

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE DISCOURSE OF THE DIGITAL MEDIA

VIOLÊNCIA CONTRA A MULHER NO INÍCIO DA PANDEMIA DA COVID-19: O DISCURSO DAS MÍDIAS DIGITAIS

VIOLENCIA CONTRA LAS MUJERES AL INICIO DE LA PANDEMIA DEL COVID-19: EL DISCURSO DE LOS MEDIOS DIGITALES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze how the digital media portrayed violence against women at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, in the light of gender. **Method:** a descriptive study with a qualitative approach that used online data (news and comments) published on digital platforms: news portals, newspapers, governmental websites and from feminist organizations, and the Twitter social media. The data were extracted using a semi-structured instrument and treated by means of thematic content analysis, with the aid of the webQDA software. **Results:** three empirical categories were found, namely: The effects of COVID-19 on the numbers of violence against women; COVID-19 unveiling violence against women in public and private spaces; and COVID-19 and violence against women: two pandemics in parallel. At the beginning of the pandemic, an increase and worsening of infringements were verified, probably related to social distancing and to the worsening of the economic crisis. The narratives addressed violence against women primarily as a phenomenon directly related to the pandemic and to the social distancing measures or the consequences of the health crisis. **Conclusion:** the results instigate reflection and provoke the recognition of women's vulnerability to violence in the home environment, through the media's critical approach to the phenomenon for the deconstruction of the androcentric sexist patterns and in search of gender equality. The potential of the digital media to understand the expression of violence against women in a unique moment in history was evident, stimulating reflections that can contribute to its confrontation.

Keywords: Domestic Violence; Violence Against Women; Qualitative Research; Pandemics; Mass Media; Women's Health.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar como as mídias digitais retrataram a violência contra a mulher no início da pandemia da COVID-19, no Brasil, à luz de gênero. **Método:** estudo descritivo de abordagem qualitativa que utilizou dados online (notícias e comentários) publicados em plataformas digitais: portais de notícias, jornais, sites governamentais e de organizações feministas e rede social Twitter. Os dados foram extraídos por meio de instrumento semiestruturado e tratados pela análise de conteúdo temática, com suporte do software webQDA. **Resultados:** foram encontradas três categorias empíricas: os reflexos da COVID-19 nos números da violência contra a mulher; a COVID-19 desvelando a violência contra a mulher no público e no privado; COVID-19 e violência contra a mulher: duas pandemias em paralelo. No início da pandemia constataram-se aumento e agravamento das violações, provavelmente relacionados ao distanciamento social e à piora da crise econômica. As narrativas abordaram a violência contra a mulher primordialmente como um fenômeno diretamente relacionado à pandemia e às medidas de distanciamento social ou às consequências da crise sanitária. **Conclusão:** os resultados instigam à reflexão e provocam o reconhecimento da vulnerabilidade das mulheres à violência no ambiente doméstico, por meio da abordagem crítica do fenômeno pelas mídias para a desconstrução dos padrões sexistas androcêntricos e para a busca pela equidade de gênero. Ficou evidente a potencialidade das mídias digitais para compreender a expressão da violência contra a mulher em um momento singular da história, estimulando reflexões que podem contribuir para o seu enfrentamento.

Palavras-chave: Violência Doméstica; Violência contra a Mulher; Pesquisa Qualitativa; Pandemias; Meios de Comunicação de Massa; Saúde da Mulher.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar cómo los medios de comunicación de masas retrataron la violencia contra las mujeres al inicio de la pandemia COVID-19 en Brasil, a la luz del género. **Método:** estudio descriptivo con enfoque cualitativo que utilizó datos en línea (noticias y comentarios) publicados en plataformas digitales: portales de noticias, periódicos, sitios web gubernamentales y organizaciones feministas y red social Twitter. Los datos se extrajeron mediante un instrumento semiestruturado y se trataron mediante análisis de contenido temático, apoyado por el software webQDA. **Resultados:** se encontraron tres categorías empíricas: los efectos del COVID-19 sobre las cifras de violencia contra las mujeres; COVID-19 que revela la violencia contra las mujeres en público y privado; COVID-19 y violencia contra la mujer: dos pandemias en paralelo. Al inicio de la pandemia, hubo un aumento y agravamiento de las violaciones, probablemente relacionadas con el

