

What do we know about interventions with perpetrators of domestic and family violence?

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Abstract: *Internationally, there has been a growing understanding that to prevent gender-based violence it is necessary to work with and involve men. After the promulgation of Law 11340 of 2006, which brought legal provision for interventions with the perpetrators of domestic and family violence in Brazil, academic debate has advanced significantly. However, the topic needs to be critically reviewed, in order to articulate the national studies. Given this framework, the purpose of this article is to analyze national academic production on the subject from the specialized literature and national reports. The results suggest the possibility of transformations in relationships; however, it brings to light weaknesses in the structure of the policies to combat violence.*

Keywords: *Gender violence; Domestic and family violence; Maria da Penha Law; Perpetrators of violence; Public policies.*

Domestic and family violence is not a new phenomenon in Brazilian reality, although the manner in which it has been combated has undergone changes over the years. Despite major advances, from the drafting of a bill by feminist organizations and its subsequent enactment in 2006, and the expansion of studies on the theme, rates of violence continue at alarming levels in Brazil (Miriam GROSSI; Luzinete MINELLA; Juliana LOSSO, 2006; Carmen CAMPOS, 2015; Wânia PASINATO, 2015; Cecília SOARES; Hebe GONÇALVES, 2017). Internationally, there has been a growing understanding that in order to prevent gender violence, men need to be worked on and involved. This is mainly because, in the majority of cases, men are committing this violence, constructions of masculinity play a vital role in its forms, and men also have a lot to gain in its reduction, both through healthier relationships and a greater freedom regarding the “dominant definitions of masculinity” (Michael FLOOD, 2011; Álvaro ANTEZANA, 2012). In this sense, we will only manage to prevent violence if we change attitudes, identities and relations that encourage violence, since violent relational language does not change until we alter the perception of those involved (Heleieth SAFFIOTI, 2004; Barbara SOARES, 2012; FLOOD, 2011).

In Brazil, the Maria da Penha Law provides for the possibility of developing interventions for the perpetrators of violence in its articles 35 and 45, including “centers of education and rehabilitation for offenders” and “recovery and reeducation programs” (BRAZIL, 2006), respectively. These interventions have proven to be actions that, in tandem with those geared towards women, can stimulate greater gender equality and represent new opportunities in combating domestic and family violence (Maria TONELI, 2007; Daniel LIMA; Fátima BÚCHELLE, 2011). More than a decade has

passed since the creation of the Maria da Penha Law; nevertheless, its implementation is still fragile, making further debate, studies, actions and concrete interventions necessary. This includes improving the articulation of research, guidelines and methodologies (TONELI; Adriano BEIRAS; Juliana RIED, 2017).

In light of this, the proposal of this article is to enhance knowledge about Brazilian interventions involving the perpetrators of domestic and family violence based on the analysis and systematization of national academic production on the theme. To develop the proposed study, the database used was the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations of the Brazilian Institute of Information in Science and Technology (IBICT), as it has the largest nationwide archive of theses and dissertations. Searches were carried out in three stages, using three key expressions: “PERPETRATOR OF VIOLENCE” (all fields), “MASCULINITY” (all fields) and “VIOLENCE” (all fields), “DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE” (all fields), and related records. The selection criteria included: a) spatial delimitation: Theses and Dissertations (T+Ds) coming from Brazilian Graduate Programs; b) temporal delimitation: defended between 2006 and 2016, bearing in mind the marker of the Maria da Penha Law; c) thematic delimitation: empirical research focused on Brazilian interventions with the perpetrators of domestic and family violence. The first stage of text selection consisted in the reading of abstracts; the second involved skim reading the texts (Laurence BARDIN, 1977), in which it was possible to identify a further two theses and dissertations of interests referenced in the bibliography of texts read; the third covered the classification and definition of the definitive corpus¹ of analysis, which comprised five theses and twelve dissertations, separately referenced in the bibliography.

The systematization and analysis of texts followed the steps proposed by Bardin (1977). To this end, the information tool Nvivo was used, enabling the enhancement of content analysis through codification, indexation and organization of qualitative materials. These materials were analyzed based on the specialized literature in the area and national reports on the theme – “Mapping of Services report dealing with male perpetrators of violence against women in the Brazilian context”, published in 2014 by the Noos Institute, and “Violence against women: services that hold male perpetrators of violence accountable”, carried out by CEPIA and published in 2016. In this manner, we seek to facilitate advances in the pooling of information and contribute to the debate around the combating of domestic and family violence.

The article is divided into three parts apart from this introduction and the final considerations. We begin with a brief summary of international and national experiences involving interventions with the perpetrators of domestic and family violence, and we analyze the advances and disputes generated by the Maria da Penha Law and, finally, we systematize and review the national academic production on the theme.

Brief summary of international and national experiences

The first program of intervention dealing with male perpetrators of violence (Emerge) was created in Boston, in the United States, in 1977, based on the movements of women against gender violence and the first support services for women (ANTEZANA, 2012; Heinrich GELDSCHLÄGER, Oriol GINÉS, Álvaro PONCE, 2011). In the following years, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project – DAIP was launched in Duluth, Minnesota. “An intervention model for male offenders, whose objective was to improve the safety of victims and highlight the accountability of the men, since the program was developed along with the judicial system” (ANTEZANA, 2012, p. 10). This model became a worldwide reference for this type of intervention.

