

COMBATTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN BRAZILIAN FEDERAL  
UNIVERSITIES: INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS MAPPING

*ENFRENTAMENTO DA VIOLÊNCIA DE GÊNERO EM UNIVERSIDADES FEDERAIS  
BRASILEIRAS: MAPEAMENTO DOS MECANISMOS INSTITUCIONAIS*

*ENFRENTAMIENTO DE LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO EN UNIVERSIDADES  
FEDERALES BRASILEÑAS: MAPEO DE LOS MECANISMOS INSTITUCIONALES*



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**ABSTRACT:** Starting in the last decade, gender-based violence occurring in university spaces began to attract the attention of society. Therefore, this article aims to give visibility to the mechanisms created within federal universities to combat gender-based violence, until the year 2022. The data was collected by consulting the websites of academic institutions, the Google search site, sending e-mails and questionnaires through the form on Google Forms for deanships, and coordination of institutional mechanisms as strategies for confirming public data or indicating information not found. The study was based on international treaties on human rights, and theoretical references arose from gender studies. The results suggest that only 23 universities have any institutional policy to combat gender-based violence, and when they exist, they generally result from pressure from feminist groups.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender-based violence. Universities. Institutional policies.

**RESUMO:** *A partir da última década, as violências de gênero ocorridas em espaços universitários passaram a chamar a atenção da sociedade. Assim, este artigo tem por objetivo dar visibilidade aos mecanismos institucionais criados no âmbito das universidades federais para o enfrentamento das violências de gênero, até o ano de 2022. Os dados foram levantados por meio de consulta aos sites das instituições acadêmicas, site de busca Google, envio de e-mail e questionário por meio do formulário no Google Forms para reitorias e coordenações de mecanismos institucionais como estratégias para a confirmação de dados públicos ou indicação de informações não encontradas. O estudo teve por base os tratados internacionais sobre os direitos humanos e referenciais teóricos advindos dos estudos de gênero. Os resultados apontam que somente 23 universidades possuem alguma política institucional para o enfrentamento das violências de gênero e, quando existem, em geral decorrem da pressão de coletivos feministas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Violência de gênero. Universidades. Políticas institucionais.*

**RESUMEN:** *Desde la última década, la violencia de género que ocurre en los espacios universitarios ha comenzado a llamar la atención de la sociedad. Por lo tanto, este artículo tiene por objetivo dar visibilidad a los mecanismos institucionales creados en el ámbito de las universidades federales brasileñas para enfrentar las violencias de género hasta el año 2022. Los datos se relevaron por medio de consulta a los sitios de las instituciones académicas en el mecanismo de búsqueda Google y del envío de e-mail y cuestionarios a través del formulario creado en el programa Google Forms a rectorados y coordinaciones de mecanismos institucionales como estrategias para confirmar datos públicos o indicar información no encontrada. El estudio tomó como referencia los tratados internacionales sobre los derechos humanos y referentes teóricos provenientes del campo de los estudios de género. Los resultados arrojaron que sólo 23 universidades cuentan con alguna política institucional para el enfrentamiento a la violencia de género y que, cuando esa política existe, en general es resultado de la presión de colectivos feministas.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Violencia de género. Universidades. Políticas institucionales.*

## Introduction<sup>3</sup>

Universities, for a long period in history, were male-dominated enclaves where scientific discourses were produced that legitimized the exclusion of women from spaces of knowledge creation. This reality began to change starting in the 1970s, a phenomenon linked to sociocultural transformations and feminist mobilizations advocating for women's rights.

Thus, the academic space, previously restricted to certain social groups (women, Black individuals, LGBTQI+ population), has been transformed by feminism, industrialization processes, and, more recently, by affirmative action policies, the Unified Selection System (Sisu), the National High School Examination (ENEM), and other social programs that facilitated the entry of these individuals (Souza; Costa, 2022). The quantitative presence of these previously excluded groups in universities has also been accompanied by unequal relations, sexism, discrimination processes, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence, which are not always as visible. Concurrently with the expansion of university access, there has been insufficient concern with establishing "policies to address harassment, machismo, racism, and misogyny" (Souza; Costa, 2022, p. 496, our translation).

In society, violence, discrimination, and gender inequality have been considered public issues in recent years, requiring the state to formulate public policies for the prevention and confrontation of such violence. In 1993, the United Nations (UN) declared that violence against women is an affront to human dignity, a public issue, and a violation of human rights. Shortly thereafter, in 1994, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Belém do Pará Convention, establishing obligations to prevent, punish offenders, and provide remedies for victims (Ortega; Góngora; Barroso, 2022).

