

Childhood adversities among self-identified LGBT+ students

Adversidades na infância entre escolares autodeclarados como LGBT+
Adversidades en la infancia entre estudiantes que se autodefinen como LGBT+

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify the prevalence of childhood adversities among self-identified LGBT+ students.

Method: Descriptive, cross-sectional study based on the *Pesquisa Estadual de Saúde do Adolescente Capixaba (PESC)* [State Survey on Adolescent Health of Espírito Santo], conducted in 63 public and private high schools in the Greater Vitória Metropolitan Region, Espírito Santo, Brazil. The sample comprised 949 LGBT+ adolescents aged 14 to 19 years, selected through stratified probabilistic sampling. Data collection took place between March and December 2023, using the Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ), adapted and validated for Brazil. Statistical analyses included absolute and relative frequencies and 95% confidence intervals (95% CIs).

Results: A high prevalence of emotional abuse (78.6%), physical abuse (55.2%), and sexual abuse (49.8%) was found, along with exposure to family violence (78.8%), and parental separation or divorce (57.4%). Exposure to violence was significant both at home and in the community, with 45.1% of adolescents reporting witnessing beatings outside the home and 21.2% living with someone who had been incarcerated.

Conclusion: The adversities experienced by this population underscore their vulnerability and the negative impacts on psychological and social development. Such experiences reflect the effects of structural LGBT+ phobia, reinforcing the urgent need for inclusive public policies and support programs to promote equity and reduce long-term harm.

Descriptors: Adolescent; Violence; LGBT Persons; Adverse Childhood Experiences.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Identificar as prevalências de adversidades na infância entre os escolares autodeclarados LGBT+.

Método: Estudo transversal descritivo, com base na Pesquisa Estadual de Saúde do Adolescente Capixaba (PESC), realizada em 63 escolas públicas e privadas de ensino médio na Região Metropolitana da Grande Vitória, Espírito Santo. A amostra foi composta por 949 adolescentes LGBT+, com idades entre 14 e 19 anos, selecionados por amostragem probabilística estratificada. A coleta de dados ocorreu entre março e dezembro de 2023, por meio do Questionário Internacional de Experiências Adversas na Infância (ACE-IQ), adaptado e validado para o Brasil. As análises estatísticas incluíram frequências absolutas, relativas e intervalos de confiança de 95% (IC95%).

Resultados: Foram identificadas altas prevalências de abuso emocional (78,6%), abuso físico (55,2%), abuso sexual (49,8%), exposição à violência familiar (78,8%) e separação ou divórcio parental (57,4%). A exposição à violência foi expressiva tanto no ambiente domiciliar quanto na comunidade, com 45,1% dos adolescentes relatando ter presenciado espancamentos fora de casa e 21,2% convivendo com alguém que já foi preso.

Conclusão: As adversidades vivenciadas por essa população destacam sua vulnerabilidade e os impactos negativos no desenvolvimento psicológico e social. Tais vivências refletem os efeitos da LGBT+fobia estrutural, reforçando a urgência de políticas públicas inclusivas e programas de apoio que promovam equidade e reduzam os danos ao longo da vida.

Descritores: Adolescente; Violência; Pessoas LGBT; Experiências adversas da infância.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Identificar las prevalencias de adversidades en la infancia entre estudiantes autodeclarados LGBT+.

Método: Estudio transversal descriptivo, basado en la Encuesta Estatal de Salud del Adolescente Capixaba (PESC), realizada en 63 escuelas secundarias públicas y privadas de la Región Metropolitana de Grande Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brasil. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 949 adolescentes LGBT+, con edades entre 14 y 19 años, seleccionados mediante muestreo probabilístico estratificado. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo entre marzo y diciembre de 2023, mediante el Cuestionario Internacional de Experiencias Adversas en la Infancia (ACE-IQ), adaptado y validado para Brasil. Los análisis estadísticos incluyeron frecuencias absolutas, relativas e intervalos de confianza del 95% (IC95%).

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Resultados: Se identificaron altas prevalencias de abuso emocional (78,6%), abuso físico (55,2%), abuso sexual (49,8%), exposición a la violencia familiar (78,8%) y separación o divorcio parental (57,4%). La exposición a la violencia fue significativa tanto en el entorno familiar como en la comunidad, con un 45,1% de los adolescentes que informaron haber presenciado golpizas fuera del hogar y un 21,2% que convivían con alguien que había estado encarcelado.