At the start of the 1980s these programs expanded to Canada (BEIRAS, 2009). The pioneering programs in Spain began in the late 80s (GELDSCHLÄGER, GINÉS, PONCE, 2011). In the 1990s, they started to be replicated in other European countries. In Latin America, Argentina was the first, followed by Mexico (BEIRAS, 2009). Nowadays, there are already consolidated initiatives in Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Nicaragua and Honduras (TONELI; BEIRAS; RIED, 2017).

Research on the international scene indicates a number of different programs and approaches (ANTEZANA, 2012; TONELI *et al.*, 2010; FLOOD, 2011). Precursor interventions in Brazil began to be implemented in the 1990s. One of them is the São Paulo non-governmental organization, *PRÓ-Mulher, Família e Cidadania* (PRO-Woman, Family and Civic Awareness) which provided family mediation in cases heard within the ambit of Law 9099/95, and in 1993 it created reflective groups with women in situations of violence, the men involved in the complaints (Susana MUSZKAT, 2006; LIMA; BÜCHELE, 2011; CEPIA, 2016), and the Noos Institute, which did not have any remit covering domestic violence initially, but rather with the discourse of men in therapy (Fernando ACOSTA; Alan BRONZ, 2014), which led to groups that focused on questions of masculinity. The methodology of the Noos Institute was constructed from gender groups held with men from different contexts, age brackets, ethnic groups and social levels in the city of Rio de Janeiro, “among them: boys and former street kids, students from the public and private systems, military police, residents, leaders and social workers from

¹ Set of documents to undergo analysis (BARDIN, 1977).

underprivileged communities, university students, high level professionals and perpetrators of domestic and gender violence" (ACOSTA; Leandro ANDRADE FILHO; BRONZ, 2004, p. 12). At the end of the 1990s, this methodology began to be used with perpetrators of domestic and family violence on a project involving the Department of Public Security for Rio de Janeiro State.

Other pioneering actions were NAFVD – *Núcleo de Atendimento à Família e aos Autores de Violência Doméstica* (Center for the Assistance of the Family and Perpetrators of Domestic Violence) created in 2003, in *Distrito Federal*; the *Programa de Prevenção e Combate à Violência Doméstica e Intrafamiliar* (Program for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic and Family Violence - PPVCDI), the City Council of Blumenau-SC, which began interventions with men in 2004, and the Albam Institute, an NGO from Belo Horizonte which began its interventions in 2005 (Luiz AGUIAR, 2009; BEIRAS, 2014). In the post Maria da Penha Law context, the first service created in accordance with its articles 35 and 45 was the *Serviço de Educação e Responsabilização para Homens autores de violência contra mulher* (Service for the Education and Accountability of Male Perpetrators of Violence against Women - SERH) (ACOSTA; BRONZ, 2014).

The "Mapping of Services report dealing with male perpetrators of violence against women in the Brazilian context", published in 2014 by the Noos Institute, was aimed at exploring and describing the experiences of services dealing with male perpetrators of violence against women in Brazil. At the time, 25 programs were found in different Brazilian states, and more detailed information was obtained for 19 of them (BEIRAS, 2014).

The Research Report, "Violence against women: services that hold male perpetrators of violence accountable", carried out by CEPIA and published in 2016, concentrated on mapping existing services in the Brazilian capitals. Of the 27² capitals, only 10 had any type of initiative aimed at the perpetrators of violence: Belém, Belo Horizonte, Distrito Federal, Natal, Porto Alegre, Porto Velho, Rio de Janeiro, São Luís, São Paulo and Vitória (CEPIA, 2016).

Cross-referencing information from these two reports with the theses and dissertations on the theme, it can be seen that the number of interventions has grown; however, it is still an inchoate practice in Brazil (BEIRAS, 2014; CEPIA, 2016). At least 30 Brazilian cities have already implemented some interventions with perpetrators of domestic and family violence. No activity was reported in other Brazilian states apart from Amapá, Goiás, Mato Grosso, Paraíba and Roraima. None of them carries out in-depth studies of the experiences. As such, we systematize and analyze, from different angles, the Brazilian theses and dissertations on the theme and compare the information gathered from mapping. We will begin with an analysis of the advances and disputes generated by the Maria da Penha Law before concentrating on the systematization and discussion of some results in the theses and dissertations.

