

VIOLENCE AGAINST RURAL WOMEN IN RIO GRANDE DO SUL, BRAZIL: CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC POLICIES

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Abstract

A woman in Brazil suffers violence every 24 seconds, but there are women more vulnerable to violence such as rural women. 55.2% rural women revealed that they had experienced some type of domestic violence and almost 50% of them reported a lack of services for women who have been abused (Bagatini et. al., 2013 p.27). This qualitative research focuses on violence against rural women in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil and the challenges for public policies to guarantee their rights. The main objectives are: to identify the types of violence suffered by rural women; to describe their help seeking process, and to analyse if the safety network for women are able to meet their demands. The data was collected through interviews with representatives of women's rural movemen, coordinators of women's policies and rural women, and submitted to content analysis. The results demonstrate the invisibility of violence against women in rural areas, the lack of recognition of women's work; the lack of transportation to access the network of services when available. Furthermore, there is a need of actions to challenge the patriarchal culture as well as public policies directed to the promotion of women's autonomy. We conclude that rural women are more vulnerable to violence due to the lack of information about their rights and the economic dependency of their partners, as well as the more traditional gender roles. Some government initiatives is taking place such as the mobile units that will provide legal, social and psychological services to rural women.

Keywords: Violence against women; rural women; public policies.

Introduction

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon that crosses boundaries of race / ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion and countries. However, there are some groups that are more vulnerable than others and rural women have less access to public protection policies . The results of the 2010 Census indicate that 759 365 women lived in rural areas of Rio Grande do Sul, south of Brazil, accounting for 47.6 % of the rural population and 13.8 % of women compared to urban areas. According to National Survey by Household Sample Survey, conducted in 2009 by Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), about 7500 of these women aged 10 or older were victims of physical aggression. Survey conducted by the Confederation of Rural Workers (CONTAG) in 2008, revealed that rural women suffer domestic violence routinely. Education and engagement in social movements were not considered a protective factor. One factor evidenced by a study of CONTAG is that financial independence of women seems to be a relevant variable in the context of violence. Of those rural women interviewed , 81.5 % did not depend on her husband to survive , while

61.2 % said they were the householders. Another worrying factor is identified that among 529 women from various regions of the country, 55.2 % experienced some form of domestic and family violence. 27.6 % of these women have experienced death threats, 11.9 % , marital rape and 4.3 % false imprisonment and almost 50 % of women reported a lack of a institutional support network to women in situations of violence (Bagatini et . Al., 2013, p.27)

Given this reality , Ordinance No. 85 of August 10, 2010 , issued by the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women of the Presidency establishing Guidelines to Combat Violence against Women who lives in forests and rural areas was created, aimed at ensuring conditions for compliance the recommendations contained in international treaties in the area of violence against women. Through this Ordinance, is also planned to implement actions that deconstruct gender and sexist stereotypes, and change the perpetuating inequalities of power between men and women and gender violence patterns , in order to address the specificities of the field and forest. Moreover, it aims to create conditions for the implementation of the Maria da Penha Law in field and forest and to ensure access of women to justice and public safety system.

This document , by itself , shows that the government has been detected a vulnerability of this specific population. Within the reality of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), although data from the Bureau of Policy site for Women's RS show us that there are 16 police stations, 27 service centers and 21 Centers of Reference for Women, many municipalities, predominantly the rural ones in RS do not have this network of services. In order to access other services such as Reference Centers for Social Welfare (CRAS) and Specialized Centers for Social Welfare (CREAS), if any, is difficult due to the long distances. This led us to question to what extent the dignity of rural women can be maintained and how public policies and the social movements of peasant women have faced the issue of violence against this segment of the population.

Methods

The research investigation aims to identify the scope and effectiveness of the safety net in ensuring the physical integrity of women who live in rural areas in Rio Grande do Sul. Regarding the methodology, it was chosen a qualitative research, under the historical-structural perspective, whose theoretical categories are totality, contradiction and historicity. The procedures and data collection instruments were : a) application form with closed and open questions focusing on the socio- demographic characteristics of rural women , b) focus groups with rural women c) interviews with the coordinators of the Regional Working Women from Workers Federation of Agriculture (FETAG) d) Managers of the Reference Centers for Women, coordinators of the safety net for women e) representatives of peasant social movements, and e) mapping of network services offered in municipalities in Rio Grande do Sul of 9 Functional regions . For qualitative data, thematic content analysis of Bardin (1977) was used.

Municipalities which were considered reference in the network services provided for women in RS were selected, comprising 30 municipalities. These municipalities were chosen from a list provided by the Women's Policies Secretary in RS who recognized these municipalities for implementation of actions aimed at fighting violence against women, are in line with the policy of regionalization of the State and with the criteria established by the National Pact to Combat Violence against Women.

Public policies for women to fight the violence

Many actions have been made in order to minimize this global reality experienced by women who suffer violence, although we know we are far from eradicating it completely.