Conclusión: Las adversidades vividas por esta población destacan su vulnerabilidad y los impactos negativos en su desarrollo psicológico y social. Tales experiencias reflejan los efectos de la LGBT+fobia estructural, reforzando la urgencia de políticas públicas inclusivas y programas de apoyo que promuevan la equidad y reduzcan los daños a lo largo de la vida.

Descriptores: Adolescente; Violencia; Personas LGBT; Adversidades en la infancia.

■ INTRODUCTION

Childhood adversities are events experienced by a child within the family or social context, including abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction, that can cause distress and negatively affect physical health, mental health, and social development. Although the intensity of these events may vary, they are generally chronic⁽¹⁾. Research on adverse childhood experiences and their long-term effects in adulthood shows that such adversities are associated with negative outcomes across multiple domains, including physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional functioning⁽²⁾.

Such adversities are not limited to childhood and may extend into, or even intensify during adolescence, a period marked by profound physical, psychological, and social transformations⁽³⁾. This stage can bring new adversities or exacerbate those already experienced in childhood. According to the Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ), these situations include family dysfunction, abuse, neglect, and social exclusion, encompassing experiences such as witnessing domestic violence; living with family members who have chemical dependency or mental disorders; physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; emotional and material neglect (e.g., lack of nutrition or supervision); and context of community violence or parental separation. Such experiences may persist or worsen during adolescence, hindering development and increasing the risk of adverse impacts throughout life⁽⁴⁾.

Childhood adversities are strongly associated with poorer health outcomes throughout life, particularly with the onset of mental health problems in adulthood⁽²⁾. Individuals exposed to adverse experiences during childhood have a higher risk of developing mental disorders than those who do not face such situations. This risk increases in proportion to the intensity and duration of exposure⁽⁵⁾.

Such a scenario can be even more challenging for adolescents in the LGBT+ community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,

Transgender, and others). These individuals may face additional obstacles due to living in social contexts shaped by heteronormative norms, including family rejection, bullying, and discrimination. Such experiences can compound the adverse impacts already associated with childhood adversities, further intensifying their negative effects⁽⁶⁾.

In Brazil, data from the 2019 National Health Survey indicate that LGBT+ adults are twice as likely to experience violence than their heterosexual counterparts⁽⁷⁾. Such violence takes multiple forms, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and is often aggravated by social stigma and discrimination. Beyond physical harm, these experiences undermine an individual's dignity and identity, exposing structural aspects of intolerance and exclusion⁽⁷⁾.

Thus, there is an urgent need to understand the adversities faced by self-identified LGBT+ adolescents during childhood, within a social and cultural environment that often marginalizes these populations, given their significant impact on psychological, social, and emotional development. Identifying and measuring these experiences is essential to guide public policies and intervention strategies aimed at promoting greater equity, protection, and well-being for this vulnerable population⁽⁸⁾.

This study can provide valuable insights into nursing care practice by fostering a broader clinical perspective on the psychosocial factors influencing the health of LGBT+ adolescents. Addressing these adversities can promote more sensitive, humane, and comprehensive approaches, while also reinforcing nursing's role in promoting equity, combating violence, and defending the rights of this population. The objective of this study was to identify the prevalence of adversities experienced during childhood among self-identified LGBT+ students, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; neglect; exposure to family and community violence; parental loss; parental separation; living with individuals with mental disorders, drug addiction, or a history of incarceration, as defined by the domains assessed by the ACE-IQ⁽⁹⁾.

METHOD

Study design

This cross-sectional and descriptive study was based on data from the *Pesquisa Estadual de Saúde do Adolescente Capixaba (PESC)* [Espírito Santo State Adolescent Health Survey]. It was conducted in 63 public and private high schools in the metropolitan region of Greater Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil, between March and December 2023.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised high school students from the metropolitan region of Greater Vitória, selected to ensure representativeness by school system and municipality. Municipalities were treated as strata to ensure statistical validity. Using 2020 INEP data⁽¹⁰⁾, a two-stage sampling with unequal probabilities was conducted at the school level. In the first stage, schools were selected according to the proportion of students in each stratum: public and private schools. For each stratum, the sample size was calculated using simple random sampling, with adjustments for complex samples in the second stage using SPSS 26, ensuring a 95% confidence level and a maximum error of 5%. For each municipal stratum, the parameters were set at 95% confidence and a maximum error of 10%. Sample size estimates were calculated to determine the total number of students needed to ensure the quality of the estimates in each stratum. Once the schools were selected, their management teams were contacted to present the research objectives and schedule data collection.

