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## THE PHENOMENON OF CHILD SEXUALIZATION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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**Abstract:** This article presents a systematic review of the phenomenon of child sexualization in the last decade, and seeks to answer the following question: What are the main issues related to child hypersexualization in the digital repositories Google Scholar, Dialnet and Redalyc in the period from 2012 to 2022? The study is based on a methodology of thematic analysis. The research reviewed provides empirical and theoretical data in relation to the object of research. The results show three main thematic areas that have motivated the latest research, media, fashion and gender ideology. In conclusion, most of the reviewed productions show that minors are exposed to an environment where child sexualization has been naturalized and normalized, causing a devaluation of childhood, privileging objectification and objectification, turning them into objects of sexual, physical, psychological and emotional violence, causing social and health problems.

**Keywords:** Child sexualization, media, fashion, gender.

## INTRODUCTION

Child sexualization is understood as “the sexualization of expressions, postures or dress codes considered too precocious.” (BAILEY, 2011, p.196). In this phenomenon, the value of the person is determined only by his or her sexual attractiveness or behavior. In this sense, the person’s value is determined only by his or her sexual attractiveness or behavior. The phenomenon of sexualization turns minors into sexual objects at a very early age and drives them to adopt sexually stereotyped roles that do not correspond to their age (RODRIGUEZ, 2007). Current society has manufactured a subjectivity articulated around sexualization where the body and sexuality become the center of vital existence, this way the identity of minors is configured as an object identity (COBO, 2015).

Sexualization at an early age brings about the possibility of suffering problems that affect minors such as; having a negative image of one’s own body, negatively influencing their future sexual relationships and interactions, intellectual, social, health and moral problems of children. This is why this work aims to identify the main themes and problematizations surrounding child sexualization in the field of research during the period from 2012 to 2022 in the digital repositories Google Academic, Dialnet and Redalyc.

## METHODOLOGY

A systematic review is a form of research that aims to compile and provide a summary on a specific topic based on a research question, which is carried out under a pre-established design (AGUILERA, 2014). This systematic review is based on the design of SALCIDO et al., (2021) and the Cochrane Manual for Systematic Reviews of Interventions, version 5.1.0, which provide a methodological guide that guides the process of preparing the reviews.

According to (SALCIDO et al., 2021), the methodology for preparing a systematic review consists of six phases, which were used in the present study and are described below: Phase I: the research question was developed based on of the objectives planned for the review. Phase II: the inclusion and exclusion criteria were proposed, as well as the search criteria in each database. Phase III: the search was carried out taking into account the criteria of the search date, terms included in the search engines, types of study and period. Phase IV: data were extracted through the study selection process, assessing the type of study, objectives, design, inclusion and exclusion criteria, procedures used, participants, results, etc. Phase V: the quality of the studies was evaluated through a checklist of elements necessary to evaluate

the quality and relevance of the documents. Phase VI: Results were presented through a process of collecting, combining and sintering the results of individual studies, based on the initial question and objective of the study, as well as sufficient evidence to answer conclusively.

Therefore, to delimit the review process, the following research question was posed:

- What are the main problematizations regarding childhood hypersexualization in the digital repositories Google Academic, Dialnet and Redalyc in the period from 2012 to 2022?

To carry out the search, the following inclusion criteria were established:

The search period was established for 10 years and covers the year 2012 to 2022. The information search was carried out between January 2022 and November 2022 in the Google academic search engine and in the academic repositories Redalyc and Dialnet, choosing these for being free access and for being the repositories where a greater amount of material corresponding to our object of study was found. As part of the search for information, it was decided to analyze articles from various countries in order to understand the way in which other contexts perceive the phenomenon of childhood sexualization and this way, enrich the research. The key words and synonyms that guided the research were; childhood sexualization, childhood eroticization and hypersexualization.

In the result of the search, a total of 44 investigations were obtained, from which the data was extracted and it was verified that they had all the necessary elements based on our object of study, subsequently an analytical reading was carried out with a checklist which allowed us to discard articles that did not meet the criteria required for the study and finally there was a total of 19 articles of which a review of the complete document was made

to answer the questions posed in this study.

Below is the search and selection diagram where this process is clarified.

## **RESULTS**

According to the proposed methodology, 19 articles were analyzed and classified in a matrix where aspects such as authors, country, year of publication, problematizations and thematic dimensions were highlighted. Taking the selected articles as reference, it is observed that in the years 2019 and 2020 there is an increase in publications, and in the years 2013 and 2015 there is lower productivity, with 2020 being the year that stands out in the greatest increase. Likewise, the country that stands out with the highest productivity is Spain and Venezuela and Chile are the least. With respect to the research questions that guided this work, the review of the articles allowed us to identify the three main thematic areas to which, according to the content of the research, these articles belong.

