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### Forensic traumatology

## CRIMINAL RECORDS OF VIOLENCE INVOLVING VENEZUELANOS IN A CITY OF NORTH BRAZIL.

### *Registros de violência envolvendo venezuelanos em uma cidade do Norte do Brasil.*

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#### ABSTRACT

Introduction: Refugee crisis is a problem faced worldwide. The large borders with neighboring countries make Brazil a potential destination for most of those seeking for a new life in South America. Venezuela currently fights the worst humanitarian crisis in the history of the country, and migration to Brazil emerges as an option. Living in border regions, these people are more susceptible to violence. Objective: This study aimed to revisit the medico-legal records of a city in North Brazil to calculate rates of Venezuelans involved in situations of violence. Material and methods: Medico-legal records of the city of Pacaraima, Roraima, Brazil, dated from 2013 and 2018, were revisited. The nationality of victims and perpetrators of violent actions were noted as well as the type of crime. Results: In 2013 (n = 86, 39.3%) and 2018 (n = 133, 60.7%), 219 forensic records were documented. Venezuelans were involved in 63 forensic reports (28.7%) – one in 2013 and 62 in 2018. Most of the reports were related to bodily integrity investigations (n = 169, 77.2%). Conclusion: This study highlights the importance of building-up social strategies to support Venezuelans and Brazilians living in the city of Pacaraima, as the number of forensic reports increased 54.7% from 2013 to 2018. This data might reflect the increase of violence in the border region, in which Venezuelans and Brazilians may figure as victims and perpetrators.

#### KEYWORDS

Violence; Forensic medicine; Forensic dentistry; Venezuela; Brazil.

#### INTRODUCTION

Refugee crisis is a major topic in the governmental agenda worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In South America, recent evidence of humanitarian crisis in specific countries, namely Bolivia

and Venezuela, triggered migration to Brazil.

The country was already the destination of many people, from different continents, that seek for new opportunities and life conditions.<sup>2</sup> Migration from Latin-American

countries, however, became more evident in the last decades. Pacaraima – a city of Northern Brazil (border region with Venezuela) with nearly 17.400 inhabitants – estimated, at certain point, the entrance of 800 Venezuelans per day.<sup>3</sup>

According to the United Nations, a refugee is defined as a particular migrant leaving his/her country of origin because of persecution (e.g. political, religious, and ethnic), war or violence.<sup>4</sup> Protection to these people is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>5</sup> In Brazil, protection is corroborated by the United Nations' High Commissioner of Human Rights;<sup>6</sup> by the Federal Law 9.474/97 – that establishes the National Committee of Refugees;<sup>7</sup> and by the Migration Law 13.445/17.<sup>8</sup> Despite the strong efforts to assure human rights, violence remains and possibly impacts the condition of living of refugees (and asylum seekers) in Brazil.

Based on the exposed problem and justification, this study raised the hypothesis that Venezuelans live in violent conditions in the city of Pacaraima, Brazil – especially because the increase of migration to the city was evident with the recent humanitarian crisis in their country of origin. In this context, this study aimed to revisit the medico-legal records of the local medicolegal institute in order to quantify and analyse forensic reports involving Venezuelans.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

An observational study was designed with retrospective sampling. The study was approved by the local committee

of ethics in human research (protocol: 10590019.6.0000.5374).

The sample consisted of forensic records (dental or medicolegal reports) of the medicolegal institute of Boa Vista, Brazil. This medicolegal institute is the only and covers the entire State of Roraima, in North Brazil. In 2019, the State had an estimated population of nearly 605.761 habitants distributed in 15 cities.<sup>9</sup> Most of the habitants ( $\frac{2}{3}$ ) are located in the capital city Boa Vista. Expertises in legal medicine and forensic dentistry are performed by a trained and experienced team.