Among the goals of the fifth Sustainable Development Goal of the UN 2030 Agenda is the need to end all forms of discrimination and eliminate violence against all women and girls, in both public and private spheres (UN, 2015). In this sense, universities need to contribute to these goals by developing institutional policies for the prevention and confrontation of violence in the academic environment, while also intensifying the debate on gender relations to foster a culture of equality and equity, which is essential for eradicating gender-based violence.

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This is because the university, as a place for knowledge construction and critical thinking, has not been immune to gender violence, reflecting the structures of patriarchal and sexist culture within society. According to Priscila Silva de Souza and Carmem Lima Costa (2022, p. 495, our translation), the university, as a societal institution, "reproduces social demands, gender inequality, and the sexist and patriarchal values that prevail, and within this logic, harassment is (re)produced."

This reality is prevalent in universities worldwide. In this regard, research from the collection *Panorama da violência contra mulheres nas universidades brasileiras e latino-americanas*<sup>4</sup>, published in 2022, indicates that the primary targets of harassment are women, Black individuals, and LGBTQIA+ people. These forms of violence are varied, ranging from intellectual disqualification and persecution, sexually suggestive comments, rape, feminicides, and even suicides as a result of harassment (Almeida; Zanello, 2022).

In this context, the incident of sexual harassment involving Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos<sup>5</sup>, which came to public attention on social media and in newspapers across various countries in April 2023, reignited the debate on sexual violence within universities. Another significant event was the feminicide and rape of a student by a graduate student<sup>6</sup>, at the Federal University of Piauí in February 2023, which highlighted the urgency of revisiting the discussion on gender and power relations within universities. This issue had already been raised in 2014 with the visibility of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI)<sup>7</sup> established in the São Paulo State Assembly to investigate cases of human rights violations in Paulista universities (Portal Catarinas, 2023).

Furthermore, it is essential to note that gender violence in Brazilian universities became more apparent starting in 2014 when young students from several universities began to report the violence and humiliation they faced during parties and initiation rituals (Porto, 2017). Additionally, the results of the Avon Institute/Data Folha Survey on Violence Against Women in the University Environment, coordinated by Miriam Scavone and published in 2015, gained significant attention. The survey interviewed 1,823 university students nationwide, 60% of

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<sup>4</sup> Panorama of Violence Against Women in Brazilian and Latin American Universities.

<sup>5</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos was denounced by three former students of the Center for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra in an article published in the book entitled *Sexual Misconduct in Academia: Informing an Ethics of Care in the University* (Portal Catarinas, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> The investigation opened into the case indicated that master's student Thiago Mayson, 28, raped student Janaína Bezerra, 22, when the young woman was already dead (G1, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Popularly known as the CPI dos Trotes.

whom were women and 40% men<sup>8</sup>. In this survey, 10% of the women spontaneously reported experiencing violence at the university. However, when presented with a list of different types of violence, 67% of them identified having experienced such situations, whereas the students considered the listed violence as "natural consequences of women's behavior or harmless jokes with no intent to offend or intimidate" (Scavone, 2015, p. 6, our translation).

These facts reveal that violence is a result of gender and power relations (Scott, 2019) that structure society and are perpetuated when the perpetrator views the victim as vulnerable, subservient, and less important. This culture, based on binary notions that overvalue the masculine, also produces violence within academic institutions.

Despite the recurring incidents of humiliation and harassment reported at university parties and in daily academic interactions, Madge Porto (2017) points out that violence in the university environment is still not recognized as such because the common belief is that in this intellectual space, women would be safer. However, the invisibility of these violent processes does not prevent their consequences, such as abandoning academic projects or courses, psychological distress, depression, insomnia, and suicide. Similarly, Letícia Mendes Paiva (2019) argues that the phenomenon of violence in universities is naturalized by the social dominance structure that overvalues male power, with manifestations of violence in the university context directly impacting the formative process of women, who are the primary victims.

In light of the above, this article aims to highlight mechanisms<sup>9</sup> or institutional policies established within federal universities up to 2022, identifying the actions undertaken to address gender-based violence<sup>10</sup>.