The broader study included 4,614 adolescents aged 14 to 19. For this analysis, a subsample of 949 students who self-identified as LGBT+ was selected based on responses to the PESC questionnaire, which included the question "What is your sexual orientation?" (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, other – specify). Participants who did not identify as heterosexual were classified as LGBT+.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria were being regularly enrolled in a public or private school in the metropolitan region of Greater Vitória, currently attending high school, and self-identifying as part of the LGBT+ group. The exclusion criterion was the presence of cognitive deficits that could compromise comprehension of the questionnaire, to ensure data validity.

Research Instrument

The study assessed childhood adversities considering the occurrence of the following up to the age of 18: sexual, emotional, or physical abuse, emotional or physical neglect, family conflicts, or community violence as defined in the Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ), adapted for use in Brazil⁽¹¹⁾.

Study Variables

The socioeconomic variables of this study included age group (14-16 years, 17-19 years), ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, Mixed race, Indigenous), socioeconomic classification (A, B1/B2, C/D/E), according to the criteria of the *Associação Brasileira de Empresas de Pesquisa (ABEP)* [Brazilian Association of Research Companies]⁽¹¹⁾, responsible for the Brazil Criteria (a socioeconomic classification system widely used in research and population studies in Brazil); religion (none, Catholic, Evangelical, other), and parental cohabiting status (live together, do not live together).

Data Collection

Data were collected online, with the participants completing the questionnaires independently on tablets. The REDCAP® (Research Electronic Data Capture) platform was used to ensure organized and efficient data collection. A qualified research team, specifically trained and supervised, conducted the process to guarantee data accuracy and integrity.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses were performed with absolute and relative frequencies and 95% confidence intervals (95%CI), using Stata 17.0® software.

Ethical Aspects

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (opinion No.5,900,370), in accordance with Resolution no. 466/2012 of the Brazilian National Health Council. All participants and their legal guardians signed, respectively, the free and informed assent and consent forms.

RESULTS

The characterization of students who self-identified as LGBT+ revealed a predominance of adolescents aged 14 to 16 years (56.1%; 95%CI: 52.9-59.2), Black and multiracial individuals (57.2%), those from class B (44.7%; 95%CI: 41.6-47.9), without religion (45.2%; 95%CI: 42.1-48.4), and whose parents do not live together (55%; 95%CI: 51.8-58.1) (Table 1).

Note that 55.2% (95%CI 51.9-58.4) of adolescents who self-identified as LGBT+ reported having experienced physical abuse by parents, guardians, or other household members, including being kicked, punched, or beaten. Approximately 21% (95%CI 18.3-23.6) reported being injured with objects such as sticks, knives, or whips. Regarding emotional abuse in childhood, 78.6% (95%CI 75.8-81.2) stated that they had been subject to shouting, yelling, insults, and humiliation by parents or other household members, and 43.6% (95%CI 40.4-46.8) reported threats of abandonment or expulsion from home. In relation to sexual abuse, approximately 50% (95%CI 46.5-53.1) of students reported having experienced unwanted sexual touching, most often perpetrated by acquaintances (40.8%; 95%CI 36.2-45.5) or family members (32.3%; 95%CI 28.0-36.8). Additionally, 24.2% (95%CI 21.5-27.1)

reported having been coerced into sexually touching another person, with perpetrators most frequently being family members (43.2%; 95%CI 36.7-50.0) or acquaintances (39.4%; 95%CI 33.1-46.2). Attempted rape was reported by 18.4% (95%CI 16.0-21.1), most often involving acquaintances (44.8%; 95%CI 37.3-52.5) and family members (35.6%; 95%CI 28.6-43.3). Completed rape was reported by 12.5% (95%CI 21.5-27.1), with perpetrators mainly being acquaintances (47.7%; 95%CI 38.4-57.2) or family members (38.5%; 95%CI 29.8-48.1) (Table 2).