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distanciamiento social y el agravamiento de la crisis económica. Las narrativas abordaron la violencia contra las mujeres principalmente como un fenómeno directamente relacionado con la pandemia y las medidas de distanciamiento social o las consecuencias de la crisis de salud. Conclusión: los resultados incitan a la reflexión y provocan el reconocimiento de la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres a la violencia en el ámbito doméstico, a través del abordaje crítico del fenómeno mediático para la deconstrucción de patrones sexistas androcéntricos y para la búsqueda de la equidad de género. Se evidenció el potencial de los medios de comunicación de masas para comprender la expresión de la violencia contra la mujer en un momento único de la historia, estimulando reflexiones que pueden contribuir a su confrontación.

Palabras clave: *Violencia Doméstica; Violencia contra la Mujer; Investigación Cualitativa; Pandemias; Medios de Comunicación de Masas; Salud de la Mujer.*

INTRODUCTION

Declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020,¹ the COVID-19 pandemic is characterized as one of the most serious events recorded in contemporary times. Complex and challenging, it mobilized actions from the entire population with emphasis on the government, science, academic area, economic and health policy makers, public opinion and the media. The events that have taken place since its beginning show that it is essentially a Collective Health problem that affects social groups in different ways, according to their vulnerability.²

In most countries, social distancing stood out among the main measures adopted to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2. In Brazil, however, this strategy, which was expressive in the first months of the pandemic, a period of greater compliance by the population, was the subject of numerous discursive and ideological clashes. When unveiling the objective reality, it brought to light a problem already existing long before the pandemic: domestic violence against women. The phenomenon has worsened to such an extent that it has been highlighted in the digital media and informal reporting channels, such as the social media, mainly after international organizations drew the attention to the increase in the number of infringements virtually in all countries.³

Such increase was confirmed by research studies carried out in Canada, the United States of America, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and France, with 30% more reports after the decree of the measure, in March 2020.³ In Latin America there were records of increase in Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru.^{4,5}

Despite this, a survey by the Brazilian Public Security Forum (*Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*) verified

that, in the country and at the beginning of social distancing, a reduction in crimes against women was recorded, except for femicide, which increased by 2.2% between March and May 2020.⁶ This data reveals a possible difficulty for women to access the means for reporting infringements. Femicides were visible because they cannot be hidden.

Understanding the meaning of this phenomenon in the pandemic involves recognizing that violence against women is a structural phenomenon in society, a reflection of power relations between men and women and of constructed and naturalized inequalities.⁷ These inequalities emerge in circumstances of increased vulnerability, such as social isolation. Women's exposure to violence due to increased cohabitation with the aggressor contributed to more occurrences of abusive behaviors, unawareness of existing assistance devices or more difficulties in accessing them, in addition to the weakening of the institutional and family networks, hindering support and assistance.

These weaknesses and barriers faced by women to seek help were expressively addressed by the digital media through the dissemination of campaigns and coping strategies, as well as by reports by family members or neighbors, especially in March and April 2020. This scenario instigated the conception of this study, which starts from the following question: What meanings do the media narratives about violence against women in the pandemic assume, when analyzed from a gender perspective? Studying the phenomenon through the media begins with the centrality they occupy in social life and their potential to reveal a reality that often goes beyond the life experience itself.⁸

Based on the above, the study is justified by the influence of the media in the formulation of public opinion, in the norms and in the gender roles and relations, which are determinants for the construction, deconstruction or reproduction of stigmas and stereotypes related to violence against women. In addition to that, it contributes to confronting violence, to the promotion of health care, and to health practices committed to social transformations and to make visible women's vulnerability to domestic violence.

OBJECTIVE

To analyze how the digital media portrayed violence against women at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, in the light of gender.