The study holds both social and academic significance by bringing attention to a social issue that has been occurring within universities and the need to develop strategies to combat it. This investigation seeks to expand knowledge about gender-based violence in universities, given the lack of research on institutional policies implemented to address such violence. According to Lima and Ceia (2022), there remains a widespread scarcity of research and data on this phenomenon at the national level, which affects women's persistence in higher education

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<sup>8</sup> The interviews were conducted throughout September and October 2015. They included undergraduate and graduate students, 76% from private institutions and 26% from public institutions.

<sup>9</sup> When we speak of mechanisms, we refer here to committees, secretariats, centers, specific bodies, or other institutionalized actions in universities.

<sup>10</sup> This is an excerpt from a study funded by CNPq, which aims to map the institutional mechanisms (committees, secretariats, centers) created in Brazilian universities aimed at defending women's human rights, promoting inclusive and non-sexist education, and confronting processes of violence and discrimination in academic spaces.

and the continuation of their academic research projects, revealing significant neglect of the topic. Thus, the importance of this study is reiterated, aiming to disseminate best practices that can be replicated across all universities.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section describes the methodological assumptions of the research, followed by the theoretical assumptions regarding gender-based violence and public policies that underpin the study. Finally, it presents the mapping of institutional mechanisms for addressing gender-based violence in Federal Universities, providing a reflective analysis of these mechanisms.

### **Methodological Assumptions**

The study adopts a qualitative approach, as this perspective allows for a close examination of the research problem to understand and explain, in-depth and detail, what is occurring and the significance of the phenomena (Gurdián-Fernández, 2010). Guided by this perspective, we aim not only to highlight institutional policies but also to examine the phenomenon of gender-based violence in universities and the need to develop strategies for its eradication and the creation of a culture grounded in gender equality and equity.

This is an exploratory and documentary<sup>11</sup> research study. According to Gil (2021), exploratory research is conducted to provide a general or approximate view of a particular fact, usually on a relatively unexplored topic where it is difficult to construct precise hypotheses. In this case, the study explores how universities are developing strategies and policies in response to the recurring visibility of gender-based violence. It relies on public documents, including information and news published on the institutions' websites, as well as resolutions and regulations issued by them. The study focuses on Brazil's Federal Universities, which, according to the Ministry of Education (MEC), numbered 69 institutions in 2022.

The collection of public data was conducted in several stages using different techniques. Initially, information was accessed from the institutions' websites, with keyword searches such as: gender and diversity committee, gender equity center, sexual diversity coordination, violence against women prevention committees, and affirmative action office. Given that information is not always directly accessible from institutional websites, a second stage

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<sup>11</sup> Since this was a documentary study, it was not necessary to submit it to the Ethics Committee. Sending emails and filling out a form, created using Google Forms, were strategies for confirming public data or indicating links for collecting information that was not found. However, the study observed the issues of research ethics involved in the analysis and interpretation of data, in accordance with the debates that have been taking place at ANPED.



involved using Google search with the same keywords combined with each university's name. This approach allowed for finding various ways to access the desired information, which was also recorded on the universities' social media.

Given that university websites are not always up-to-date and the information available may not encompass all aspects of the research topic—since institutions select what should be announced based on their information dissemination protocols—and considering that search engines use algorithms that follow specific formulas to determine the relevance of certain information, we decided to employ additional strategies to verify and complement our findings or to access other data. Thus, over 90 emails were sent in two rounds<sup>12</sup>, requesting information about the existence of institutional mechanisms aimed at promoting gender equality/equity and addressing violence in universities, to the email addresses of rectories, pro-rectorates, and coordinators or secretariats of such mechanisms<sup>13</sup>. We received responses from 22 academic institutions, which allowed us to confirm and complete data already collected and to record information from other universities that had not been previously found. The final step involved sending a Google Forms questionnaire link requesting information and links where data about the existence of gender mechanisms could be accessed. This was done through the same email addresses in two attempts, one in October and another in November 2022, resulting in seven completed questionnaires. Four of these provided new data that had not been gathered in the initial stages.

The research findings, including the names of university mechanisms, their objectives, the focus of their actions, and characteristics related to their affiliations, were organized into tables to highlight the information obtained for each institution<sup>14</sup>, which was then categorized and coded. The data were analyzed and interpreted based on international human rights treaties concerning women's rights and theoretical references from gender and violence studies, particularly concerning power relations.

## **Gender Violence and Public Policies**

To understand the importance of institutional gender mechanisms, it is essential to grasp the potential of the analytical category of gender and its relationship with public policies. Joan

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<sup>12</sup>The attempts were made between December 2021 and March 2022.