According to Table 3, 17.3% (95%CI 15.0-19.9) of self-identified LGBT+ students reported that their parents or guardians did not understand their problems and worries, and 7% (95%CI 5.2-8.4) indicated that their guardians were unaware of their activities during free time outside of school or work. Regarding physical neglect, 15.9% (95%CI 13.7-18.5) reported not receiving enough food despite their guardians' ability to provide adequate nutrition, and 25.8% (95%CI 23.1-28.8) stated that their guardians were drunk or under the influence of drugs while caring for them. Furthermore, 20.6% (95%CI 18.0-23.3) reported that their parents or guardians did not ensure their school attendance despite being legally obligated to do so.

Table 1. Socioeconomic characteristics of self-identified LGBT+ students in the Greater Vitória metropolitan region, Espírito Santo, Brazil, 2023.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Age			
14 to 16	532	56.1	52.9-59.2
17 to 19	416	43.9	40.8-47.1
Ethnicity			
White	380	40.0	36.9-43.2
Black	175	18.4	16.0-21.0
Asian descent	15	1.5	0.9-0.2
Mixed race	369	38.8	35.8-42.0
Indigenous	10	1.0	0.05-1.9

Table 1. Cont.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Socioeconomic classification			
A	154	16.2	14.5-18.0
B1/B2	424	44.7	41.6-47.9
C/D/E	370	39.0	36.0-42.2
Religion			
None	429	45.2	42.1-48.4
Catholic	167	17.6	15.3-20.2
Evangelical	215	22.7	20.1-25.4
Other religions	138	14.5	12.4-16.9
Parental cohabitation status			
Parents live together	424	45.0	42.0-48.2
Parents do not live together	518	55.0	51.8-58.1

Source: Developed by the author.

*Absolute frequency, †prevalence, ‡95% Confidence Interval

Table 2. Prevalence of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse in childhood among students self-identified as LGBT+, in the Greater Vitória metropolitan region, Espírito Santo, Brazil, 2023.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Physical Abuse			
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member spank, slap, kick, punch or beat you?			
No	408	44.8	41.6-48.1
Yes	502	55.2	51.9-58.4
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member hit or cut you with an object, such as a stick (or cane), bottle, club, knife, whip etc?			

Table 2. Cont.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
No	713	79.1	76.4-81.7
Yes	188	20.9	18.3-23.6
Emotional Abuse			
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member yell, scream or swear at you, insult or humiliate you?			
No	193	21.4	18.8-24.2
Yes	710	78.6	75.8-81.2
Did a parent, guardian, or other household member threaten to, or actually, abandon you or throw you out of the house?			
No	513	56.4	53.2-59.6
Yes	396	43.6	40.4-46.8
Sexual Abuse			
Did someone touch or fondle you in a sexual way when you did not want them to?			
No	437	50.2	46.9-53.5
Yes	434	49.8	46.5-53.1
Was this person:			
A family member	140	32.3	28.0-36.8
An acquaintance	177	40.8	36.2-45.5
Unknown person	88	20.3	16.7-24.3
No response	29	6.7	4.7-9.5
Did someone make you touch their body in a sexual way when you did not want them to?			
No	668	75.8	72.9-78.5
Yes	213	24.2	21.5-27.1

Table 2. Cont.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Was this person:			
A family member	92	43.2	36.7-50.0
An acquaintance	84	39.4	33.1-46.2
Unknown person	22	10.3	6.9-15.2
No response	15	7.0	4.3-11.4
Did someone attempt oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you when you did not want them to?			
No	722	81.6	78.9-84.0
Yes	163	18.4	16.0-21.1
Was this person:			
A family member	58	35.6	28.6-43.3
An acquaintance	73	44.8	37.3-52.5
Unknown person	19	11.7	7.5-17.6
No response	13	8.0	4.7-13.3
Did someone actually have oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with you when you did not want them to?			
No	765	87.5	72.9-78.5
Yes	109	12.5	21.5-27.1
Was this person:			
A family member	42	38.5	29.8-48.1
An acquaintance	52	47.7	38.4-57.2
Unknown person	7	6.4	3.1-13.0
No response	8	7.3	3.7-14.1

Source: Developed by the author.

*Absolute frequency, †prevalence, ‡ 95% Confidence Interval.