Advances and disputes generated by the Maria da Penha Law: seeking dialogue

Among the interventions studied in the theses and dissertations, seven (PMFC – *Pró-Mulher, Família e Cidadania* (Pro-Woman, Family and Civic Awareness), São Paulo/SP; Instituto Noos, Rio de Janeiro/RJ; Movimento de Mulheres de São Gonçalo (CEOM), São Gonçalo/RJ; NAFVD – *Núcleo de Atendimento à Família e aos Autores de Violência Doméstica* (Center for the Assistance of the Family and Perpetrators of Domestic Violence) Paranoá and Samambaia/DF; *Programa de Prevenção e Atenção à Violência Doméstica e Familiar* (Domestic and Family Violence Prevention and Care Program), SC; Reflexive Thematic Groups on domestic and family violence – Albam Institute, Belo Horizonte/MG; and the research-action in the Judicial Branch of Porto Alegre/RS) began before the passing of the Maria da Penha Law. Under the auspices of Law 9.099/95, tools such conciliation and the conditional suspension of proceedings/probation were used as a form of including and engaging perpetrators of violence. A feature of the São Gonçalo/RJ group was the use of conciliation, and the Paranoá/DF group employed the conditional suspension of criminal proceedings approach. The policy of the São Gonçalo Special Criminal Court was to

[...] send all the men and women involved in cases of conjugal violence to reflective gender groups. The women, as victims, are invited to participate in a women's group, without obligation. Both the accused and the victim must agree, in the conciliation, to the participation of the man in the reflective group as an alternative measure; otherwise, if one of the parties does not agree, the case is sent to the judge, who will set a new hearing. The judge will also send the accused to the reflective group, but now as an alternative penalty, in addition to setting other types of punishment (Cristiane MARQUES, 2007, p. 59).

² In three capitals, Palmas, Maceió and Salvador, partnership experiences with universities were identified, but as they were extension projects and weren't closely related to the SPM Technical Norm, they were not computed in the framework. There were no return calls from three capitals: Cuiabá, Curitiba and Florianópolis, and in the case of Manaus it was not possible to confirm if the service continued active. In Rio Branco, Fortaleza and Recife, the existing projects were closed (CEPIA, 2016, p. 15).

Besides these, the Reflective Group, based in the Feminist Sexuality and Health Collective, created in 2009, after the installation of the 1st Domestic and Family Violence Court in São Paulo, employed the conditional suspension of proceedings as a form of processing. On February 9, 2012, after the decision on Direct Action for the Declaration of Unconstitutionality 4424, in which the Supreme Federal Court (STF) decided unanimously that the Maria da Penha Law does not apply to any of the doctrines removing a penalization under Law 9.099/95 (Civil and Criminal Special Courts Law), such as conciliation, plea bargain and conditional suspension of criminal proceedings (CAMPOS, 2015; Raíssa NOTHAFT, 2012), this group changed its terms of engagement. Given the impossibility of employing the probationary option, the judge from the 1st Domestic and Family Violence Court began to send male offenders awaiting judgment who fit the first-time profile and were accused of crimes considered "minor" (threat and bodily injury, for the most part), voluntarily. However,

[...] despite not being compulsory, participation in the reflexive group has been accepted by almost 100% of the men, both because they were unaware it was not obligatory and due to the fact they hoped participation would be considered a "mitigating factor", in the judgment of their cases (Paula PRATES, 2013, p. 266).

According to the CEPIA 2016 Report, the invitation to participate in the Feminist Collective groups is currently made during a general hearing held every two months, in which approximately 40 or 50 who have been charged by the Public Prosecution Office are invited. The public defender is responsible for clarifying that participation is optional. The Report claims that in this format "adhesion is usually low and the decision of the men is guided more by the convenience of days and times than the opportunities being offered" (CEPIA, 2016, p. 44).

The decision of the Supreme Federal Court in 2012 "finalized an arduous debate on the constitutionality of the law, particularly on the application of criminal law exclusively to women and the non-application of the rules of procedure as per law 9.099/1995" (CAMPOS, 2015, p. 528). However, the groups from Paranoá-DF and Rio de Janeiro continued to apply these rules (Concepcion PAZO, 2013; Anita MONTEIRO, 2014). At the same time as the Public Prosecutor from *Distrito Federal* argued for the utilization of suspension, based on the notion of protecting the victim, a Judge from the District of Rio de Janeiro applies the rules of procedure regardless of the referral to the Reflective Group (PAZO, 2013), and states that:

[...] as we applied the Law and observed the position of the women, the couple, and the accused, we began to notice that in applying the Law in a rigid manner, we often finished up being unfair. Flexibility then entered into it [...] our main segment is the guy who explodes. By applying the law in this way, we end up producing an injustice. In practice, there is little difference in relation to 9.099 [...] (Judge from the Domestic and Family Violence Court. Interview on February 25, 2011) (PAZO, 2013, p. 41-42).

The question is problematic, as Campos explains (2015): "the conditional suspension of criminal proceedings under Law 9.099/95 aims to benefit the perpetrator and not the victim, since this is the logic of the legislation" (p. 528). As per article 89 of this Law, conditional suspension aims to avoid proceedings in crimes whose minimum sentence does not exceed 1 year, when the accused is not being prosecuted and has not been convicted of another crime. The proposal for suspension may be accepted or rejected by the perpetrator, regardless of the victim's wishes and does not imply confession, recognition of guilt or responsibility. In this sense, while this rule of procedure can be used to combat violence through referral to interventions for perpetrators of violence, it can be employed as a means of challenging the Law, as in the case described above by Pazo.