A single examiner revisited the forensic records and screened eligible reports. The inclusion criteria were: dental or medicolegal reports released in 2013 (typical year for expertises in the medicolegal institute) or 2018 (atypical year for expertises in the medicolegal institute because of the increase in Venezuelan migration rates); reports of forensic examinations related to the city of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil; reports that involved only Brazilian and Venezuelans; and reports of forensic examinations of crimes against the person. Reports with missing information about the victim/offender, case and forensic experts were excluded, as well as reports of victims of traffic accident or from indirect forensic examinations.

From each report, the examiner retrieved information about the nationality, age and sex of the victim/offender examined, year of occurrence, and type of forensic examination. Four types of forensic examination were considered: I) physical integrity (performed in offenders/perpetrators before entering jail); II) bodily injury

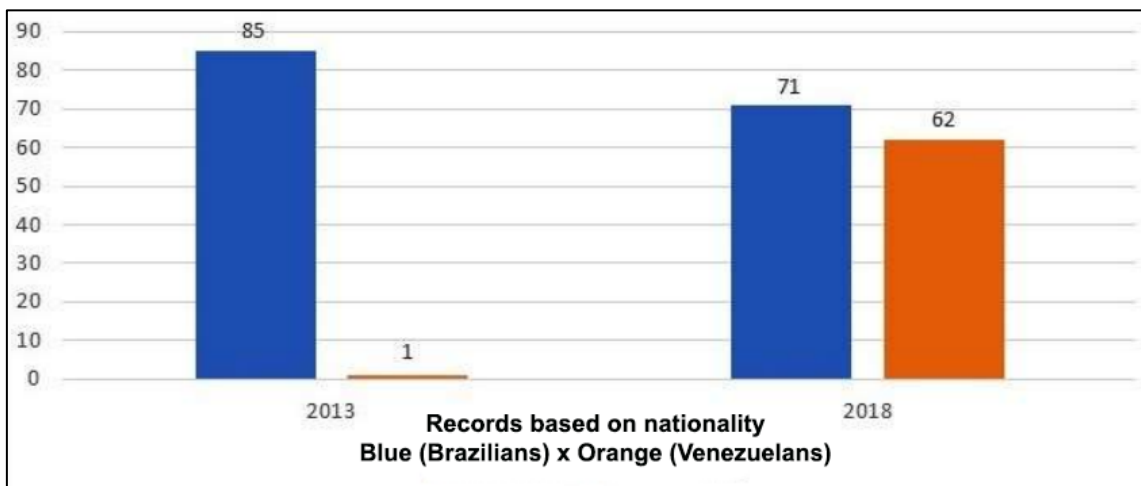
(performed in victims of interpersonal violence); III) carnal/sexual conjunction (performed in victims of alleged sexual abuse) and IV) cadaveric examination (performed in victims of violent or suspicious death).

The extracted data was recorded and tabulated for descriptive statistics of absolute and relative frequencies of distribution. Chi-square test was used to test the association of nationality with the specific types of reports revisited in this study. Statistical significance was set at 5% with confidence interval at 95%.

**RESULTS**

The search resulted in 219 forensic reports released in 2013 (n = 86, 39.3%) and 2018 (n = 133, 60.7%). The increase in the number of reports between the years of 2013 and 2018 reached 54.7%.

Venezuelans accounted for 63 (28.7%) of the reports, while Brazilians accounted for 156 (71.3%). In 2013, only one report (1.2%) was from a Venezuelan, while 85 were from Brazilians (98.8%). In 2018, the number of reports from Venezuelans increased to 62 (46.5%), while in Brazilians it decreased to 71 (53.5%) - Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – Distribution of Brazilians (blue) and Venezuelans (orange) examined within forensic reports released in 2013 and 2018 in the city of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil.**

Reports of examination of physical integrity (n = 169, 77.2%) were the most common, followed by cadaveric examinations (n = 20, 9.1%), carnal/sexual conjunction (n= 17, 7.7%), bodily injury (n = 13, 6%) - Figure 2.

