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Masculinity and Violence in Brazil: Contributions to Reflections on Health

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Objectives: To examine masculinity and its link with violence in the field of public health.

Methodology: Analysis of secondary data, using the Brazilian Mortality Information System (SIM) and Hospital Information System (SIH) databases. Data on male and female mortality from external causes (violence, accidents and homicide) and morbidity from various types of aggression were analyzed both nationally and in Brazil’s capitals between 1991 and 2000.

Results: The author shows that it is mainly men who are the victims of violence, and emphasizes the impact of violence on males. Of all deaths from external causes in Brazil, 82.8% were men, with an average rate five times that of women. Male excess mortality is dramatically elevated in adolescence and adulthood; 6.3 times as many males aged 15 to 19 die as females, and the ratio is 10.1 among 20 to 24-year-olds. Twelve men are murdered for every woman. Among hospital admissions in 2000 for injuries sustained in attacks, 84% were men. The majority of victims were adolescents and young men. Homicides and traffic accidents are the main causes of death from external causes. The author found that male deaths from homicide take place in public places with an unknown assailant, while women are killed in private places, in the home and by those known to or close to them.

Conclusions: The relationship between masculinity and violence is due not only to subjective processes such as the masculine identity—characterized by strength, competition and machismo-, but also by socioeconomic and cultural determinants. The author reiterates the need for alternative, integral policies to decrease these rates, and reflects on the values and forms of socialization in the construction of the masculine and feminine identities in contemporary society.