METHOD

A descriptive study with a qualitative approach that used digital data (news and comments) on violence against women at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, considering that the use of digital methods for online data capture makes it possible to access social changes in relation to the phenomena.⁹

The data were collected in two virtual news portals, in two national newspapers in their digital versions, in the Federal Government's official pages, in the Federal District and the 26 federative units, in four pages of Brazilian feminist organizations, and in the Twitter social media.

The choice of these digital platforms is justified due to the possibility of capturing different perspectives of the object under study, from different sources that refer to the singular, particular and structural dimensions of society. The amount of data was defined according to the recurrence and complementarity of the information with a view to deepening, encompassing and understanding the phenomenon.¹⁰

Data collection took place from March 11th to April 30th, 2020. The start date was due to the publication of the World Health Organization's decree declaring the SARS-CoV-2 infection a pandemic¹ and the end date was defined according to the period with the highest social isolation index recorded in Brazil (over 50%).¹¹ The sources were accessed daily by the study authors during data collection.

The news and comments were accessed through the search field of each site investigated, using the following terms: "violence against women", "covid-19", "covid19", "coronavirus", "pandemic", "isolation" and "social isolation". In the governmental portals, the search was carried out with the word "violence". News and comments on violence against women published in the digital media at the beginning of the pandemic were included, a period with the highest record of social isolation. Duplicate news items and comments were excluded. All the information obtained was read in full, considering the eligibility criteria to then select those that would be analyzed.

The selected news and comments were saved in Portable Document Format, stored and shared among the study authors through an online file folder. Subsequently, the data were extracted with the aid of a semi-structured instrument, developed by the authors for its exclusive use in this study, in order to capture the following information: the news' publication date and authorship, digital platform and discourses on violence against women.

The instrument was submitted to internal validation through a virtual meeting.

The discourses were submitted to thematic content analysis, consisting of the following stages: a) pre-analysis, defined by the organization and reading of the material; b) exploration of the material, consisting in coding and categorization; c) treatment of results, in which interpretation is developed through inference.¹²

The data collected through the instrument and entered into an Excel spreadsheet were incorporated into the webQDA qualitative analysis software¹³. The use of this software is justified due to the possibility of handling the data in a collaborative and synchronous manner between the research team members. It is available on an online platform, which can be accessed through a license purchase. webQDA is divided into three systems: sources, coding and questioning.

The Excel spreadsheet was incorporated into webQDA through the internal source system and the automatic import tool. In the first stage of data treatment, the study authors read the material in its entirety, followed by a virtual meeting to define the provisional empirical categories. These categories were also structured from the "gender" and "gender violence" analytical categories.

In the second stage, in the webQDA coding system, the data related to the characterization of the news and comments (date of publication, authorship and digital platform) were automatically coded using the descriptors tool. The empirical categories emerging from thematic content analysis were constructed using the tree codes tool. The data coding process took place independently and collaboratively between the first four authors of the study. Finally, there was a virtual meeting with all study authors for the process of establishing consensus and validating the coded data in order to reduce interpretive bias.

The research waived the need to be assessed by a Research Ethics Committee, as it used publicly available and freely accessible texts and comments. The anonymity of the data sources was guaranteed by replacing the names with the following expressions: News Portals 1 and 2, Newspapers 1 and 2, Feminist Organizations 1 to 4, and Twitter 1 to 499. The governmental pages were named according to the management unit. The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) instrument was used for the methodological procedures.

RESULTS

With regard to the number of daily publications on the topic, it is worth noting the number of 33 publications published on April 14th and April 20th, 2020. On the other days, the daily mean was 14 publications. As for the authors, most were female (n=287), followed by male (n=130), four were authored by men and women and, in 313, the author's gender was not informed. Table 1 presents the number of publications selected, according to the digital platforms used:

Table 1 - Number of publications selected according to the type of digital platform consulted, Brazil, 2021

Digital platforms	Number of publications
Virtual news portals	120 news items (NP1 n=65; NP2 n=55)
Newspapers, digital version	28 news items (N1 n=17; N2 n=11)
Governmental pages	45 publications
Feminist Organizations Pages	42 publications
Twitter	499 comments
Total	734 publications

Data content analysis allowed for the emergence of three empirical categories, namely: The effects of COVID-19 on the numbers of violence against women; COVID-19 unveiling violence against women in public and private spaces; and COVID-19 and violence against women: two pandemics in parallel.