The Special Criminal Courts, established by Law 9.099,

[...] enabled for violence against women to made public, since this was the main demand presented therein. However, its inability to resolve the violence led to an elevated number of conciliations held in the context of pressure or coercion of the women, producing agreements centered on the payment of fines and basic food baskets by the men. If on the one hand the Special Criminal Courts were a space for the public formalization of violence against women, on the other, the form in which they "resolved" the cases presented, constituted an instrument to legitimize and trivialize violence and disqualify the violence reported by the women, seeing as it did not consider the complexity of the phenomenon and did not ensure the safety of the women (BRAZIL, 2016, p. 14).

This Law was an important starting point for the organization of interventions with perpetrators of violence. They take place in venues in which the legal profession questioned the appropriateness of monetary penalties and basic food baskets in cases of gender violence (CEPIA, 2016). However, at the same time that access to justice expanded, the report highlighted the unpreparedness of many legal professionals when dealing with domestic and family violence, shown in the large number of coerced conciliations and disqualification of victims during processes (SOARES, 2004).

The struggles of the feminist and women's movements to create the Maria da Penha Law happened due to these delegitimizing approaches to domestic and family violence. As such, even

though the text of the Law ensures the creation of interventions, they were not necessarily conceived in alignment with existing methodologies. According to Acosta and Bronz (2014), “there is at least one discrepancy: the group of people who formulated the laws define the work as one more form of punishment” (p. 144). The first interventions in Brazil were developed independently of the feminist movements or with limited dialogue; nevertheless, there is a need for those responsible for the development of existing interventions and those behind the formulation of the Maria da Penha Law to establish a frank dialogue in terms of aligning their expectations (ACOSTA; BRONZ, 2014).

Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the provision of two models of interventions with perpetrators of violence in the Law: article 35 provides for centers of education and rehabilitation; meanwhile, article 45, which changes the Execution of Sentences Law, stipulates that “in cases of domestic violence against women, the judge can determine the mandatory attendance of the perpetrator at recovery and reeducation programs” (BRAZIL, 2006). Not only are objectives such as education, rehabilitation, recovery and reeducation distinct, thereby being able to cover programs for diverse groups, but some of these expressions are controversial. There is relevant criticism regarding the assumptions that ground these objectives. For example, behind the prefix “re” in “rehabilitation”, “reeducation” and “recovery”, is the idea that there was once a time when men related to women on an equal footing. Considering the history of Brazil, it is not possible to identify the existence of this point, since, as Leandro Andrade (2014) states, “gender inequality appears in all phases of socialization, both primary and secondary, and therefore needs to be known and deconstructed, and go through a process of education, and not rehabilitation and recovery” (p. 184). If we accept that this gender inequality foments violence, it is not possible to return - based on rehabilitation, reeducation and recovery - to a state that never existed.

The lack of a legal definition to commit perpetrators of violence to these initiatives produced a range of models in the organization of efforts. In 2008, with the publication by the *Secretaria de Políticas Para as Mulheres* – (Department of Policies for Women - SPM) – of “General Recommendations and Guidelines from the Federal Government’s Department of Policies for Women on the implementation of services in the accountability and education of perpetrators of violence”, that situation should have been overcome (CEPIA, 2016). This document “constituted the result of discussions held by different Ministries and representatives from civil society in the workshop ‘Discussing Education and Rehabilitation Centers for the Perpetrator’, held in Rio de Janeiro in July 2008” (BRAZIL, 2008, p. 1). According to this proposal,

[...] The Services in the Accountability and Education of Perpetrators of Violence are responsible for monitoring the sentences and decisions handed down by the appropriate court to offenders, as per Law 11.340/2006 and Execution of Sentences Law (BRASIL, 2008, p. 1).

In other words, the guidelines reinforced the model as per article 45 of the Law, based on the argument that ‘center’, from article 35, brought with it the idea of a space for ‘assistance’ similar to the Women’s Centers of Reference and the Social Assistance Centers of Reference.

Among the interventions studied, the Reflective Group from the Feminist Sexuality and Health Collective is one of the few in Brazil expressly conceived according to the guidelines (Tales MISTURA, 2015; PRATES, 2013). Thirteen of the seventeen theses and dissertations postdated the drafting of the document, with only six of them making reference to these guidelines, not surprisingly the four theses and dissertations (PRATES, 2013; MISTURA, 2015; Isabela OLIVEIRA, 2016; Jan BILLAND, 2016) which study the reflective group organized by the São Paulo Feminist Collective and the thesis that compared the four interventions. Despite not specifying all the necessary points, the recommendations and guidelines include relevant discussions from the feminist social and women’s movements that must at least be made known to those who intend to research and structure interventions with the perpetrators of domestic and family violence. 2016 saw the launch of the Management Manual for Criminal Alternatives: urgent protective measures and other services in the accountability and education of perpetrators of violence against women”, product of a Specialized National Consultancy for Formulating a Management Model for Criminal Alternatives, bill BRA/011/2014 – Strengthening Brazilian Prison System Management, a partnership between the National Penitentiary Department and the United Nations Program for Development. This document presents:

[...] the mapping of the actors, work processes, description of procedures, social protection and referral to support networks specialized in drugs and alcohol, social assistance and professionalization, flowcharts and description of routines, defining a management model for urgent protective measures and other actions in the accountability and education of perpetrators of violence against women in Brazil, considering the ongoing good practices, such as Reflexive Groups based on the initiative of institutions specialized in gender, with emphasis on the accountability of men and rupture with cycles of violence (BRAZIL, 2016, p. 7-8).