### **WHAT ARE THE MAIN PROBLEMATIZATIONS REGARDING CHILDHOOD HYPERSEXUALIZATION IN THE DIGITAL REPOSITORIES GOOGLE ACADEMIC, DIALNET AND REDALYC IN THE PERIOD FROM 2012 TO 2022?**

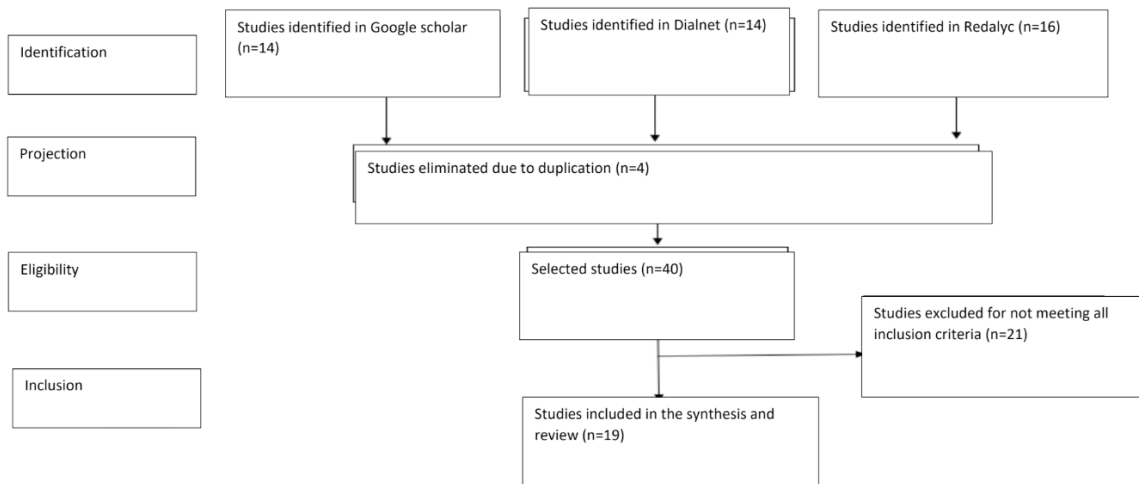
#### **MEDIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON CHILD SEXUALIZATION**

In the review of the documents, problematizations of childhood sexualization were found aimed at the category of media. They are defined as the channels and instruments to inform and communicate to today's society about facts or events that happen in a textual, sound, visual or audiovisual way. The media understands them; television, radio, digital and printed magazines, newspapers, social

Context and temporality	Repositories	Key indicators:
- Articles published between 2012 and 2022	- Digital	- Child sexualization
- Direct relationship with the research object, which included one or more search terms related to the research questions	- Academic google	- Child eroticization
- Articles in Spanish language	- Dialnet	- Childhood hypersexualization
- Full text availability	- Redalyc	
- Articles from any country		

**Table 1** Inclusion criteria in the systematic review

Source: self made



**Figure 1.** PRISMA search and selection process diagram

Source: Own elaboration, based on the PRISMA model [Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses] (2020) with the purpose of guaranteeing the reliability of the systematic process. <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

networks, among others.

The media transmit images that society normalizes until they become stereotypes. These images related to childhood project a sexualized image that is normalized. In turn, advertising media present photographs with striking colors to attract attention to the products (LLOVET, et al., 2019). Consequently, these photographs have a sexual component and capture the attention of followers, making them more vulnerable (DIAZ et al., 2021). For its part, (MÉNDIZ, 2018) in its study concludes that minors are increasingly present in advertising as consumers in the world of adults influenced by family purchasing decisions.

On the other hand, cartoon television

series use a persuasion route in which they transmit subliminal messages to minors that influence minors by hypersexualizing them. Not only that, but also television programs during children's hours use sexual intimacy to acquire more viewers (VELÁZQUEZ, et al., 2020). Added to this; Movies, television series, video clips, video games, comics, present eroticized images of women and men in the audiovisual environment, as a consequence of this the representation of minors is threatened by an increase in sexualization in the context, reducing the value of the minor to their sexual attractiveness, confuses physical attractiveness with being "sexy", turns minors into objects for the sexual use of others and imposes a sexuality inappropriate for their age

(HERNÁNDEZ, 2021).

Consequently, the use of social networks to disseminate sexualized photographs of minors deteriorates and impoverishes the image that society may have of childhood. Likewise, images of sexualized girls on social networks are perceived as non-competent, less intelligent, less sociable and decent girls (DÍAZ; LLOVET, 2017). In this same context, minors produce sexual content on the internet and use social networks to voluntarily exchange and socialize their own videos and photos (packs) through chats or online games (GONZÁLEZ, 2019). This practice of presenting oneself in a sensual or suggestive, coded way is synonymous with online self-sexualization where one learns that sexualized behaviors and appearances are approved and rewarded by society (MORENO, 2021).