Table 3. Prevalence of emotional and physical neglect in childhood among students who self-identified as LGBT+, the Greater Vitória metropolitan region, Espírito Santo, Brazil, 2023.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Emotional Neglect			
Did your parents/guardians understand your problems and worries?			
No	153	17.3	15.0-19.9
Yes	731	82.7	80.1-85.0
Did your parents/guardians really know what you were doing with your free time when you were not at school or work?			
No	60	6.6	5.2-8.4
Yes	846	93.4	91.6-94.8
Physical Neglect			
Did your parents/guardians fail to give you enough food, even when they could easily have done so?			
No	754	84.1	81.5-86.3
Yes	143	15.9	13.7-18.5
Were your parents/guardians too drunk or intoxicated by drugs to take care of you?			
No	660	74.2	71.2-76.9
Yes	230	25.8	23.1-28.8
Did your parents/guardians not send you to school even though they were obliged to do so?			
No	723	79.5	76.7-82.0
Yes	187	20.6	18.0-23.3

Source: Developed by the author.

*Absolute frequency, †prevalence, ‡95% Confidence Interval.

It was observed that 78.8% (95%CI 76.0-81.4) of the research participants reported witnessing shouting, insults, or humiliation at home, while 39.6% (95%CI 36.4-42.8) had witnessed physical abuse, such as slaps, kicks, or punches. Additionally, 22.8% (95%CI 20.2-25.7) reported seeing a household member injured with objects such as sticks, knives, or bottles. Regarding the family environment, 33.3% (95%CI 30.3-36.5) reported having lived with someone who had problems with alcohol or drugs, and 21.2% (95%CI 18.6-24.0) reported living with someone who had been incarcerated. Moreover, 39.8% (95%CI 36.6-43.1) had lived with a person who had depression, another mental illness, or suicidal intent. Concerning parental separation or divorce, 57.4% of respondents reported having experienced this situation, while 42.6% had not. Finally, the death of a parent or guardian was reported by 10.4% of

participants, while 89.6% had not experienced such a loss during the period analyzed (Table 4).

The prevalence of community violence among self-identified LGBT+ students in Espírito Santo was as follows: 45.1% (95%CI 41.9-48.3) reported witnessing beatings outside their homes, 28.4% (95%CI 25.5-31.4) had seen someone stabbed or shot, and 43.9% (95%CI 40.7-47.4) had witnessed threats with a knife or firearm. Regarding the impact of these events, 15.7% (95%CI 13.4-18.2) reported being forced to move, and 11.1% (95%CI 9.2-13.3) experienced the intentional destruction of their homes. Direct victimization was less frequent: 4.2% (95%CI 3.0-5.7) reporting being beaten by soldiers, police officers, militia members, gangs, or drug traffickers. Additionally, 29.1% (95%CI 26.3-32.2) stated that a friend or family member had been killed or assaulted under circumstances (Table 5).

Table 4. Prevalence of family conflicts in childhood among students who self-identify as LGBT+, in the metropolitan region of Greater Vitória, Espírito Santo, Brazil, 2023.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Did you see or hear a household member in your home being yelled at, screamed at, sworn at, insulted or humiliated?			
No	190	21.2	18.6-24.0
Yes	708	78.8	76.0-81.4
Did you see or hear a household member in your home being slapped, kicked, punched or beaten up?			
No	541	60.5	57.2-63.6
Yes	354	39.6	36.4-42.8
Did you see or hear a household member in your home being hit or cut with an object, such as a stick (or cane), bottle, club, knife, whip etc.?			
No	694	77.2	74.3-79.8
Yes	205	22.8	20.2-25.7
Did you live with a household member who was a problem drinker or alcoholic, or misused street or prescription drugs?			
No	594	66.7	63.5-69.7
Yes	297	33.3	30.3-36.5

Table 4. Cont.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Did you live with a household member who was ever sent to jail or prison?			
No	711	78.8	76.0-81.4
Yes	191	21.2	18.6-24.0
Did you live with a household member who was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?			
No	537	60.2	56.9-63.3
Yes	355	39.8	36.6-43.1
During this period (up to your current age) did your parents ever separate or divorce?			
No	355	42.6	39.3-46.0
Yes	478	57.4	54.0-60.7
Did your mother, father, or guardian die during this period?			
No	808	89.6	87.4-91.4
Yes	94	10.4	8.6-12.6

Source: Developed by the author.