The effects of COVID-19 on the numbers of violence against women

The news and comments conveyed by the digital media mainly referred to the increase in the number of cases of violence against women, recorded at the beginning of the pandemic, when compared to the same period in the previous year.

Reports of violence against women increase during quarantine. Data from the official governmental channel, Ligue 180, reveal an 18% increase in the number of reports in the nine days of isolation compared to the rest of the month (Twitter 98).

In Mato Grosso, femicide records jumped from 2 to 10, a 400% increase. In São Paulo, there was a 46.3% increase in femi-

des, from 13 to 19. The homicide victims in the state went from 38 to 41 women, a 79% increase (Government of Bahia).

The increase in the reports of situations of violence against women was verified at the federal level, at the *Disque 180* Service Center, which offers the service free of charge, 24 hours a day, every day of the week. The increase in femicides was evidenced in the states.

A smaller percentage of the digital media addressed the reduction in the number of cases of violence against women at the beginning of the social distancing adopted in Brazil. The records had as sources data primarily accounted for by the Public Security Secretaries, reinforcing the understanding of violence as a police issue.

There is fear that social isolation could lead to an increase in domestic violence but, for now, the Public Security Secretary's numbers do not support the hypothesis in the state. Reports of violence against women drop 49% in Ceará, after the isolation decree (Twitter 311).

The Public Security secretary explains that: There is no change in the number of records of violence against women due to confinement. Statistics do not show this. The measures remain the same, we have given priority to these cases, the police stations are all open, the service numbers for women are working normally, the service remains normal and, of course, at this moment, any call they make will have priority in our service system. However, in the Federal District, up to date, there is no high number or increase in the number of cases due to the isolation caused by the coronavirus (Government of the Federal District).

The data show divergence between the low numbers recorded by the different service centers and the growth in the number of femicides.

Covid-19 Unveiling Violence Against Women In Public And Private Spaces

The narratives referred to the several types of violence established in the Brazilian legislation (psychological, moral, patrimonial, physical and sexual) and also infringements occurred in cyberspace. Various manifestations of violence were reported, highlighting suffocation and silencing. Suffocation was associated with the physical structure of the home space, which materializes as a barrier to seeking help, while silencing was related to the fear that paralyzes and prevents the rupture of the infringement cycle.

There are screams going through the walls, there are screams that are smothered so that calls for help are not heard through doors and windows; and there are the screams that are silenced by fear, oppression and death. In many cases, there is still pain, visible marks on the body and those that remain invisible in the soul of the woman who suffers aggression and violence in its variants (Newspaper 2).

The infringements were reported as responsible for causing pain, leaving visible and invisible marks on the women's bodies and lives, affecting personal appreciation, self-image and, consequently, self-esteem. It was often emphasized that the women believed they had a duty to bear violence in the name of emotional and economic dependence on the aggressor and of the possible loss of living with their children.

The abusive relationship affects four female dimensions. The first is self-esteem. The woman thinks she is nothing without the man, that her life depends on his. The second is the economic dimension. She cannot break the cycle because she depends on him. The third is that of children and family, the threat of losing that. She is afraid of having her child-rearing competence questioned, so she often waits for the children to grow up before she leaves. And finally a social dimension, of losing the people around them (Feminist Organization 1).

The narratives also showed that the restriction for people to remain in the home space spread the concept of the residence as a safe place. However, for women and children, on the contrary, it became a place of danger and insecurity, due to the increase in the cohabitation time and, consequently, the tensions between intimate partners or family members, especially where situations of violence already occurred. Some discourses equated the home to captivity for women in situations of violence.

For some, the home is a refuge and center of peace, that place where you can't wait to arrive there after a long workday. However, for those who do not have this happiness, it becomes a true synonym of torture and despair, so that incessant working hours are preferable to having to return there at the end of the day (Newspaper 2).

For many women, the prospect of being prisoners in their homes is more terrifying than the possibility of contracting a disease on the street (Newspaper 2).