Starting with the 2008 Guidelines, this document may be considered an advance in terms of the systematization of interventions in relation to article 45 of the Law, since it aims to consolidate a management model to be implemented through the services for executing criminal alternatives, in

discussing a methodology that enables the National Penitentiary Department and the “states and municipalities to foster the implantation, management and monitoring of protective measures and other services for the accountability of male offenders, as per the Maria da Penha Law” (BRASIL, 2016, p. 8). In addition, this manual makes substantial advances in terms of methodological and political alignment for services aimed at the perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Due to the temporal criteria used in the choice of the theses and dissertations analyzed (2006-2016), none of them utilized this material as a reference. Based on this discussion, we carried out the systematization and discussion of national academic production using the mapped theses and dissertations.

Systematization of national academic production

Without claiming to be exhaustive, we sought to systematize some of the findings from the analyzed work. We noted a concentration of studies in interventions from the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis, those being the first cities in Brazil where there were initiatives and the theoretical debate on interventions was centered. Two dissertations focused on different interventions: the text by Welliton Maciel (2014), which is geared towards the mechanisms of electronic surveillance used as a form of ensuring the performance of protective measures, along with the obligation to attend reflective groups for male perpetrators of domestic violence against women in Belo Horizonte. And the text by Edélvio Leandro (2009), which studies the perpetrators of violence referred to the *Centro de Atenção Psicossocial – Álcool e outras Drogas* (Center for Psycho-social Care - Alcohol and other Drugs - CAPS AD), bearing in mind the absence of another policy in Recife. In his research, he shows the “misrepresentation” of the demand for intervention, since in the medical-psychiatric approach the perpetrators of violence are described as “the sick, the drunken”. As such,

[...] those prosecuted by the Justice system for assaulting their companions, and named as offenders, are tacitly perpetuated in the condition of “victims”, held unaccountable due to their chemical dependence. The meanings produced on gender violence in these spaces revolve around the dependent-victim axis perpetuate the categories of oppositional thinking and the everyday institutional practices that support the maintenance of the sexist order of gender (LEANDRO, 2009, p. 10).

In this manner, there occurs what Soares (2004) calls the pathologization of violence, releasing them of any responsibility. As the studies present different methodologies, focusing either on the discourses of the perpetrators of violence, or on the discourses of the professionals involved, or on both together, we will divide this session that summarizes and briefly discusses the results of national academic production on the theme in four parts: Discourses of the perpetrators of violence; Perspectives of interventions; Difficulties in implementation, and Theoretical-methodological challenges.

Discourses of the perpetrators of violence

From the texts that utilized interviews with the perpetrators of violence and observations from reflective groups, certain recurring participant discourses stood out. Among them were:

1) The idea that the Maria da Penha Law is unjust, “a gift for women” (AGUIAR, 2009; MARQUES, 2007; MISTURA, 2015; PAZO, 2013; PRATES, 2013; OLIVEIRA, 2016).

2) The difficulty in recognizing their act as violence or minimizing it (MARQUES, 2007; AGUIAR, 2009; PAZO, 2013; PRATES, 2013; MISTURA, 2015; BILLAND, 2016).

3) The problem in recognizing as violence acts that differed from extreme physical aggression (Gustavo WINCK, 2007; MISTURA, 2015). In this sense, psychological violence was far from being accepted as violence.

4) The attempt to justify violence, often accompanied by the disqualification of the women’s claims (MUSZKAT, 2006; PRATES, 2013; MACIEL, 2014; OLIVEIRA, 2016). As such, the participants:

[...] described the women using stereotypical and traditional ideas, such as “of ill repute”, and having “feminine ruses”. From this masculine perspective, feminine fragility is used to the benefit of the women, being one of their forms of exercising their power over men, with the complaint one of its manifestations. In this sense, what we see is that, on the one hand, the men seek to disqualify the women and, on the other, they are compelled to recognize the power they hold. This is because the men think the discourse of the women represents power, taken here to mean in the Foucauldian sense of the term (PRATES, 2013, p. 259).