*Absolute frequency, †prevalence, ‡95% Confidence Interval.

Table 5. Prevalence of community violence among students who self-identify as LGBT+, in the Greater Vitória metropolitan region, Espírito Santo, Brazil, 2023.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Did you see or hear someone being beaten up (outside your home)?			
No	498	54.9	51.7-58.1
Yes	409	45.1	41.9-48.3

Table 5. Cont.

Variable	N*	%†	95%CI‡
Did you see or hear someone being stabbed or shot (outside your home)?			
No	649	71.6	68.6-74.5
Yes	257	28.4	25.5-31.4
Did you see or hear someone being threatened with a knife or gun (outside your home)?			
No	510	56.1	52.9-59.3
Yes	399	43.9	40.7-47.4
Were you forced to go and live in another place due to any of these events?			
No	764	84.3	81.8-86.6
Yes	142	15.7	13.4-18.2
Did you experience the deliberate destruction of your home due to any of these events?			
No	802	88.9	86.7-90.8
Yes	100	11.1	9.2-13.3
Were you beaten by soldiers, police, militia, or gangs?			
No	875	95.8	94.3-97.0
Yes	38	4.2	3.0-5.7
Was a family member or friend killed or beaten up by soldiers, police, militia, or gangs?			
No	632	70.9	67.8-73.7
Yes	260	29.1	26.3-32.2

Source: Developed by the author.

*Absolute frequency, †prevalence, ‡95% Confidence Interval.

DISCUSSION

This study identified a high prevalence of childhood adversity among self-identified LGBT+ adolescents, with emphasis on emotional abuse (78.6%), physical abuse (55.2%), and sexual abuse (49.8%). Exposure to domestic violence (78.8%), parental separation or divorce (57.4%), living with people with mental disorders (39.8%) or with a history of incarceration (21.2%) was also common. In the community, 45.1% reported witnessing beatings outside the home. These findings highlight the high burden of adverse experiences faced by this population throughout childhood and adolescence.

The results reveal a high prevalence of intrafamily physical violence among LGBT+ adolescents, with 55.2% reporting having been kicked, punched, or beaten by parents, guardians, or household members. This frequency is similar to that observed in another study on intrafamily violence among adolescent students, which found a 53% rate of reports of physical aggression⁽¹²⁾.

Furthermore, approximately 21% of LGBT+ adolescents reported being injured with objects such as sticks, knives, or whips. The prevalence of this type of abuse reported in the literature among the general adolescent population is considerably lower. For instance, a study conducted in the city of São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, found that 3.6% of adolescents reported having been attacked or stabbed with a knife⁽¹³⁾. These findings suggest that LGBT+ adolescents may be more vulnerable to severe forms of physical violence.

The findings of this study indicate an alarming prevalence of emotional victimization among LGBT+ adolescents, with 79% reporting having been subject to shouting, insults, and humiliation—a rate considerably higher than that found in the general population. In comparison, one study found that emotional violence represents approximately 43% of cases of child and adolescent abuse in Brazil⁽¹⁴⁾, while another identified a 32.6% prevalence of emotional neglect⁽¹⁵⁾.

The greater exposure of LGBT+ adolescents to these types of abuse highlights their heightened vulnerability within family and social contexts. Emotional abuse, often linked to parental rejection and social stigma, can have severe consequences during childhood and adolescence, contributing to elevated stress levels, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety⁽⁸⁾. However, the lack of understanding from guardians (reported by 17.3% of adolescents) and insufficient supervision of their activities (7%) reinforce a context of neglect that may intensify feelings of isolation and insecurity.

Furthermore, 43.6% of the participants in this study reported having been threatened with abandonment or expulsion

from home. This finding is disturbing, as adolescents experiencing abandonment are at increased risk of substance abuse, victimization, and mental health disorders⁽¹⁶⁾.

Regarding the prevalence of sexual abuse, approximately 50% of LGBT+ students reported having been sexually touched without consent. This percentage is markedly high, even when compared to studies involving adolescents from the general population. For example, a study of high school students in a city in Bahia found a prevalence was 22.8% of sexual abuse, regardless of sexual orientation⁽¹⁵⁾, underscoring the greater vulnerability of the LGBT+ group. Similarly, an international study conducted in Germany reported that 18.2% of respondents experienced sexual abuse during childhood or adolescence⁽¹⁷⁾.