Dealing with public policies to assist women in situations of domestic violence, appears historically, and show us that there has always been a setback evidenced by a lack of concern for these situations. Since the 80s, it is observed in Brazil that State action was primarily restricted "to police protection and legal referral of cases aimed at punishing the aggressor and reparation to the victim" (Camargo; Aquino, 2003, p.12) .

A first step that can be seen in this period was the establishment of the Women Police Stations. The first one was created in São Paulo, in August 1985 , under pressure from the women's movement and the State Council for Women. Afterwards, other 152 were installed, and more than half of them in the State of São Paulo and the other mainly in the capital . This advance enabled greater visibility of violence against women which resulted in the increase of complaints, as well as its limits. Another significant advance from the 80s, was the creation of the Coordination of Women Policies in many municipal and state governments, national advertising campaigns discussing violence against women and the initiative to propose the creation of the Special Secretariat of Public Policies for Women (Camargo ; Aquino,2003) .

Among the various events held in the '90s stand out the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and the Convention of Belém do Pará - Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (1994) , which directly addressed the issue of sexual violence, gender violence and all forms of discrimination against women, including the promotion of their autonomy and rights (Moreira, 2002) .

In January 2003, the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women (SPM) of the Brazilian Presidency was established. Aquino and Camargo (2003) explained that it had the status of Ministry, as a government reference for establishing and implementing policies and articulations directed to gender equality in the federal government, highlighting the commitment to the Programme of Prevention, Assistance and Combating Violence against Woman. In 2004 , based on the guidelines set out in the First National Conference on Policies for Women, the National Plan of Policies for Women proposed that promoting gender equality was established, with the highlight to the issue of coping domestic violence against women. In 2007, the Second National Plan of Policies for Women was created where six new strategic areas of intervention were included.

Another advance that was observed in the legislative field was the creation of a Domestic Violence Act which was the Law 11,340 of August 7, 2006 , titled as the Maria da Penha Law, in force since 22 September 2006. As a result, Special Courts on Domestic and Family Violence were created, with civil and criminal jurisdiction. Thus, the complaint will trigger both civil and criminal action, and the Court will adopt legal measures to put an end to violence: the withdrawal of the offender 's home; prevent him from approaching the house or any communication with the family, or to follow his wife and children, and other protective measures. This legislation, however, could not protect widely a woman in Brazil, especially women who live and work outside the urban area and has very limited access to police stations. It should be stressed that in Rio Grande do Sul, the women's police stations are limited by lack of financial resources, and lack of trained personnel to meet and accompaniments the victims. .

For Daron (2012) , to address violence against women in the field and forest is a vindication of women's movements and organizations and has been part of the political agenda of the Secretariat of Policies for Women of the Presidency, through studies, the creation of Dial 180, a national women's help line, the National Forum to Combat Violence against Women in the Field and Forest, "Women owners of their lives" campaign, the Pact to Combat Violence and instruments for the implementation of the Maria da Penha Law. However, much remains to be done for women who live in rural environment and forests to have the fullness of their rights guaranteed .

The Rio Grande do Sul was the last state in Brazil to sign the National Pact to Combat Violence against Women in 2011 . This Pact provides resources for investing in actions to combat violence to be implemented by various ministries and special departments under the coordination of the Secretariat of Policies for Women. In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, it also emphasizes the State Plan for Public Policies for Women, entitled "RS Woman", released in October 2008 as a result of the III Conference of State Public Policies for Women. Another important step to guarantee the rights of women in RS was the creation of the Secretariat of Policies for Women by Law 13.601 , of January 1, 2011. The Secretariat of Policies for Women created a network of services called "Rede Lilás". One of the great challenges is the expansion of specialized services for rural women due to insufficient network of services in rural areas, which make it difficult for women to report incidents of violence suffered by them, among other factors that will be addressed in this article. Another guideline of the Secretariat for Women in RS is the promotion of a culture of peace by creating measures to promote gender equality in all spheres.

The multiple expressions of violence against rural woman

From the 90s, the first shelters were implemented in Brazil due to efforts of the women's movement and supported by the demands of the Women's police stations since women often get more punished by their batterers after pressing charges against them (Camargo ; Aquino, 2003). In Rio Grande do Sul there are 497 cities and only 12 women's shelters, with an average capacity for 10 women and their dependent children under 12 years. The difficulty of access to women living in rural and other isolated areas of such equipment, and the lack of information and proper recognition of the situation of violence was evidenced in our research narratives as follows:

" [...] a woman who will have to walk sixty , eighty, two hundred kilometers , to press charges against the abuser. She often quits due to this lack of available network ... in general, for the women who live in rural areas, there is no place near by to report it , and she is afraid to get into the police station by herself [...]" (Leader of Rural Movement) .

" To begin, rural women have a great difficulty to end their relationships . One of these women's greater demands, according to reports from a women's conference is to bring information to rural areas concerning women's rights, knowledge about the law and the service network. (Coordinator of Policies for Women) .

"I think the biggest difficulty for a woman is to recognize that she suffers violence. And then when you look at violence, it seems that it is only when someone gives you a punch , a push , a slap , and do not recognize all other violence; not allowed to leave the home , to study, to think, to decide, to say one's word (...) (Leader of Rural Movement) .

