musculoskeletal pain and somatic symptoms experienced by women victims of sexual violence.	Quantitative research

Most (80%) of the articles were published in international journals<sup>20,22-27,29</sup>, in English and using quantitative methodology in methodological drawings (100%) 20-28e in 2014 (50%)<sup>25-28</sup>.

Regarding the publication, capillarization of the theme was evidenced among the journals, because of the 10 articles published, four (40%) were published in magazines that addressed general health topics<sup>21,25,27-28</sup>, two (20%) in psychology / psychiatry magazines<sup>22-23</sup>, two (20%) in gynecology / obstetrics journals<sup>20,26</sup>, one (10%) in the magazine on violence<sup>24</sup> and one (10%) pain<sup>29</sup>.

Among the findings of this review, there was a high concentration of studies aimed at the association between Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), focusing on sexual violence, and physical and, mainly, psychological illness<sup>20-21,23-25,27,29</sup>. A significant association was found between physical and / or sexual violence and the incidence of common mental disorders in adult women, both in the period of 12 months and seven years after the traumatic event, prevalence rates of 25.3 and 28.9%, respectively<sup>21</sup>.

The IPV is violence that occurs within intimate relationships, it is considered as "one of the most common forms of violence against women is that practiced by a husband or an intimate partner"<sup>3:91</sup>, in which it can express itself through physical, psychological, sexual aggression among others<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, regarding changes in the mental health of women in situations of sexual violence, a study on the physical and psychological disorders resulting from sexual violence in 112 women (51 adolescents and 61 adults) showed that 6.3% of them had related symptoms to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder<sup>13</sup>. Still regarding psychological illnesses, depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), social isolation and the difficulty of maintaining emotional relationships in women who experienced sexual violence are mentioned<sup>30</sup>. Suicidal ideation was also brought as a negative outcome, cited by women who suffered sexual coercion, having lasting permanence, even when the woman appeared to be well<sup>31</sup>.

Another point that deserves attention is the period of appearance of CMD after violence, in this sense, it is

considered extremely important to recommend the Ministry of Health<sup>1</sup>, when stating that "Psychological care should start as soon as possible, preferably from the first consultation, maintained throughout the period of care and for as long as necessary".

Therefore, longitudinal monitoring should focus on not only the physical aspects, but mainly the psychological ones. The importance of psychological care is one of the fundamental interventions for the care of women in situations of sexual violence, as recommended by the technical standard for the prevention and treatment of injuries resulting from sexual violence against women and adolescents<sup>1,13,31</sup>.

Still referring to IPV and CMD, research data carried out with 804 Thai women who lived in Sweden, found that 22.1% of them experienced IPV during their lifetime, of these, 20.4% had their mental health compromised, due to physical violence and / or sexual by a previous partner. Regarding the current partner, only 6.6% reported impairment related to physical and / or sexual violence<sup>27</sup>.

Regarding intimate partner violence, at some point in life, other studies show high prevalence of people with mental health disorders. In this sense, a study states that 33.3% of women, especially the youngest, went through some episode of violence<sup>32</sup>, as well as other research that showed that about 50% of adult women experienced IPV<sup>33</sup>. When looking at sexual violence, women who have experienced this type of aggression have 2.47 more chances of acquiring symptoms and thoughts related to depression than those who have never been assaulted<sup>33</sup>.

When analyzing associations between violence and CMD dividing women into groups by age group, it was observed that the prevalence of sexual violence was higher among women aged between 16 and 49 years in the last year. An association of psychosomatic and psychological symptoms with all forms of intimate partner violence was found, however, about physical and / or sexual violence, 7.55% of women in Group 1 (16-49 years) reported psychological problems. mild and 3.24% of women in Group 2, in which the age group ranged from 50 to 65 years old, reported serious psychological problems<sup>24</sup>.



It is noted that the greater the victim's age, the greater the degree of severity of psychological changes. However, when referring to the experience of violence in the context of intimate relationships, women with a lower age group tend to experience greater violence within the family context than other age groups<sup>34</sup>.

When the context of intimate partner violence took place during the war, it was noted that among women who suffered IPV in the last year, 40% of them also experienced sexual violence. It was observed that of the most serious forms of violence, such as sexual violence, there was a greater predisposition to PTSD<sup>35</sup>.

From the context of war and the situation of refugees in the world, sexual violence is seen as a risk factor for refugee women, assessing that the countries that have more cases of sexual violence are on the African continent (54%). Most abusers are intimate partners (55%), the victims are adult women (83%) and the abuse usually occurs in the country of origin, prior to migration. The author also refers to the association of sexual violence with PTSD<sup>36</sup>.

