

Feminism, motherhood and women's mental health: understandings from the social reality

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ABSTRACT

The present study sought to understand the reality of women and the factors related to their mental health, from an understanding of the social reality faced by

women in Brazil. The question that guided the development of the research was: to what extent can gender inequality impact women's mental health. The method used was deductive, starting from general understandings in order to reach particular understandings. From the bibliographic research technique, it was concluded that the social scenario builds the gateway to women's mental illness, but other issues, such as the absence of public policies aimed at women's well-being, are also contributing factors for illness.

Keywords: Gender, Mental health, Motherhood, Social isolation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present work seeks to understand the aspects of the mental health of women under the gender bias, intertwining with the social roles destined to women. In the case of maternal mental health, the problems that involve it represent a great challenge for public health, but it is still a forgotten theme, both in the period that comprises prenatal care and in the puerperium.

It should be emphasized that, although the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF/88) and the Civil Code of 2002 (CC/02) provide that parenthood should be exercised in an equal manner, it is on women who have the responsibility for the creation of offspring and for domestic care in family ambience in relationships marked by the binary and heterosexual model of parenthood

Faced with this problem, often silenced in the social and academic field, the question is: to what extent can gender inequality impact women's mental health? The overall objective is to understand the extent to which gender inequality can impact women's mental health. More specifically, it is intended to: outline the social position occupied by women; understand the effects of the pandemic on women's lives and understand the determining factors of women's mental problems.

The method used is deductive, starting from a general understanding on the subject in order to reach a more specific understanding. With regard to the type of approach, the qualitative approach is used, offering interpretations about the data seized from the social reality. The research technique used is bibliographic in nature, based on the analysis of scientific articles, specialized bibliography, master's dissertations and doctoral theses relevant to its development. The research is exploratory, based on literature review.

The accomplishment of this research is justified by the fact that the search for gender equality and the equal division of roles in the domestic sphere is a matter of social character, which should be faced by all those who see gender equity as a measure of social justice and a human rights issue.

As partial results of the research, the facts can be highlighted that the social gap constructed between genders impacts women in a systemic and significant way, going through social, personal, physical and mental issues. In addition to this factor, racism, social vulnerability and the ills of the pandemic have crossed women's lives, making them even more vulnerable. When these questions are posed through the prism of motherhood, the reality is even more worrying.

2 THE ABOUT(LIVING) WOMAN: UNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN GENDER AND SOCIAL REALITY

According to Joan Scott (1989), gender can be understood as an element of social relations from the establishment of the difference between the sexes, being related to the issues of power. It is from the social construction that gender is determined, being factors that go beyond biology. It is in this perspective that Simone de Beauvoir (2009) asserts that no one is born a woman, but becomes a woman, because it is the social structure that draws the fate of the subjects, the male and the castrated.

Faced with the structural machismo that permeates society and the influence of the public environment on the private, the domestic environment reflects a scenario of subjugation and inferiorization of women. It should be emphasized that household chores have always had their space for women, also activities relevant to the exercise of motherhood (Catarina OLIVEIRA; Maria Rita NETHERLANDS, 2022).

As a reflection of the banner of feminism - wielded by many women - women conquered the labor market, without, however, having managed to abandon the burden of domestic activities. The conquest of the space of the labor market and the non-emancipation of the execution of domestic work caused women to accumulate the execution of these tasks.

It cannot be overlooked that all this work overload is often accompanied by situations of violence, affecting the physical and mental health of women, as well as their own dignity. The work overload directed at women, translated through the accumulation of functions and constructed by society itself, causes a physical and psychic illness of those who have to occupy two places at the same time (Isabele D'ANGELO; LANDO, 2020).

In the social field, it is common for women to be given the inexorable mission of motherhood. The one who does not take is considered a "denatured" mother. There is no room for women to exercise her freedom, especially as a mother. On the contrary, man is allowed to exercise his mission as a father in a sporadic manner, or even not to exercise it.

3 THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF PANDEMIC ON WOMEN'S LIVES

Social relations were diametrically affected from the recommendation of social distancing given by the World Health Organization (WHO), when on March 11, 2020, it considered that society was experiencing a pandemic scenario. According to data published by the National Household Sample Survey, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Statistical Geography (IBGE) in a sample of Brazilian households during the pandemic period (2020 to 2021), more than 8 million women lost their jobs (Carolina DELBONI, 2021).

Isolation, school closures, the uncertainty of the moment, the difficulty in accessing health care, the working hours of those who could not isolate themselves, the work day that increased and the lack of income contributed to the woman's mental health scenario being considered devastating, mainly due to the fact that 1/3 of Brazilian families are headed by women, a generalized feeling of exhaustion and depression arises. (DELBONI, 2021).