However, during the course of the reflective groups, some participants revisited these initial stances. Among these discourses, the most complex remained the recognition of violence. According to Marco Martínez-Moreno (2017), “they did not deny the assault, despite stating that they did not commit a violent act” (p. 190-191). They consider their acts as justifiable errors in the face of their companions’ actions (BILLAND, 2016). The CEPIA report (2016) confirms these perceptions, describing how the men are very resistant when they attend the groups and are unfamiliar with the Maria Penha

Law. Most of them do not know why it exists and feel hard done by, not recognizing that they committed a crime. In this sense, the report highlights the importance of the interventions in clarifying the legal and procedural aspects of the situation experienced by these men, since the unsatisfactory treatment of legal questions

[...] (such as the severity of the crime committed, the existence of prior convictions, the recurring violence contained in the complaints made by the women, the consistent patterns of violent behavior against women, to cite some examples) may contribute to the men not appreciating the opportunity for reflection and change that the group offers, hindering their intimate processes of transformation in relation to affective and social relations in general (CEPIA, 2016, p. 55).

When these aspects are not worked on, the feeling of anguish, injustice and uncertainty about the future persists. The Noos Institute methodology also highlights the importance of fully explaining the objectives and workings of the group, in the initial meetings “since our experience has shown that the men referred by the JVDs are unaware of the proposal. In this case, it is also important to differentiate it from the function of justice” (BEIRAS; BRONZ, 2016, p. 35) because, as the perpetrators stress, the inadvertent association between both may compromise the work.

Perspectives from the interventions

In research that focused on the considerations of participants as a form of group evaluation, it was noted that:

1) Participants notice improvements in their family relationships (WINCK, 2007; AGUIAR, 2009; ACOSTA; BRONZ, 2014; MISTURA, 2015).

2) They requested the inclusion of their families, particularly their companions, in similar services (AGUIAR, 2009; Anne SILVA, 2016).

3) Groups are seen as a learning space (WINCK, 2007; AGUIAR, 2009; PRATES, 2013; OLIVEIRA, 2016; SILVA, 2016). Prates (2013) ties the advance of the reflexive group to the facilitators' work strategy,

[...] which adopted the “cathartic” process of participants, thereby creating conditions for seeking a re-signification of the group's meaning, that is, changing from the idea of punishment to one of opportunity, a notion that was gradually incorporated by the majority of the men (p. 261).

As such, the interventions are viewed as a possibility for the construction of new forms of resolving conflicts, noticing/controlling their own aggression (AGUIAR, 2009; PAZO, 2013; Milena SANTOS, 2012; MISTURA; ANDRADE, 2017). The reflective groups are seen as spaces for interlocution and expansion of meanings and senses on conjugal relations, violence and the possibility of being a man nowadays (MISTURA; ANDRADE, 2017). In the exchange of experiences between men, listening is encouraged as a non-violent manner of conflict resolution (SANTOS, 2012).

Difficulties in implementation (or policies)

1) Lack of financial resources (SANTOS, 2012). The majority of non-governmental organizations that offer such services do not have the finances to structure programs and maintain a professional team (BEIRAS, 2017). Along these lines, the Ministry of Justice published Ordinance 216, of May 27th, 2011 by the National Penitentiary Department/DEPEN establishing “procedures, criteria and priorities for the granting of financing for projects relating to the application and execution of Criminal Alternatives with resources from the National Penitentiary Fund” (BRASIL, 2011). Due to the scarcity of funding, the Ministry of Justice decided to only “invest in municipal and state projects for work involving men in locations with structured Centers of Reference and Assistance for Women” (SANTOS, 2012, p. 111). However, reports indicate that the funds received tend to be periodic, which makes a large part of the actions temporary. As such, even where there is a possible source of finance for the actions, there is a lack of political will to prioritize these services for the managers of these funds.

2) Lack of coordination with the network combating violence and the institutionalization of policies (LIMA, 2008; Anderson OLIVEIRA, 2012; SANTOS, 2012). According to Anderson Oliveira (2012),

[...] services for the accountability and education of male perpetrators of violence are subservient to the network of care for women in situations of violence and, as such, the dialogue between these services should be constant. The implementation of services for men, as public policy, cannot be conceived in isolation of a network. The few references made by SERH professionals in interviews held in institutions that comprise the women's care network in the *Baixada Fluminense* and the small number of referrals they make for the service left me with the sensation that the interconnection between these mechanisms fell short of what you would expect (OLIVEIRA, p. 109).

Reports by CEPIA and the Noos Institute also confirmed this issue. Interventions with perpetrators of violence, in general, are localized and occasional policies, constituting what Oliveira (2012)

calls government policies, that is, implemented under a certain mandate, and canceled or replaced when the government changes. In this context, the lack of continuity is the main limitation of these initiatives (SANTOS, 2012; BEIRAS, 2014) and the paucity of funding is directly related to this lack. The work carried out with the men needs to, in effect, become a public policy. The inconsistent application of interventions with men may:

[...] compromise the effectiveness of the law, the credibility of the security and legal systems, put women at risk, deprive the men of the chance to change and preclude a permanent monitoring and assessment process, which is so necessary in work that deals with the imponderable nature of human behaviour (ACOSTA; BRONZ, 2014, p. 145).

Such difficulties may be considered as merely one more reflection of the fragility of public policies to combat domestic and family violence and the precarious implementation of the Maria da Penha Law itself.