Related to examinations of physical integrity, 62 (36.7%) reports were released in 2013 and 107 (63.3%) in 2018. Out of the reports of 2013, only one (1.6%) was from a

Venezuelan, while 61 (98.4%) were from Brazilians. In 2018, the number of reports involving Venezuelans increased to 57 (53.3%), while the reports involving Brazilians decreased to 50 (46.7%) in 2018. The increase of reports between 2013 and 2018 was 72.5% (Figure 3). The difference between nationalities was statistically significant (p<0.05).

The other type of forensic examinations that led to reports had discrete numbers documented in 2013 and in 2018. Reports of bodily injury examinations in Brazilians decreased from 10 to two, while in Venezuelans increased from zero to one between 2013 and 2018, respectively. For the same years, reports of examinations of carnal/sexual conjunction reached eight and seven for Brazilians and zero and two for

Venezuelans, respectively. Reports of cadaveric examinations increased from six to 12 among Brazilians and from zero to two among Venezuelans (Figure 3). The difference between nationalities for the quantity of reports on bodily injury, carnal/sexual conjunction and cadaveric examinations was not statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ ).

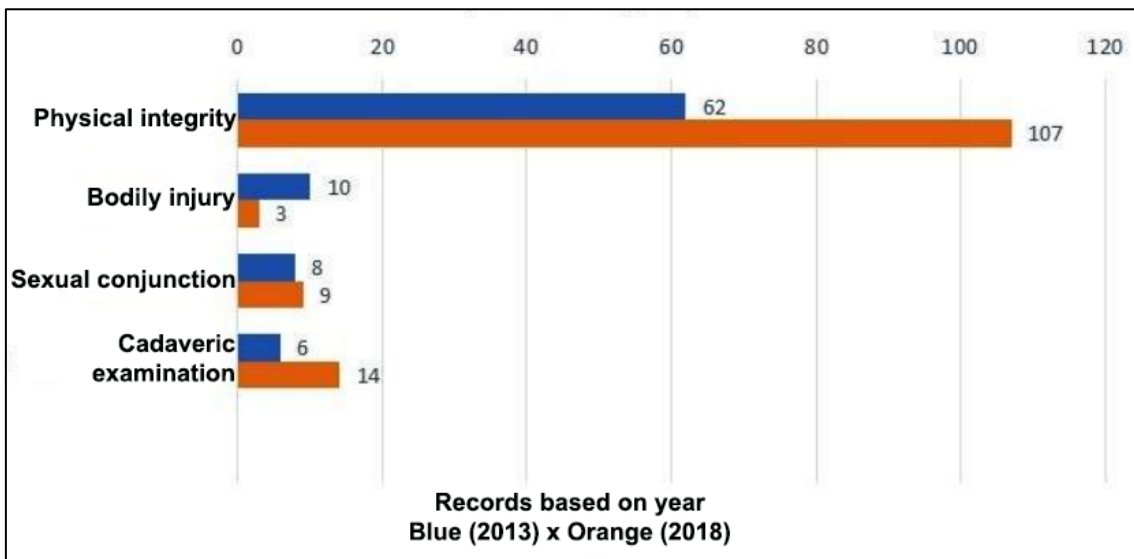


Figure 2 – Distribution of forensic reports related to the city of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil, in 2013 (blue) and 2018 (orange), related to physical integrity, bodily injury, carnal/sexual conjunction and cadaveric examinations.