<sup>13</sup> These electronic addresses were found on the websites of the aforementioned universities.

<sup>14</sup> The ordinances and resolutions on the creation of the mechanisms were downloaded and saved in a folder, for later reading and obtaining additional data.

Scott (2019), a key reference in the development of the gender analytical category, posits that there is a connection between gender and power. For Scott, the core of the concept involves the relationship between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes and represents a primary way to signify power relations because it structures social hierarchies. She introduces the concept of gender from the historical perspective, the dimension of relational power, and gender's cross-cutting nature as a cultural element that helps to understand social reality.

Gender violence, as a result of power relations (Scott, 2019), is linked to the socio-cultural constructions of masculine and feminine roles, which create gender hierarchies and inequalities through the overvaluation of the masculine. Gender violence refers to any "type of violence (physical, social, or symbolic) based on the social organization of the sexes and perpetrated against individuals specifically due to their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation" (Sardenberg; Tavares, 2016, p. 8, our translation). Thus, it affects both men and women, as evidenced by violence against members of the LGBTQIA+ community, who are victims of all types of aggression. However, historically, male violence against women has been the most prominent phenomenon, as it is not only structured by the gender organization in contemporary societies but also as a factor that structures these societies (Sardenberg; Tavares, 2016, p. 8). Undoubtedly, violent actions, in all their forms, have a higher incidence on bodies perceived as feminine, whether in private/family spheres or public workspaces.

In the same vein, Bandeira (2019, p. 304, our translation) asserts that "violence occurs motivated by inequalities based on sex, which begin in the family sphere, where gender relations constitute the prototype of hierarchical relationships." Gender violence is a multifaceted, persistent social phenomenon, manifesting in moral, psychological, and physical aspects. It establishes a relationship of submission or power, which generally results in fear, isolation, dependency, and intimidation for women. Violence is presented as "an action involving the use of real or symbolic force by another with the aim of subjecting the body and mind to someone else's will and freedom" (Bandeira, 2019, p. 304, our translation).

According to Bandeira (2019), the notion of "gender violence" has a dual dimension; it is both a social phenomenon and an analytical category, opening a broad field for scientific research. Thus, the concept of gender has become not only a theoretical tool for analyzing social reality and producing knowledge but also a political struggle that allows for questioning the areas of action concerning inequalities, discrimination, and violence. It has been adopted by the



UN as a transversal element in the formulation of public policies for the defense of women's human rights and the construction of equitable relations.

It is important to note that the Brazilian State has reaffirmed its commitment to international human rights treaties and OAS legislation, particularly the Belém do Pará Convention (1994). This convention defines violence against women from a comprehensive perspective, not only in material terms, but as "any act or conduct based on gender that causes death, harm, or physical, sexual, or psychological suffering to a woman, both in the public and private spheres" (Bandeira, 2019, p. 307, our translation).

Overcoming gender violence requires the training, awareness, and capacity building of public agents from a feminist perspective so that they commit to creating new knowledge, practices, and public policies aimed at gender equality. According to Stromquist (1996), public policies or actions for gender equality imply a profound change in values and ideology, not only among recipients but also among the agents responsible for providing such policies/actions. They should lead to the construction of gender democracy, which suggests equal opportunities, equal rights, and equal access to power and economic resources for women and men (Furlin, 2020). This justifies the importance of mechanisms within academic institutions aimed at promoting equity between women and men and combating processes of violence and discrimination, which generally affect women and violate their rights.

The phenomenon of gender violence, which is reproduced within universities, highlights the need to develop policies and/or mechanisms based on gender issues to address violence and inequalities. This study is relevant as it seeks to demonstrate the extent to which universities have invested in institutional policies for this purpose.

It is essential to highlight the significance of the university space as a place for fostering solidarity, respect, defense, and promotion of human rights. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the debate on the topic has intensified, along with the proposal of governmental actions to realize these rights (Souza, 2019). Thus, within educational institutions, there emerges a need to develop a culture that aims at respecting and promoting human rights for all individuals. According to Felgueiras et al. (2018), to achieve a positive impact on society, it is necessary to implement educational practices that prepare individuals to fully exercise citizenship and be aware of building a just and equitable society. Therefore, institutional mechanisms for addressing discrimination and gender violence function both as channels for awareness and education, with the aim of ensuring human rights.