3) Lack of training and supervision of professionals (LIMA, 2008; PAZO, 2013). As per the CEPIA report (2016), most of the groups are conducted by multidisciplinary teams that serve in the justice agencies – domestic and family violence courts or specialized prosecutors, as one more activity. There are a lot of voluntary and trainee professionals, many of whom never underwent any specific training activity for working with groups. Knowledge is gathered individually during the course of the work. In the still active São Paulo and Belo Horizonte interventions, there was a concern about academic qualifications to carry out activities with the men. This difficulty intensifies when added to the constant interruptions to services, since it hinders the facilitator's opportunity for learning on the job (ACOSTA; BRONZ, 2014). In addition to the lack of training in the different methodologies used in state interventions in Brazil, the type of training needs to be queried where it exists (ANTEZANA, 2012; BILLAND, 2016; Roberto AMADO, 2017).

4) High turnover and drop-out rates for participants in non-mandatory groups (LIMA, 2008; Anderson OLIVEIRA, 2012; SANTOS, 2012). There is debate about the best intervention model, a mandatory one, connected to the justice system, or a voluntary one. Some perpetrators argue the voluntary model is an ideal format for encouraging a reflective process. However, interventions that follow this model have high drop-out rates (AMADO, 2017). In the mandatory groups meanwhile, there is great resistance initially, which gradually transforms during the course of the process (SANTOS, 2012; BEIRAS, 2014).

Theoretical-methodological challenges

The theoretical-methodological challenges are intertwined with the numerous difficulties in the implementation of interventions. For the most part, they result from or are aggravated by the problems outlined above. It is also worth noting that the four challenges analyzed here are closely connected to each other:

1) Lack of instruments to deal with cognitive diversity and for cases in which there is alcohol or drug abuse (MONTEIRO, 2014). In this manner, individual consultation should not be ruled out in specific situations, particularly when the man needs psycho-therapeutic or medical treatment for drug addiction. Some international experiences provide for individual sessions before, during and after group experiences, which can be a part of the methodology, or used in cases where psycho-therapeutic needs are evident (Santiago BOIRA SARTO, 2010). One approach does not substitute another and the fundamental point is that the framing of violent behavior in pathological terms does not override any other perspective (CEPIA, 2016; TONELI; BEIRAS; RIED, 2017).

2) Groups that focus on a traditional educational format or lectures may preclude a dialogue that produces subjective transformations (BILLAND, 2016).

According to Pazo (2013),

the men reformulated certain images of masculinity (aggression and control over women) and reiterated others (worker/provider/responsible father), constructing meanings for the violence experienced and their relations with the Law that conflicted with those proposed by the techniques (p. 249).

It is the participants who produce new meanings for their own experiences and relations, and it must be expected that they merely adopt the ethical stances presented by group facilitators. This is a relevant discussion, since it has an impact on possibility for participant reflection. In this sense, the Noos Institute methodology proposes Paulo Freire's principles of popular education as important political and conceptual references in the creation of group activities with perpetrators of domestic and family violence since the knowledge is contextualized based on the experience of participants and the facilitator seeks to produce reflections and understandings, along with them, of the theme discussed, avoiding an authoritarian approach by the facilitator as "possessor of knowledge" subordinating the participant "as an incomplete and lacking being" (BEIRAS; BRONZ, 2016).

3) Superficial and depoliticized incorporation of the gender debate (OLIVEIRA, 2012; PAZO, 2013; João GONÇALVES, 2015; AMADO, 2017). There is consensus among various researchers (ANTEZANA, 2012; ANDRADE, 2014; BEIRAS, 2014; ACOSTA; BRONZ, 2014; AMADO, 2017; MARTÍNEZ-MORENO, 2017; João BERNARDES; Claudia MAYORGA, 2017) about the need for a gender perspective in the reflexive process that has an impact on violent relations. According to the CEPIA Report (2016), the term gender is cited in most of the programs, although it was noted that many discourses use the concept of gender as synonymous with woman, without any theoretical reference to feminist gender and masculinity studies. In the construction of interventions, there is therefore a loss of the historical-cultural perspective of gender relations regarding their effects on the relational character (SOARES, 2012) of domestic and family violence in Brazil.

The experience analyzed by Concepcion Gandara Pazo (2013), in Rio de Janeiro,

[...] operated based on assumptions that appeared to mirror generic perceptions of techniques on gender relations and violence against women. Inconsistent and dogmatic, these assumptions universalized the relation between masculinity and aggression, which produced intense reactions in group members, who for the most part, did not identify with the male identity that the techniques imposed on them (p. 249).

If the objective of interventions with perpetrators of violence is to “provoke the deconstruction and changing of naturalized standards of gender, gender violence and hegemonic masculinity” (ANDRADE, 2014, p. 181), the professionals involved must begin a dense reflexive process, themselves, to denaturalize their own construction within an androcentric and patriarchal society (BEIRAS; BRONZ, 2016), since the work of intervention is risky, “always on the limit of reproducing the prejudice we intend to combat” (BILLAND, 2016, p. 123).