Sexual violence against LGBT+ individuals is largely shaped by social norms that devalue these identities, fostering the normalization of violence and the marginalization of victims⁽¹⁸⁾. The stigma associated with sexual victimization can have profound consequences, leading to self-blame, shame, and internalization of homophobia or transphobia. These factors may exacerbate psychological distress and create significant barriers to recovery⁽¹⁹⁾.

Attempted non-consensual sex was reported by 18.4% of LGBT+ adolescents, most often perpetrated by acquaintances (44.8%) or family members (35.6%). Completed rape was reported by 12.5%, with perpetrators likewise being primarily acquaintances (47.7%) or family members (38.5%). Overall, the main perpetrators of sexual abuse in this group were acquaintances (40.8%), followed by family members (32.3%). In addition, 24.2% reported having been forced to touch another person sexually, with the aggressors most frequently being family members (43.2%) or acquaintances (39.4%). This pattern mirrors that observed in the general population, where 81.6% of sexual abuse against children and adolescents occurred in the victim's home, and where the majority of victims knew their aggressors: 63.1% among girls and 76.7% among boys⁽²⁰⁾. Similarly, a study on sexual violence against children and adolescents in Belém, PA, Brazil, between 2014 and 2016 found that the main perpetrators among girls were men known to the family (43.34%), while among boys, in 59% of cases, the aggressors were people known to the victim, regardless of age⁽²¹⁾.

Regarding physical neglect, 15.9% of participants reported not receiving adequate nutrition, despite their guardians' ability to provide it. Additionally, 25.8% stated that their guardians became intoxicated with alcohol or drugs while responsible for their care, and 20.6% reported that their parents or guardians failed to send them to school despite being legally obligated to do so. These findings are consistent with a study that reported a 20.7% prevalence of physical

neglect by parents or guardians in adolescence⁽¹⁵⁾, a rate comparable to that observed among LGBT+ adolescents in the present study.

Among survey participants, 78.8% reported witnessing shouting, insults, and humiliation at home, while 39.6% had seen physical aggression, such as slaps, kicks, or punches. Additionally, 22.8% had observed a family member injured with objects such as sticks, knives, or bottles. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 116 studies found that the combined global prevalence of children witnessing physical domestic violence is 16.5%, with the highest rates observed in Western Asia and Africa (38.3%)⁽²²⁾. Exposure of children and adolescents to domestic violence is a global concern, with significant regional and socioeconomic variations. Its impact on mental health is substantial, increasing the risk of psychological disorders and affective lability^(1,2).

In the family environment, 3 in 10 self-identified LGBT+ adolescents (33.3%) reported having lived with someone who had problems with alcohol or drug use. A similar prevalence (33.9%) was found in a Brazilian study involving adolescents from the general population who reported living with family members with alcohol-related problems⁽²³⁾. Evidence indicates that adolescents living with parents or guardians who use substances are more likely to develop behavioral problems, such as school dropout and involvement in fights, as well as psychological disorders, including anxiety and depression⁽²⁴⁾.

The finding that 21.2% of LGBT+ adolescents live with someone who has been incarcerated reinforces the need to understand how incarceration affects their well-being. Family dynamics and parenting styles play a decisive role in shaping their development, either mitigating or amplifying its consequences⁽²⁵⁾. The incarceration of a family member often leads to changes in family structure and relationships, resulting in emotional instability, financial insecurity, and an increased burden of responsibilities for adolescents⁽²⁵⁾.

The percentage of LGBT+ adolescents who reported living with someone experiencing depression, another mental illness, or suicidal intent (39.8%) is significantly higher than in the general population. For comparison, a study conducted in Northern Ireland found that 13.7% of adolescents lived with parents who had mental health problems. In the same study, 11.6% of adolescents themselves had mental disorders, and 0.1% died by suicide⁽²⁶⁾. Adolescents exposed to mental health problems—whether through their parents, friends, or both—had higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to those without such exposure⁽²⁷⁾.