## Mapping of Institutional Mechanisms in Federal Universities

The research results indicate that out of the 69 federal universities spread across the national territory, only 23 have institutional policies with actions for the prevention, support, and addressing of gender violence occurring within these academic institutions. However, it is important to note that the data found may not accurately reflect reality, as the websites of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES)<sup>15</sup> are not always up to date, and not all institutions responded to the emails and questionnaires sent. Despite this, the data provide a close approximation of the situation, indicating that approximately 33% of federal universities have some mechanism aimed at addressing gender violence, as detailed in the following table.

**Table 1** – Universities with Mechanisms for Support and Addressing Gender Violence

Purpose of Mechanisms	Number	Universities
Accepting and addressing gender-based violence	14	FURG / UFPel / UFSM (2) / UFRGS / UNILA / UFPR / UFRRJ / UFSC/ UnB/ UFG / UFCat / UFNT / UFABC <sup>16</sup>
Addressing violence against women	6	UnB / UNIFAL / UFOP / UFU / UFAL / UFPB
Addressing violence against the LGBTQIA+ community	3	UNIFAL / UnB / UFRN

Source: organized by the authors, based on research data (2022).

Although we recognize that gender violence encompasses "any type of violence based on the social organization of the sexes and perpetrated against individuals specifically because of their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation," as defined by Sardenberg and Tavares (2016, p. 8, our translation), we have categorized the mechanisms into three groups, as shown in Table 1. This categorization is due to the fact that we identified mechanisms addressing gender violence in a broad sense, with many focusing specifically on violence against women, as well as mechanisms aimed at combating gender violence against women and/or LGBTQIA+ individuals. Below, we present the names of the 23 mechanisms and/or institutional policies found, their respective Federal Institutions of Higher Education (IFES), and the year of establishment, according to the three categories created.

<sup>15</sup> In this study, Federal Higher Education Institutions (IFES) are equivalent to Federal Universities.

<sup>16</sup> We chose to use only the acronyms of the universities, in order to avoid making the tables too long.

**Table 2 – Mechanisms for Addressing and Supporting Gender Violence and Their Respective IFES**

Mechanism/Policy	IFES	Year
Affirmative Action, Inclusion, and Diversity Committee	FURG	2021
Gender and Diversity Center (NUGEN)	UFPeI	2019
Gender Equality Committee	UFSM	2021
Casa Verônica (created through the Gender Equality policy)	UFSM	2021
Human Rights and Combating Institutional Violence Committee	UFRGS	2022
Coordination of Sexual Diversity and Combating Gender Violence - linked to the Pro-Rectorate of Affirmative Actions and Equity	UFSC	2016
Executive Committee for Gender Equity and Diversity (CEEGED)	UNILA	2017
Superintendence of Inclusion, Affirmative Policies and Diversity (SIPAD)	UFPR	2017
Gender and Sexual Diversity Center	UFRRJ	2021
Permanent Committee for Institutional Policy on Diversity Gender, Ethnicity/Race and Inclusion	UnB	2013
Diversity Directorate - Linked to the Human Rights Secretariat	UFG	2017
Permanent committee for monitoring complaints and Administrative Proceedings Related to Moral, Sexual Harassment and Prejudice	UFCat	2017
Harassment Committee	UFNT	2021
Gender and Diversity Coordination	UFABC	2022

Source: organized by the authors, based on research data (2022).

**Table 3 – Mechanisms for welcoming and addressing violence against women and their respective IFES**

Mechanism/Policy	IFES	Year
Women's Rights Coordination – CODIM - Linked to the diversity department of the Human Rights Secretariat	UnB	2017
Women's Care Center (NAM) – within the scope of the Human Rights and Inclusion Department (DDHI),	UNIFAL	2019
Athenas Women's Ombudsman Office – Extension project that was incorporated into the university scope	UFOP	2019
Permanent Committee for Monitoring the Institutional Policy for Valuing and Protecting Women	UFU	2021
Committee for Combating Violence against Women, Racism and Homophobia	UFAL	2017
Committee for Policies for Preventing and Confronting Violence against Women	UFPB	2018

Source: Compiled by the authors, based on research data (2022).

**Table 4 – Mechanisms for Addressing and Supporting Violence Against LGBTQIA+ Individuals**

Mechanism/Policy	IFES	Year
Sexual and Gender Diversity Center (Diverges/UNIFAL-MG) – within the scope of the Department of Human Rights and Inclusion (DDHI)	UNIFAL	2021
LGBT Coordination – Codsex - Linked to the Diversity Directorate of the Human Rights Secretariat	UnB	2021
UFRN Committee with Diversity	UFRN	2016

Source: Compiled by the authors, based on research data (2022).