The narratives indicated the pandemic as a trigger for increased tension, stress and consumption of alcohol and drugs, polarizing the relationship between victims and aggressors, crystallizing women as helpless and passive victims while, between the lines, men were seen as executioners and enemies to be fought.

Social isolation is necessary, but the woman who is in a condition of aggression lives in a prison. She lives 24 hours with the aggressor; so we are receiving requests for help from women in a situation of despair; because they are feeling threatened by their partners (News Portal 2).

Can you imagine isolating yourself with the enemy? Tempers heat up, stress increases, even more if the enemy consumes alcohol or has another addiction. All this together, certainly increases the violence - emphasizes the prosecutor (News Portal 2).

In addition to the changes in private life, the pandemic brought about significant changes in public life, especially in the economic sector, due to the closing of services considered non-essential. This fact was directly reflected in the dynamics of social roles. The reduction in paid productive activities for men was considered a stressor, as it compromises family livelihood. For women, there was an increase in the burden of unpaid reproductive activities, such as caring for the home, the children, the sick and older adults, reinforcing the idea that housework and family care is "a woman's thing".

To support his argument that isolation is harmful, Jair Bolsonaro [President of the Brazilian Republic] cited, without giving numbers, an increase in domestic violence. "It's just showing that, is there a woman being beaten at home? Why that? In a home that lacks bread, everyone fights and no one is right. How does that end up? The guy wants to work, my God in heaven, is it a crime now? (Newspaper 1).

Due to the health systems' saturation and the closing of schools, the home care chores fall mainly on them. The responsibility of caring for sick family members, older adults and children as well. In addition to that, women are a majority among the informal and domestic workers (News Portal 1).

Economic instability and social distancing were presented by the digital media as justifications for the cases of violence against women at the beginning of the pandemic.

COVID-19 and violence against women: two pandemics in parallel

The media revealed the pandemic as a favorable scenario for the perpetration of violence against women, due to the fact that families spend more time confined in the home space, a privileged, *locus* for the occurrence of this type of violence. If, however, for women, social isolation reduced the risk of contamination by the coronavirus, it considerably increased their vulnerability to violence.

Increased cohabitation can increase control, ownership, humiliation and, often, physical aggression happens for the first time. Women who did not realize that they were in abusive relationships, because they had ups and downs, started to realize so (News Portal 1).

Women routinely subjected to gender subordination had this situation aggravated by the pandemic. The digital media recognized this worsening and justified it due to unemployment, to the daily need to commute and risk of contamination for working outside the home, to the work overload due to the longer permanence of the family members at home, and to the need to care for children and older adults motivated by the restriction of access to the health services, as a result of the increase in the demand for care due to COVID-19. Another element cited for the increase in violence was the transfer of responsibility for school education to the family - mothers, aunts, grandmothers or other women - as a result of the closing of schools and of practicing remote educational activities, supervised by someone in the family.

Women are more severely affected by the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). They are more exposed to the risk of contamination and social vulnerabilities resulting from the pandemic, such as unemployment, violence, lack of access to the health services and increased poverty. With the pandemic, women have to divide themselves between various activities, such as the following: employment outside the house, housework, child care, home education (since schools are closed) and care for the older adults in the family (News Portal 2).

At the beginning of the pandemic, the media reported that women were at the apex of submission due to the economic, political, health and humanitarian crises, subjected to a greater number of infringements, which were not necessarily restricted to the private life sphere.

The second point in which we can think of these two epidemics in parallel is women as the most vulnerable when these multiple inequalities meet. The more fragile this woman is within the complexities and inequalities, the greater the weakness and exposure to the risk and to the effects of this false crossing between economy and public health. False because public health has always been a good economy, and economy has always depended on people's health to be good workers (News Portal 1).

The time for analysis is still short, but the data point to a trend. Moments of crisis in society – economic, political or a pandemic – have historically brought about an increase in violence against women. That was the case with Ebola in Africa and cholera in Haiti (Newspaper 2).

It was highlighted that social vulnerability and violence against women were not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic, but were also identified in other health crises.