In turn, the Instagram network, being the favorite network of millennials, has also been investigated and it has been concluded that its artificial intelligence only detects percentages of skin in photographs, it does not have semantic intelligence and its algorithms do not discover another form of sexualization. Then minors show their bodies with sexualizing elements online and have gained a large number of followers (DIAZ et al., 2021). Hence, boys and girls are developing new values, influenced by the media and globalization. They are subjects based on the desires of adults, permeated by adulthood that shortens their freedom, creativity, stages and interests typical of childhood (VERGARA; VERGARA, 2012).

## **FASHION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILD SEXUALIZATION**

During the systematic review of the studies, problematizations were found that were grouped within the category titled fashion. Fashion is the original system of regulation and social pressure, its changes have a compelling nature that is accompanied by the duty of adoption and assimilation, which is more or less obligatorily imposed on a given social environment (LIPOVETSKY, 1990).

With respect to child sexualization reflected in fashion and beauty products, it has been found that children's beauty contests have increased and with it, eating disorders and depression. It is a mistake that girls are appreciated for their physical appearance and that they grow up thinking that appearance is the most important thing. In this sense, culture appropriates the innocence of girls through advertising and consumption of child beauty (QUEZADA, 2014), thus making the body the object of consumption par excellence (SIFUENTES, 2019).

The fashion industry induces people to buy certain types of clothing and reproduce a lifestyle that is not in line with the age of minors. Therefore, children are presented as sexual objects in much of the activity of brands and media linked to fashion and advertising. A stereotype of beauty has spread that privileges an excessively thin body, causing physical and psychological disorders. Fashion trends are progressively introduced into the daily lives of minors until they become something normal and habitual (DIAZ et al., 2016).

Then the bodies of minors are transformed into a spectacle of business culture, considering them as sexual objects in advertising, but also as objects of consumption. Highlights, stockings, adult fabrics (velvet, leather, silk, lingerie), high-heeled shoes, postures, sexy gestures, dress codes, nudity, styling, makeup, language, etc., are some elements that are

shown as sexualizing (NARROS, et al., 2018) In this sense, the market focuses on infants as consumers and concerns children's parties, hair cuts and hairstyles, beauty accessories, outfit-duos, body postures, exercises aerobics, muscles, among others (SIFUENTES, 2019).

Gender ideology as the scenario for the sexualization of minors

Finally, the problematizations found were grouped into the category of gender ideology, which is considered as a set of ideas, beliefs and social attributions constructed in each culture and historical moment, based on sexual difference. From the above, the behavior, functions, roles, assessment and type of relationships between women and men are determined (GENDER GLOSSARY, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF WOMEN, 2007).

With respect to the topic of gender ideology, the research that was analyzed mentions the gender roles that girls and boys must play in society, physical appearance is considered essential to achieve success, as well as early maturity, distortion of their reality and loss of experiences typical of their age; thus violating the fundamental rights of minors (LÓPEZ, 2019). This way, sexism and racism are part of the same discriminatory discourse, based on the status of women (CARRÈRE; CARRÈRE, 2015). It is stated that the children's guardians exhibit the girls on different platforms through the publication of images with inappropriate clothing and poses considered sexy that subject them to unnecessary adulthood, inciting machismo to predominate in our country (LÓPEZ, 2019).

Consequently, some problematizations that sexualization entails in minors have to do with basing the value of a person on their sexual attractions, evaluating people's capabilities based on physical aspects, their corporeality and eroticization makes it easier to fall into the cycles of gender violence, the appearance

of pregnancies at increasingly younger ages, boys and girls victims of sexual harassment and/or abuse, and online self-sexualization practices (FUENTES; RODRÍGUEZ, 2021)

## CONCLUSIONS

Once analyzed and explored the different views of childhood sexualization and its main problematizations during the last 10 years, it can be concluded that the majority of studies have been dedicated to studying the influence of the media on the sexualization of minors, the production Scientific research shows that content that influences the sexualization of children is transmitted through the media and that society is normalizing it, leaving aside the filter and care for minors.

Likewise, the advertising of fashion and beauty products has endeavored to include minors in their activity; children are part of the market discourse as they are considered as sexual objects, but also as objects of consumption and consumers. An attempt is made to that minors are fashionable, objectified, sexualized, however, this has caused a large number of physical and psychological disorders in minors. Children dress the same as "sexy" adults and face a number of pressures to have a sense of belonging.

Consequently, gender roles and stereotypes continue to influence the phenomenon of child sexualization, reproducing inequalities in the cultural system, reproducing in minors the idea that children must be physically and emotionally strong, they must be handsome, having many girlfriends, etc., and girls who are attractive and objects of desire for others, this has brought great problems to society, including violence and machismo.

In closing, it is considered advisable to continue researching more about the phenomenon of childhood sexualization, since minors are exposed to an environment where

childhood sexualization has been naturalized and normalized. This causes a devaluation of childhood, privileging objectification and objectification, turning them into objects of sexual, physical, psychological and emotional

violence, leading to social and health problems; early pregnancies, psychoaffective problems, reduced cognitive abilities of infants, physical, mental and emotional health problems.

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