We observe from Tables 1 and 2 that the Federal University of Santa Maria has two institutional policies: the Gender Equality Committee and the Casa Verônica, which was established through the Gender Equality policy to support individuals experiencing gender-based violence and to promote gender equality actions within the institution's campuses.

The University of Brasília (UnB), as noted in Tables 2, 3, and 4, has three mechanisms, each falling into a different category: the Diversity Directorate, established in 2013 and linked to the Human Rights Secretariat, which focuses on supporting and assisting victims of violence and rights violations. In 2017, the Women's Rights Coordination was created under the Diversity Directorate to promote actions recognizing gender diversity, addressing sexism, and combating gender violence within the university community. Later, in 2021, the LGBT Coordination (Codsex) was established, also linked to the Diversity Directorate, to address issues related to homophobia, transphobia, lesbophobia, and biphobia, as well as to promote LGBT rights by receiving, referring, and monitoring cases of LGBTphobia<sup>17</sup>. This highlights that UnB has been actively promoting policies that consider cultural and sexual diversities<sup>18</sup>.

The Federal University of Ouro Preto has a distinct initiative, the Women's Ombudsman, which began as an extension project and was incorporated into the university as an official body for receiving reports of violence against women at UFOP, also providing free legal assistance to women experiencing violence.

It is important to note that this study considered policies established until 2022, when the data was collected. However, with the enactment of Law No. 14,540 on April 3, 2023, which "institutes the Program for Prevention and Addressing Sexual Harassment and Other Crimes Against Sexual Dignity and Sexual Violence within public administration, both federal, state, district, and municipal" (Brasil, 2023, our translation), some universities are now developing specific policies. As we were writing this article, we observed that the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG), through its Committee on Affirmative Actions, Inclusion, and Diversity, was already implementing measures for the prevention, investigation, handling, and accountability of harassment, abusive conduct, and discrimination. However, based on the new federal law, on September 15, 2023, it approved a policy for the prevention and addressing of harassment, discrimination, and other forms of violence at the university (FURG, 2023). This was also observed at the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), which issued a

<sup>17</sup> See <https://sdh.unb.br/index.php/div-sexual>.

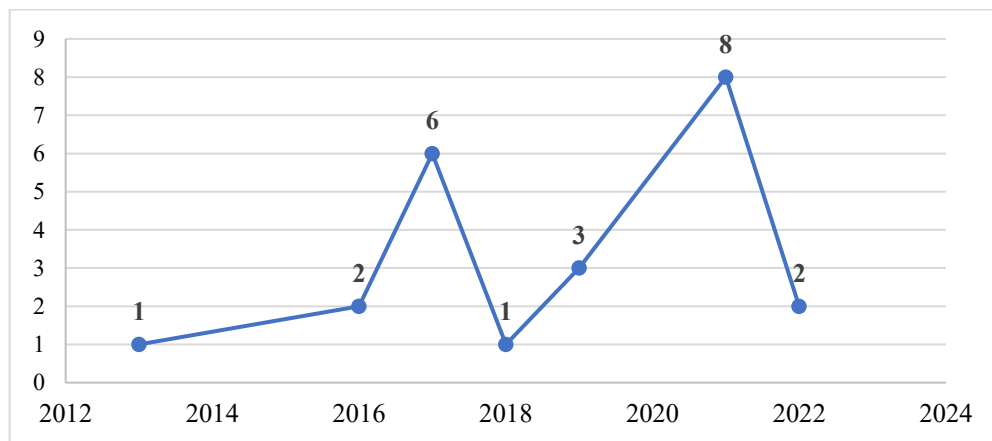
<sup>18</sup> This is because, in addition to the mechanisms mentioned in this article, UnB has also created the Black Coordination and the Indigenous Coordination focused on the rights of these populations, coordinations that are also linked to the Secretariat of Human Rights.

decree designating a committee to develop a Policy for the Prevention and Addressing of Sexual and Moral Harassment. As seen in Table 2, this university was already implementing good practices for supporting and preventing gender violence through the Permanent Commission on Institutional Policy for Gender Diversity, Ethnicity/Race, and Inclusion. These new developments indicate a positive trend, suggesting that Law No. 14,540/23 may be a driving force for the establishment of university programs or policies for the prevention and addressing of gender-based violence in higher education institutions.