DISCUSSION

Violence is a phenomenon based on unequal power relations, historically and socially established between men and women.¹⁴ At all times, women - children, adolescents, adults and older adults - are exposed to different types of infringements, regardless of social class, schooling, race-ethnicity and religion, also evidencing inequalities in the intersectionality of these belongings.

This is not a one-off coping phenomenon, but a problem that requires continuous investments both in times of normality and in exceptional situations. In Brazil, despite being serious, violence against women has never been a priority, and in recent years significant setbacks were verified in the agenda for advocating gender equality, which impacted - and still impact - negatively on the implementation of specific measures.¹⁵ In this scenario, it is considered that the pandemic has potentiated harmful social situations that already existed for women's lives and contributed to the aggravation of their social vulnerability.

The digital media reputed the apparent reduction in the records of violence against women to their silencing, as the communication channels, public transportation and formal support network began to operate on an exceptional basis, serving fewer people and, therefore, hindering access to these resources. This result is corroborated by a research study conducted in Nigeria that found more difficulties for women to access help in confronting violence during social isolation.¹⁶

The digital media also revealed narratives based on superficiality regarding the structural causes related to the phenomenon of violence against women, contributing to the naturalization and reproduction of gender inequities, spreading sexist patterns and perpetuating the view of the problem as inherent to the private and individual spheres, without any connection with the social scope that legitimizes such patterns.

Narratives that do not problematize issues related to violence against women and its genesis - including those given by political representatives - can produce meanings that legitimize reactionary ideologies that privilege the appreciation of the idealized nuclear family, gender inequalities, patriarchy and heteronormativity.¹⁷

In this research, when analyzed in the light of gender, the narratives were based on the reiteration of the idealized conceptions of home, associated with terms such as refuge, peace and happiness. In the social imaginary, these conceptions reproduce the idea of family as a space of absence of conflict, so that, when affected by domestic violence, they are pathologized and stagnated in a morbid state that prevents any and all transformation.

It is considered that the communication media are responsible for the elaboration of the collective imaginary, playing a formative role in relation to themes that configure the social phenomena. Thus, they can clarify or hide social problems through the hierarchization, approaches, conceptualizations and terminologies adopted, negatively affecting the formation of the social fabric.¹⁸

Data from a study based on 657 interviews, published between 2000 and 2015 by the *El País*, *El Mundo* and ABC newspapers, revealed that 68% of the publications addressed violence against women as the main theme and 32% as a secondary phenomenon, even with the agendas highlighting serious situations of physical and sexual violence and femicides.¹⁹

An important revelation of this research was that, for the women who were already experiencing situations of violence, the imminent risk of infection by COVID-19 became more terrifying than the infringements perpetrated inside the homes. However, another study points out that, for many women and children, cohabitation with the aggressor proved to be as dangerous as or even more dangerous than the pandemic.²⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic also aggravated women's economic dependence on their partners, unemployment and difficulty in accessing safe places. In addition to that, the economic instability triggered by the pandemic

allowed for the increase in the occurrence of intra-family conflicts.²¹

In general, conflicts are reflections of the gender stereotypes that underpin inequalities and condition men to the role of provider and women to the role of family caregiver, responsible for domestic activities and for the care of children and older adults, concentrating most of the activities of the private sphere.²² This continuous burden to which they are exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic can have physical and psychological consequences and reduce their ability to avoid conflicts with the aggressor, in addition to making them more vulnerable to psychological violence and sexual coercion.²³

It is also noteworthy that, in contexts of more social isolation, the women's social support network is limited, due to distancing from friends, neighbors and family members, which greatly restricts the possibility of finding help. This is aggravated by the difficulty in accessing the services of the network for confronting violence, due to the closure or restriction of care as a result of the pandemic.

Health, political, economic and humanitarian crises affect men and women differently. Although both are subjected to the same problems, the weight has been greater for women, due to the existing gender inequalities that have aggravated.