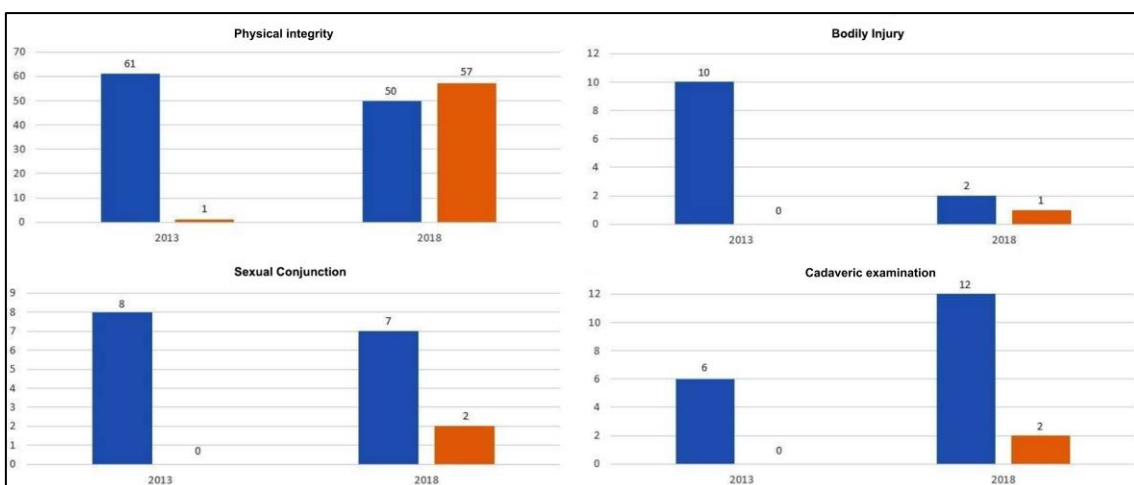


Figure 3 – Distribution of forensic reports of examinations of physical integrity, bodily injury, carnal/sexual conjunction and cadaveric examinations among Brazilians (blue) and Venezuelans (orange) in 2013 and in 2018 related to the city of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil.

## DISCUSSION

Investigating country, state and city-specific conditions in which refugees live is an essential and initial step to support social strategies to promote better quality of life and protection of human rights. This study revisited the medicolegal records of the medicolegal institute of Boa Vista/RR, Brazil, related to cases of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil, in order to analyze forensic reports that depicted examinations of physical integrity, bodily injury, carnal/sexual conjunction and autopsies (cadaveric examinations) released in 2013 and 2018.

The scenario depicted from this study corroborates the aspect of an atypical year for forensic expertises represented by the quantity of forensic reports released in 2018 – especially if compared to the perspective of the same forensic unit five years before. These outcomes alone could trigger administrative decisions to understand the problem-based scenario faced in the borders of Brazil. A deeper look in the outcomes, however, will strengthen the evidence to contribute to practice as forensic reports related to the city of Pacaraima only increased for Venezuelans over the time as it decreased for Brazilians, in most of the types of forensic examinations, comparing the scenarios of 2013 and 2018.

Reports of forensic examinations of physical integrity figured as the ones with the most evident occurrence in the city of Pacaraima. This type of report represented 77% of the data analyzed from the medicolegal institute in the two years (2013 and 2018). The frequency of physical integrity reports differed with statistical significance

( $p > 0.05$ ) between Brazilians and Venezuelans – increasing and being higher for the latter in 2018. This evidence reveals that Venezuelans might indeed be living in violent conditions, not only playing a passive (victims) but also active (with criminal acts) role. Physical integrity reports may be justified to assess the condition of prisoners before or during incarceration.<sup>10</sup> These outcomes must be carefully interpreted because incarceration may result from criminal actions that do not necessarily manifest from physical violence. As part of the routine examinations prior to incarceration, the assessment of physical integrity may be requested by legal authorities to those arrested for theft or robbery, for example. The lack of significant increase in the number of reports on bodily injury and sexual conjunction examinations between 2013 and 2018 confirms the hypothesis that Venezuelans are not necessarily arrested for aggressive behavior or physical harm against others. In short, Venezuelans were more often arrested in 2018 (given the number of reports of physical integrity examinations that significantly increased from 2013) but statistical rates of reports on crimes of bodily injury and sexual conjunction did not increase proportionally.