Based on the data produced in this research, we can infer that the few mechanisms established by 2022 for addressing gender-based violence among the 69 federal universities may function as a form of "gender technology"<sup>19</sup>, as defined by Teresa de Lauretis (1994). This is because these mechanisms not only serve as spaces for prevention, reporting, and support for victims of violence but also function as a strategy for training that could impact cultural change processes toward the construction of gender-equal relationships.

The institutional mechanisms created to address gender-based violence at federal universities, mapped up to 2022, are quite recent, as shown in the following chart.

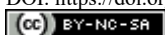
**Chart 1 – Year of Creation of Institutional Mechanisms at Universities**



Source: Organized by the authors, based on research data (2022).

We observe that the need for such institutional policies began to gain attention from universities starting in 2016. This phenomenon can be explained as a response to the numerous reports of abuse and sexual harassment that occurred in recent years, particularly from 2015

<sup>19</sup> In Lauretis, “gender representations are products of different social technologies, such as: cinema, discourses, in which epistemological theories and institutional practices are inserted, as well as everyday practices, marginal to hegemonic discourses, situated in political microrelations. Such technologies have the power to control the field of social meaning and, therefore, to produce, promote, and “implement” a certain gender representation” (Furlin, 2014, p. 116, our translation).

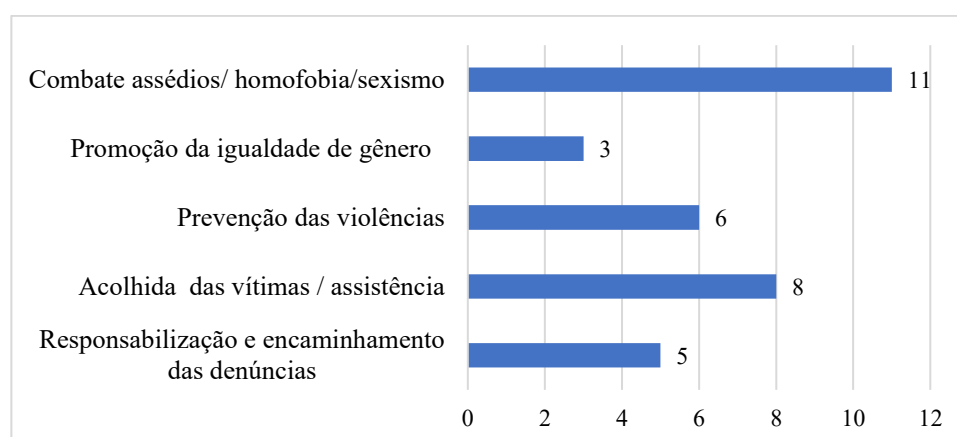


onward, when women at some universities began to report the violence they experienced (Porto, 2017). Additionally, it can be speculated that the need for these policies may have been influenced by the impact of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission in the São Paulo Legislative Assembly, created in 2014 to investigate human rights abuses at São Paulo universities, which became popularly known as the "*CPI dos Trotes*."

On the other hand, these institutional policies have also emerged due to pressure from feminist collectives within universities, highlighting the importance of women's political organization against sexism and power relations that are reproduced in the academic world, as well as advocating for concrete actions in response to cultural and structural dynamics that generate violence and inequalities.

The content of the objectives of the mechanisms created at federal universities demonstrates specific actions that they can implement. For clarity, we have categorized these actions quantitatively, as shown in the following chart.

**Chart 2 – Actions Implemented by Institutional Mechanisms at Universities<sup>20</sup>**



Source: Organized by the authors, based on research data (2022).

It is important to note that in some of the 23 mapped mechanisms, we found proposals for actions that were included in more than one category listed in Chart 2. Others had only a single focus, such as the prevention of violence or support for victims. The most frequent actions relate to combating harassment, homophobia, and/or sexism, followed by actions for victim support and assistance. Undoubtedly, actions promoting gender equality and preventing violence, such as educational activities, are necessary and can positively impact the reduction of violence.

<sup>20</sup> Translation from top to bottom: Combating harassment/homophobia/sexism; Promoting gender equality; Preventing violence; Welcoming victims/assistance; Accountability and referral of complaints.



However, as mentioned in the introduction to this article, gender-based violence is a recurring and increasingly visible reality in the academic space. Therefore, discovering that only five universities have an institutional mechanism for handling complaints and holding perpetrators accountable, which corresponds to 7.3% of Brazilian federal universities, highlights a reality that is not favorable for individuals who are victims of violence in the university environment. This reality is clearly evidenced by the account of an anonymous student from UFSCar, who reported being raped in student housing after being drugged in October 2018:

I cannot move around the university freely, and to my knowledge, other girls have been victims of harassment by the same man. The university provides us no support; I wonder how many girls have already given up on their academic lives because of abusers and the university's defense of the aggressors (*A Verdade*, 2022, our translation)<sup>21</sup>.