Recent study by Costa (2012) in 08 municipalities in the RS focusing on violence against rural women in professional practices in local health and public agendas in relation to confronting this violence , concluded that violence against women in the rural setting is considered a "destiny" . In the narratives of professionals and health managers, a rural woman is seen from the perspective of "subordination" and "obedience" with the sole responsibility for biological reproduction, household chores and farming. In the political sphere, the weakness of the management of policies and resources attest to the unpreparedness of the municipalities to conduct the management process guided the guidelines and principles of the national health system and the lack of local agenda directed to violence against rural women and unaccountability and lack of commitment of local management to fight against this phenomenon that affects women's health. According to Sagot (2007, p.31), in some communities, especially rural ones, "for reasons of isolation and culture, the abusers have

more facility to deprive women of freedom or separate them from family or social group in which they could find some kind of support. " One of the strategies of managers is the outreach and to provide transportation to enable women's access to the service.

" I believe they have difficult access , so in that sense , what we do? We go to the countryside. It is a different approach that we have with urban women when you just make one phone call and you have three hundred and eighty women as we have here in the last meeting. In rural areas, you need to provide transportation for these women so that women could be able to participate in the activities, even in rural areas, some live within thirty miles of the places where we gather [...] (Coordinator of the Reference Center the woman) .

Another factor related to non-reporting violence is the very naturalization of violence. Despite the wide dissemination and the efforts to implement some policies to curb different types of violence, women living in rural areas (farmers) are still part of a group of victims who are not even on national statistics. This may be due to the fact that the woman's rural environment is embedded in a context of anonymity and invisibility, without information and access to support networks. Still Lorenzoni (2007) states that the peculiarity of family life, culture and working class (and in this case) in the rural setting are very rarely cited as well as their needs in everyday life, and their problems. Only when women's organizations such as FETAG and CONTAG and other associations of rural women go to media to call attention for their issues, their problems get public attention. Every year they march, with thousands of women, and go to parliament to demand public policies to address their needs related to land, income, safety, labour, and so on. The issue of violence against rural women is a recurrent one from the agenda's movement and reaffirm the importance of publicizing the phenomenon.

" I think that there are more complaints of violence against women because before Maria da Penha Law, it was much more veiled, but it's so hard to tell if violence has increased. The numbers indicate that it has increased the number of violence reports driven by Maria Da Penha Law. Women press more charges against their aggressors because they know they will be punished. However, many women do not always want that their husbands get arrested . Often, they press charges only to scare them in order to make them stop with the violence [...]"
(Leader of Rural Movement) .

Besides domestic violence , there is the presence of institutional violence. This can be exemplified when rural women end up pressing charges at the police station, and are often questioned about why they suffered aggression, as the interviewee 's research reveals " if you 're so bruised something you did". Unfortunately, this victim-blaming approach is still present during the women's process of seeking help, reinforced by a patriarchal culture. This institutional violence is revealed in the application or omission in the management and implementation of public policies, where institutions reproduce relations of power, authority and domination. This violence is reproduced in public and private institutions, with a political assault on macro level (Minayo , 2004). Materializes in the daily lives of rural women, subjects in our study , which also constitute the working class , and that somehow , are subjected to gender bias or discrimination in accessing their rights, especially access to institutions that should protect them.

Conclusion

Education for peace involves issues related to democracy, which is a necessary requirement for the exercise of human rights, for the full development of social justice, and for the prevention of any kind of abuse such as gender violence. All these elements can be achieved through a dynamic process that requires participation, positive attitude towards all beings, awareness of reality, and denouncement of injustice. (Tuvilla of Rayo, 2004; Jares,

2002; Guimarães, 2003, 2005). These are great challenges for women who live in rural areas, isolated from social support networks and immersed in a patriarchal culture that perpetuates gender inequality. To promote culture of peace we need to make efforts to empower these women to have control over their lives by taking information to them access to their rights.

As defined by the United Nations, the culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent it by tackling the root causes to solve the problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace).

According to Unesco (2001), for peace and non-violence to prevail, we need to ensure equality between all men and women through full participation of women in economic, social and political decision-making, and we must eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women as shown in this study. Whenever violence dominates, there is no possibility to ensure human rights; at the same time, without human rights in all their dimensions, there can be no culture of peace.

Among the factors identified in our research that contribute to the invisibility of violence against rural women are fear, economic dependence on the abuser, and distance between their residences and the network of services for the execution of the complaint, lack of family support and lack of public policies, as stated one of the interviewees "*the law itself (Maria da Penha Law) is a very big breakthrough, but she does not become effective if there are no public policies for women, when there is no structure of services*" (Peasant Leader) . In addition to these factors , we share the position of Daron (2012) that to confront violence against women in the rural areas, we have to face the oppressive patriarchal culture that is intertwined with capitalism and the violence that is reflected in the labor exploitation of women's work, the sexual division of labor and discrimination in all public and private spheres. Only thus can we envision the possibility of living in a society based on justice, dignity, gender equity and culture of peace. This also implies breaking with patriarchal and patrimonial culture of public policies.

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