The prevalence of parental absence, i.e., divorced parents, or deceased guardians was 57.4% and 10.4%, respectively. In Brazil, this reality is generally associated with the absence of a father figure. According to data from the *Central Nacional*

de Informações do Registro Civil (CRC) [National Civil Registry Information Center], in 2020, 6.31% of children were registered with only their mother's name on their birth certificates⁽²⁸⁾. The absence of a father during childhood and adolescence can have far-reaching effects on development, influencing cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral outcomes. Moreover, the lack of role models may hinder the formation of identity and self-esteem, increasing susceptibility to violence and social exclusion⁽¹⁶⁾.

When analyzing community violence, 45.1% of self-identified LGBT+ students reported witnessed beatings outside the home, 28.4% reported seeing someone being stabbed or shot, and 43.9% witnessed threats with a knife or firearm. In comparison, one study addressing the general adolescent population found that 55.1% had witnessed physical aggression, such as slaps and punches, committed by someone outside the family, 21.4% had seen a person being shot, 12.8% had witnessed knife attacks, and 32.5% had observed threats of severe physical harm⁽¹³⁾. These findings reinforce the high exposure of adolescents to community violence.

Regarding the impact of these events, approximately 16% of participants reported being forced to relocate, while 11% experienced the intentional destruction of their homes. In Brazil, forced displacement is driven not only by large-scale projects but also by persistent violence within families and communities⁽²⁹⁾. Adolescents often find themselves caught in the crossfire of drug trafficking, armed conflicts, and gang disputes, leading to relocation for safety. Domestic violence is another frequent cause, compelling adolescents to leave home in search of protection and security⁽³⁰⁾.

While 4.2% of LGBT+ adolescents reported being beaten by state agents or armed groups, one study found a higher prevalence of harassment by gangs or older individuals (16.1%) among adolescents in general⁽¹³⁾. This difference suggests that, although direct violence against LGBT+ adolescents is numerically lower, it may carry distinct characteristics linked to discriminatory motivations.

Direct violence was less frequent, with 4.2% of LGBT+ adolescents reporting having been beaten by soldiers, police officers, militia members, gangs, or drug traffickers, while 29.1% reported that a friend or family member had been killed or assaulted in these contexts. In the general population, 16.1% of adolescents reported harassment by gangs or older people, and 38.2% witnessed someone being stalked under similar circumstances⁽¹³⁾. This difference suggests that, although direct violence against LGBT+ adolescents is numerically lower, it may carry distinct characteristics, such as being related to discriminatory motivations.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, particularly the potential for recall bias. Another

limitation concerns the lack of multivariate analyses, which could have provided insights into associations between the outcomes investigated and the participants' socioeconomic characteristics. This decision was consistent with exploratory nature of the study and its primary objective of describing the prevalence of childhood adversities among LGBT+ adolescents. Future research is suggested to address these limitations by employing more complex analytical approaches to better explore these relationships.

Despite these limitations, this study makes important contributions, given the scarcity of research focusing on the LGBT+ adolescent population. The inclusion of a comprehensive sample of students from both public and private schools strengthens the representativeness of the findings, while the use of self-administered questionnaires enhances confidentiality and improves response accuracy. Overall, the results contribute significantly to filling gaps in knowledge about violence in this population and provide essential evidence to inform public policies, prevention strategies, and victim support initiatives.

■ CONCLUSION

This study revealed a high prevalence of childhood adversity among self-identified LGBT+ adolescents, particularly emotional (78.6%), physical (55.2%), and sexual (49.8%) abuse. Exposure to violence also extended beyond the home, with 45.1% of adolescents reporting witnessing beatings outside the home and 21.2% living with someone who had been incarcerated.

Therefore, these findings reinforce the vulnerability of this population and the need for targeted measures to mitigate the long-term impacts of such experiences. The high prevalence of emotional abuse and family violence highlights the importance of implementing protective strategies, including psychosocial support programs and inclusive public policies designed to reduce adolescents' exposure to these adversities. In this context, schools should be strengthened as safe and supporting environments, ensuring protection and assistance for LGBT+ adolescents facing these challenges.

The results of this study broaden the understanding of the adversities faced by LGBT+ adolescents in Brazil and provide a foundation for developing evidence-based public policies. Future research should further examine the impacts of these experiences on mental health, academic performance, and social integration to identify effective interventions to reduce harm and promote equity and well-being.

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■ Data and material availability

The dataset is available from the corresponding author upon request.

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