The absence of mechanisms or institutional bodies at universities was also reported by Professor Heloisa Buarque de Almeida to the USP Campus newspaper in 2016. According to the professor, in the absence of any office to handle complaints, these were directed to the *Rede Não Cala*<sup>22</sup>. The professor noted that most women do not want to report incidents because they do not trust the university's investigative bodies, where there is “a significant lack of preparation in the units to handle such cases, which has led to institutional violence against the victims” (Vieira; Missi, 2016, s.p, our translation).

In times of absence of institutional policies, feminist collectives become alternative spaces for fighting human rights violations. On the other hand, the data from this research highlight the urgency of effective institutional policies at universities to ensure the rights of women and the LGBTQIA+ community, as gender-based violence, as documented by the UN, is one of the main forms of human rights violations, undermining individuals' dignity in their rights to life, health, autonomy over their bodies, physical and mental integrity, and access to higher education.

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<sup>21</sup> Anonymous report found in news published in the online newspaper, “*A Verdade*”. Available at: <https://averdade.org.br/2022/07/estudantes-denunciam-assedio-e-estupro-em-universidades-no-interior-de-sp/>.

<sup>22</sup> Feminist collective that brings together Professors and Researchers against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence at USP. Rede não Cala seeks to react to reports of sexual and gender-based violence suffered by members of the university community.

## **Final considerations**

This study on the mapping of institutional mechanisms created within Brazilian federal universities to address gender-based violence has indicated that these mechanisms or policies are limited and still in their early stages. Furthermore, mechanisms specifically designed to receive and process reports of violence and hold perpetrators of rape and sexual harassment accountable are even more scarce.

The existence of some institutionalized policies reflects these universities' commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, many of these policies have been developed as a result of pressure from feminist collectives within the universities, particularly from 2015 onwards, when reports of violence became more visible. This underscores the importance of women's political organization in challenging sexism and power dynamics that are perpetuated within the academic world, as well as in advocating for actions to confront cultural and structural dynamics that produce violence and inequalities.

We consider that feminism is now one of the democratic tools crucial for questioning structures and power relations with a view to building social justice and gender democracy. Building gender democracy requires the renewal of social structures that reproduce inequalities, sexism, and violence, including within the university setting. One of these strategies is the development of institutional policies. Such policies can have a ripple effect on the creation of non-violent educational processes, which are essential for ensuring the right to higher education for women and the LGBTQIA+ community and their retention in the university, as affirmed by the international treaties to which Brazil is a signatory.

The results of this research are consistent with the study by Bianca Spode Beltrame (2018) on harassment in federal universities, which found that 52.3% of higher education institutions did not have any prevention policies in place, and of those, 70% lacked measures to combat harassment. This reiterates the need for more policies and institutional programs with gender mainstreaming to prevent and address gender-based violence that pervades social institutions, while also acknowledging that part of combating violence involves creating mechanisms for handling complaints and holding perpetrators accountable.

Moreover, in a national context where conservative and fundamentalist agents are attacking studies and policies with gender mainstreaming, it is crucial to counter the anti-gender offensive with the implementation of educational policies that guarantee the rights of vulnerable groups. Academic debates on gender relations and inequalities should be promoted to build

equal and equitable relationships, which are essential for preventing various forms of violence (sexism, homophobia, transphobia, harassment) within the university environment.

As a space for generating knowledge to address social problems, the university must also invest in innovative solutions to issues within the academic community as part of the formative process. This aims to change the sexist, homophobic, and transphobic culture and structures that are reproduced within universities. Such efforts are necessary for democratic education, grounded in social justice and respect for human rights, and should be regarded as part of the mission of academic institutions.

In conclusion, the creation of institutional policies to address violence represents strategies that open spaces for reflection within universities on power and gender relations, which create social hierarchies and processes of violence. These strategies are essential for producing new cultural practices that uphold the human rights of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, enabling these groups to lead lives of dignity and free from violence. We hope that Law No. 14,540/23 will drive the implementation of effective measures and policies within public and private academic universities, as a democratic and quality education is also committed to eradicating gender inequalities and violence.

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