This challenge has a direct impact on the potential for transformation in interventions, since it could lead to misogynistic discourses and the blaming of women for the violence committed (AGUIAR, 2009; PAZO, 2013; MARTÍNEZ-MORENO, 2017). Apart from the training of professionals, methodologies should be considered that help reach participants and identify “risks and other signs such as rationalization in the discourse, denial and minimization of the violence committed” (AGUIAR, 2009, p. 149). Similarly, care should be taken that the interventions do not slip into tools of contention for violent practices (PAZO, 2013; SANTOS, 2012). In the group analyzed by Pazo (2013),

[...] the end learning of the group members seemed to be limited to the awareness of the need to enhance their self-control so they can “flee”, “not lose their cool”, “walk away”, “forget it”, “learn to live” and “avoid” situations that promote conflicts, fights and assaults. From their point of view, it seems they learned, above all, how not to fall into the traps the women might put in their way. This is a long way off the transformative goals sought by the Law (p. 249-250).

According to research, this risk is more recurrent in groups where there is no orientation on feminist perspectives of gender (TONELI *et al.*, 2010; ANTEZANA, 2012).

4) Prevalence of the therapeutic approach in groups, even if the theoretical models do not provide for this. According to analysis done by Oliveira (2012) from the Service for the Education and Accountability of Male Perpetrators of Gender Violence (SerH), despite being called a service for accountability,

[...] the intervention model that each group designs can resemble the service of a much more therapeutic than accountability approach. I do not view the group assuming a therapeutic position as a defect or problem necessarily. Maybe it is an interesting form of constructing a link between service and user, indispensable for the success of the intervention. However, priority must be given to its socio-educative and pedagogical objective, since “acting neutrally in this type of intervention could present a risk, in so far as it could favor the impunity of the person charged” (ALVAREZ, 2006 *apud* OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 108).

Concerning the dynamics recounted in the theses and dissertations analyzed, there is every indication that the therapeutic approach is important in maintaining the perpetrators of violence in the groups. However, in terms of time, it has taken up a lot of the sessions. According to Andrade (2014), “in the creation and dynamic of the groups, the rationale tends towards ethics and the perspective that comes from group therapy proposals” (p. 187). As such, the groups end up moving away from a feminist gender debate, losing out in terms of reflection and accountability.

Final considerations

Based on this study, it was possible to note that research on interventions with perpetrators of domestic and family violence are quite recent in Brazil, there having been a significant increase in theses and dissertations on the theme after the enactment of the Maria da Penha Law. The interventions have sparked a contested legal debate, mainly related to the form of referring and committing perpetrators and those charged with domestic and family violence, and its structuring – to centers of assistance, or services related to execution of the sentence. Both models currently exist in Brazil,

and an interesting task for future research would involve comparing these aspects and analyzing their implications.

The perspectives presented in these analyzed theses and dissertations were all either connected to interviews with facilitators or with participants, that is, there is no research that systematically involves the companions of the perpetrators of violence in its analysis. The theses and dissertations also demonstrate the nonexistence of structured evaluative processes. In this sense, the initiatives are still quite rudimentary (ANTEZANA, 2012; AMADO, 2017) and are limited to the opinions of the male participants, without noting the relational character of the violence (Cecília MacDowell SANTOS; PASINATO, 2005). The main challenges are either related to the implementation and maintenance of interventions or the theories and methodologies behind their execution. Even in the face of a considerable theoretical debate, questions of a political order overlap, and the difficulty maintaining and implementing the interventions place their potential for combating domestic and family violence at risk. As such, care must be taken so that the numerous challenges described above do not transform the interventions with the perpetrators of violence into new tools for conciliation, which were vehemently rejected by the feminist movement on the application of Law 9.099/95 (Guita DEBERT; Maria Filomena GREGORI, 2008).

In this sense, it is problematic that the transformations noticed in intervention participants are designed only to avoid conflicts. Interventions in the manner they are being carried out need to be analyzed as to whether they promote changes in relations or just in learning, on the part of the perpetrators of violence, on how to avoid classification as crimes governed by law. This type of "learning" could become another form of making invisible claims of violence based on gender inequality.

The main questions that remain open, and pervade ongoing studies, refer to the format, methodology, formation of facilitators and evaluation. These issues are directly interrelated. Research that starts from a relational viewpoint and involves the perpetrators of violence and their families in a more continuous form, or after their participation in groups, are necessary for a more attentive perspective of the implications of interventions. There is still a long way until more in-depth evaluations of these interventions can be made, both of the theoretical and methodological tools used, and the experiences themselves. This article is merely one more analytical effort on this quest.

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

NOTHAFT, Raíssa Jeanine; BEIRAS, Adriano. "O que sabemos sobre intervenções com autores de violência doméstica e familiar?". *Revista Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, v. 27, n.3, e56070, 2019.

PARTICIPATION IN AUTHORSHIP

Raíssa Jeanine Nothafft: conception, data collection and data analysis, writing of the manuscript, writing, discussion of results.

Adriano Beiras: manuscript elaboration, writing, discussion of results.

FUNDING

This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001

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Not applicable.

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HISTORY

Received on 27/03/2018
Revised on 09/01/2018
Approved on 10/30/2018