A study on the repercussion of disasters on intimate partner violence identified stressful factors that accentuate the prevalence and severity of the problem. Among them, the changes in relationships, in dealing with conflicts, in communication, and in the economic and housing situation stand out. In addition to that, the authors highlight the increased social vulnerability of women due to reduced access to the services and resources needed for recovery - in case of diseases - and to their role of primary caregivers that exposes them to more significant harms.²⁴

The results of this research also revealed that, during the pandemic, women continued to be the main individuals responsible for organizing private life to ensure family livelihood and organization. In the pandemic, housework and childcare, despite having no added economic value and little social recognition, proved to be even more fundamental for life maintenance. However, the condition of exploitation and oppression of women was evidenced, both in the private sphere of family relationships, and by the State, which does not provide enough support so that the triple workload overload does not exert a negative impact on women's living and health conditions.

The narratives about violence against women published by the digital media proved to be important sources of recognition and understanding of the Brazilian women's reality, facing gender violence at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the relevance of Simone de Beauvoir's quote regarding the current context - "*a political, economic or religious crisis is enough for women's rights to be questioned*"²⁵ -, it is perceived that the identification of the problematic situation of women in the pandemic can contribute to strengthening the feminist struggle for the guarantee of rights and gender equality.

Given the above, it is believed that the results of this study can support the development of public policies and support the implementation of Nursing care from a gender perspective to confront violence against women, not restricting it to the pandemic scenario.

For health professionals, such as those in Nursing, whose training lacks gender contents that make it possible to rethink the media communication about the phenomena of women's lives, studies like this can increase the critical ability of reality and favor care beyond the biological scope, as recommended in Collective Health Nursing. This conception understands women's health as a result of power relations between the genders, in the different dimensions of objective reality and in the intersection with the categories of social class, race-ethnicity and generation. This understanding changes the understanding of the content and way of caring, as well as the repercussions of care for women in situations of violence and for other family members, including the aggressors.

One of the study limitations is the brief data collection period, covering the first 45 days of social isolation in Brazil. However, this limitation does not invalidate the results, as the data were sufficient to support the analysis of the phenomenon of violence against women in the period of the highest isolation index recorded and the expressiveness of the theme in the digital media. In addition to that, in the months following data collection, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to accelerate in the country and the inequalities were intensified. It is also necessary to consider that, in addition to gender, other social insertions, such as generation (children, adolescents and older adults), race-ethnicity (Afro-descendants, indigenous people and gypsies, among others) and social class (poor, indigent and homeless populations), contribute to aggravating women's situation, as well as that of their children and dependents.

The research also contributed methodologically, as it enabled data triangulation and innovated by using media narratives, allowing for the approximation with what has been communicated and how the information contributes to the formation of collective social awareness, favorable or not to women's issues.

CONCLUSION

The digital media play an important social role by conveying information that can maintain, reinforce or weaken sexist discourses, mainly when disseminating news and comments related to violence against women, prevalent in society, and which had their frequency and intensity increased with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The narratives published addressed violence against women primarily as a phenomenon directly related to the pandemic and to the social distancing measures or to the consequences of the crisis. However, the historical reality of the phenomenon shows that this perspective is wrong, as violence against women did not originate in the pandemic, nor will it end with the interruption of the social distancing measures and with the improvement of the economic and health situation.

If the pandemic of violence against women does not have the visibility it should as a health problem, the current health crisis, in addition to increasing women's vulnerability, has redirected the focus of the health actions to COVID-19. However, the overlapping of the two pandemics – COVID-19 and violence against women – did not translate into increased attention to their confrontation because, when it comes to violence against women, such confrontation has been increasingly more fragmented, inefficient or even non-existent.

The results of this research promoted reflections on the importance of implementing services and public policies to prevent and confront violence against women and the need for equitable reorganization of domestic work and childcare. It is also urgent to provoke in the digital media the recognition of women's vulnerability to violence in the home environment, through a critical approach to the phenomenon in order to deconstruct current androcentric sexist patterns and to implement social transformation in favor of gender equality.

For Nursing, the reflections provided can strengthen the recognition of violence as socially determined, and are fundamental for the provision of responsible and emancipatory care, materializing the politics that are inherent to it.

Such politics is articulated with the purpose of emancipating populations with less decision-making power over their lives, as is often the case with women that experience situations of violence who, with the pandemic, had their quality of life even more impaired than in times prior to it.

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