According to Santos (2020), the pandemic revealed other social crises that had long been crossed, denoting chasms that always existed. The case of women who, as a result of sanitary measures, were forced to assume telework is shown to be an unfolding of the harmful effects of the pandemic. Given the social position aimed at women, they were overloaded, because, in addition to performing the activities related to the work relationship, they had to perform the domestic activities (Maria Júlia ARRUDA; Isabele D'ANGELO, 2021).

Although the domestic sphere is often romanticized, it is in it that women victims of domestic violence live their worst scenes. The lethality of the virus left the authorities no choice but to impose social isolation. The fact that the aggressor and the victim were forcibly isolated in the same domestic environment caused the scenario of violence to be enhanced, resulting in a significant increase in domestic violence statistics. (Beatriz BORGES; LARA, 2020).

The number of children registered without a father during the pandemic also jumps to the eye, as it increased significantly. According to data obtained from the Portal of Transparency of the Civil Registry, it is found that, in the periods that comprises the years 2020 to 2022, about 320,000 children were registered only with the maternal name, corresponding to 6% of the children born in this period in Brazil (Roberta JANSEN, 2022). The reasons that led to this decrease in the number of children registered with the paternal name may be many, however, regardless of the reasons, women will be impacted in the exercise of motherhood.

4 WOMEN, MATERNITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Although mental health is a challenge among all mothers, at all times, there is greater attention when it comes to solo mothers. Ibge data state that in Brazil there are more than 11 million solo mothers and that more than 1/3 of the families are headed by women. Of these, 63% are below the poverty line (CALDAS, 2021). The lack of daycare and school, the difficulty of access to public health, unemployment, legal

disputes for custody or child support and emotional blackmail hinder the physical and mental well-being of these mothers. All these facts, together with the social condition occupied by women, make the exercise of motherhood more dense than that of fatherhood, requiring material equality (OLIVEIRA; HOLANDA, 2022).

The investment in public health and in the infrastructure of schools for better access, as well as the equal participation of women in the professional sphere, public policies aimed at humanizing care during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum, community structures aimed at family support, are some measures that the government must take so that maternal mental health ceases to be a public health problem.

There are situations that pregnant women are subjected to and can generate health risk, enhancing the onset of diseases not necessarily related to pregnancy: inhumane care by health professionals, domestic, psychological and obstetric violence, bullying inside and outside the home, anxiety due to economic and emotional insecurity (DELBONI, 2021).

From a health point of view, the state of pregnancy represents for the woman an experience that brings to her body and to her health a number of implications. The fact of being pregnant brings to women physiological and psychological changes, which without proper follow-up of health professionals, family and support network can pose risks to the health and physical integrity of her and her child (Maria GUERRA *et al*, 2014).

The number of pregnant women with mental health problems in Brazil varies between 31% and 41%, with more than half of pregnant women with signs of mental disorders (Fernanda GUIMARÃES *et al.*, 2019). The problems accompany the mother beyond pregnancy. It is in the puerperium that changes in routine, body and mind will happen. The lack of support network, the absence of the partner and the family at the time of adaptation, the physical changes and even traumatic experiences at the time of delivery, are triggers for the development of some disorder in this postpartum period.

5 CONCLUSION

Women, throughout history, promoted/promoted social movements and struggles that fundamentally seek gender equity. Although much has already been conquered, there is still a lot of fighting ahead. Unfortunately, the years of searching for equity have not yet managed to bridge the gap between the masculine and the feminine. Markers such as class and race, when placed side by side with gender issues, denote that material equality is still a distant reality to reach women indistinctly.

The insertion of women in the labor market was a great achievement of the feminist movement, despite having achieved this insertion, the woman has not yet managed to completely dismember herself from the place reserved for her in the domestic environment. In the domestic environment, there is no division of tasks that contemplate genders equally, but rather a total direction of these tasks to women.

The pandemic of Covid-19, using the precepts of democracy, has reached everyone, but unfortunately its consequences were not the same for everyone. Those who during the pre-pandemic reality

were considered vulnerable, had their vulnerabilities potentiated by the virus, which, in this respect, was not democratic, but cruel. Certainly, women have had their lives totally impacted by the harmful effects of the pandemic, issues such as: increased workload, double working hours, unemployment and increased numbers of domestic violence have made women's lives more about.

The social reality to which women are inserted, added to the effects of the pandemic and the consequences of motherhood, impacts women in a poignant way, causing physical, material and psychic effects. With regard to mental health and motherhood, the data obtained from documentary research denote a sensitive reality of pregnant women suffering from mental disorders.

Turning to the research question, what is it: to what extent can gender inequality impact women's mental health? It is possible to affirm that gender inequality significantly impacts women's mental health: it is systemic and structural. Nevertheless, the problem is intersectional and involves issues such as class and race, which often go unnoticed in the face of the central issue of gender inequality.

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