When considering the prevalence of PTSD related to tonic immobility behavior, which occurs in women in traumatic events, this being sexual violence, the considerations on the subject were that 70% of women experienced sexual violence with this immobility behavior tonic. After six months, an evaluation was performed considering PTSD and, at the end, a significant relationship between tonic immobility behavior and PTSD and depression<sup>20</sup>. Research signaled the predominance of PTSD in women victims of sexual violence and addressed, as symptoms of this disorder, tonic immobilization behavior, thus treating an association like that of the previous study<sup>36</sup>.

Another study also specifically addressed sexual violence and its relationship with physical, somatic, and psychological pain. Regarding the psychological, after six weeks of sexual violence, 93% of women had symptoms of the diagnosis of PTSD and, after three months, the prevalence was 68%<sup>29</sup>. In contrast, another study addressed sexual violence considering the diagnosis of PTSD and relating it to heartbreak and anxiety. Using the imaginary repeated exposure technique, they assessed the decrease in these feelings. From the results found, it was noticed that 84.7% of women interviewed in Northwest Arkansas suffered some type of sexual abuse<sup>26</sup>. The most prevalent sexual assault was touching the intimate area, with 50%. Another relevant difference occurred in relation to the perpetrator of violence, since 12.5%, the highest percentage, indicated that women were raped by strangers. The technique promoted a significant decrease in anxiety, but not in disgust. As for the partner, similar aspects were presented about the perpetrator of violence, stating that most men who sexually abused women were unknown to them<sup>13</sup>.

Another aspect addressed in the articles referred to sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in women who were in the gestational period or in the postpartum period<sup>22,26,28</sup>. Among the research findings, psychological violence was more frequent, however, there is a reference to sexual violence in 14.5% of women<sup>28</sup>. While

physical violence has been shown to decrease during the period of pregnancy, there has been a significant increase in other types of violence, such as psychological and sexual violence<sup>37</sup>.

When the relationship between violence and CMD was analyzed, there was a considerable increase, about pregnant women who experienced physical and / or sexual violence, with a prevalence of 71%<sup>28</sup>. Evidence reinforces a significant relationship between impaired mental health of pregnant women and sexual violence, noting that among the most worrying implications of this relationship are depression, anxiety, PTSD, among others<sup>38-39</sup>.

Regarding the period prior to pregnancy, it was found that sexual violence was associated with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and anxiety disorder. In the gestational period, sexual violence was associated with Anxiety Disorder. The only violence that occurred before pregnancy and that was associated with symptoms harmful to mental health in the postpartum period was sexual coercion<sup>26</sup>.

Among the findings, a study highlights that the prevalence of sexual violence in women in the puerperium was high (40%) and as for common mental disorders, 21.4% of women who suffered IPV had symptoms for postpartum depression, while 21.6 % said they had suicidal thoughts<sup>22</sup>. It is noteworthy that common mental disorders, such as depression in women during pregnancy and postpartum<sup>39</sup>. Suicidal ideation was cited identifying the relationship between this behavior and sexual violence<sup>40</sup>.

## Conclusion

In view of the studies presented, a significant association was identified between sexual violence and CMD, with a predominance of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Other pathologies characterized other disorders related to sexual violence, in the context of IPV, such as suicidal ideation, anxiety disorder, depressive disorder, relationship difficulties, among others. As for the perpetrator of violence, the intimate partner was the biggest sexual abuser of young, adult, elderly, and even pregnant women, which brings tension and reflections on the male domination process and gender inequality.

There were psychological implications of sexual violence that affect so many different women in the world and, based on this focus, it is essential to understand the relevance, individual and collective, of these injuries to act, as a professional, promoting prevention and qualified intervention, both violence and the consequences of this.

It is hoped that this manuscript can foster discussions about sexual violence against women and their harmful consequences to mental health, as well as their access and monitoring in health and psychological services.

It is also necessary to observe the significant association between sexual violence and the prevalence of common mental disorders, starting from comprehensive and interdisciplinary monitoring, in which health professionals know how to proceed in the face of women's demands.



For this, it is important to rethink how these professionals' permanent health education has taken place, assuming the need for training and qualifications directed to the care of women in situations of sexual violence to prepare

them for the reception, qualified listening, the adequate targeting of these women to the other devices of the care network, emphasizing humanized, ethical and comprehensive care.

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