Interestingly, the number of reports on cadaveric examinations increased over 50% for both nationalities. Despite the small number of *postmortem* examinations, the increase in the number of violent deaths might reflect the Brazilian panorama of violence<sup>11</sup> that ranks high position worldwide. A reasonable explanation for the low number of cadaveric examinations is the

distance between Pacaraima and the medicolegal institute in the capital city Boa Vista (213.6 Km), which may hamper quick forensic responses. Ideally, violent and suspicious deaths should be investigated by means of cadaveric examinations. However, this study is not able to confirm if all cadavers underwent autopsy or if there was indeed underreported data due to distance. Another aspect to be considered regarding the cadaveric examinations is the lack of data about the nationality of the criminals behind violent and suspicious deaths. While in one hand they could be Brazilians and confirm the country-wise known violence rates, on the other hand they could be Venezuelans and indicate external sources of violence that increase Brazilian's rates.

In short, this study indicates an increase of violence in the city of Pacaraima Brazil, especially involving Venezuelans (as victims or perpetrators). However, the preliminary data collected in this study does not allow stronger conclusion about the influence of migration on violence rates. Apparently, the outcomes of the current investigation suggest an evidently increase in the number of Venezuelans in custody. Their participation as perpetrators of crimes involving bodily injury, sexual violence and homicide is possible, but these crimes did not increase proportionally with the examination of physical integrity – suggesting a potential participation in crimes that did not involve aggression. Future

studies in the field should be aware of the fact that forensic reports from 2013 and 2018 were assessed as two cross-sectional samples of the casuistics of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil. Improved investigations could include yearly progressive observations from 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 to enable a better understanding of the forensic scenario in a true longitudinal retrospective study. Investigations about the nationality of perpetrators for every crime is a must to clarify the real role of migration in violence rates.

The recent scientific literature encouraged and invited studies on the phenomenon of violence in Brazil.<sup>12</sup> The interest of researchers in the topic might be justified by the increase of violence rates, especially those that depict homicide.<sup>13</sup> The present study answered to the call and emerged with preliminary data of the city of Pacaraima, Brazil, in to contribute to the knowledge in the field.

## CONCLUSION

The number of forensic reports from the city of Pacaraima/RR, Brazil, considerably increased from 2013 to 2018. Physical integrity examinations performed prior to incarceration were the most prevalent source of forensic reports. These outcomes suggest that Venezuelans became more often involved in crimes in the Brazilian territory.

## RESUMO

Introdução: A crise migratória é um problema de proporções globais. A ampla fronteira do Brasil com países vizinhos faz deste um potencial destino para aqueles que buscam novas oportunidades na América do Sul. A Venezuela luta contra a maior crise humanitária da história do país e a migração para o Brasil figura como alternativa. Ao viver em regiões de fronteira, essas pessoas podem ser mais suscetíveis à violência. Objetivo: Revisitar os registros médico-legais de uma cidade do norte do Brasil e calcular o envolvimento de Venezuelanos em situação de violência. Materiais e métodos: Registros forenses da cidade de Pacaraima/RR, Brasil, datados de 2013 e 2018 foram revisitados. A nacionalidade

de vítimas e perpetradores de atos de violência, assim como o tipo de crime cometido, foram registrados. Resultados: Em 2013, (n = 86, 39,3%) e 2018 (n = 133, 60,7%), 219 laudos forenses foram elaborados. Venezuelanos foram descritos em 63 laudos (28,7%) – um em 2013 e 62 em 2018. A maioria dos laudos versou sobre exames de integridade física (n = 169, 77,2%). Conclusão: Este estudo ressalta a importância da elaboração de estratégias sociais para apoiar Venezuelanos e Brasileiros que vivem na cidade de Pacaraima, pois os laudos médico-legais aumentaram 54,7% de 2013 para 2018. Estes dados podem refletir o aumento da violência, na qual Venezuelanos e Brasileiros representam vítimas ou perpetradores.

## KEYWORDS

Violência; Medicina legal; Odontologia legal; Venezuela; Brasil.

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