

Social representations of domestic violence against women and men in the rural settings

Representações sociais da violência doméstica em cenários rurais para mulheres e homens

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Abstract

Objective: To understand the social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, from the perspective of women and men living within these contexts.

Methods: A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive study, from the Social Representations theoretical-methodological perspective. The scenario was composed of two small municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in which more than half of the population lives in the rural areas. The participants included 16 people living in the rural areas of these municipalities who were integrated into health groups organized by the rural Family Health Strategy (FHS). The inclusion criterion was living in the rural areas for at least five years, because time is a causal element for development of social representations. The exclusion criterion consisted of residing less than five years in the rural areas. In this study, data generation of projective technical data and semi-structured interviews were used. The data obtained in the workshop were analyzed using the *theoretical-methodological reference* of racial representations.

Results: The analysis resulted in two thematic categories: social representations of domestic violence in the rural settings, anchored in unequal relationships between women and men; and, social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, grounded in family and generational relationships.

Conclusion: Domestic violence in this context is a complex phenomenon that involves different generations that circulate within the private space, demanding many actions for care and coping.

Resumo

Objetivo: Compreender as representações sociais da violência doméstica em cenários rurais, na perspectiva de mulheres e homens residentes nesses contextos.

Métodos: Estudo exploratório-descritivo, de abordagem qualitativa ao qual agregou-se a perspectiva teórico-metodológica das Representações Sociais. O cenário foi composto por dois municípios de pequeno porte do estado do Rio Grande do Sul, em que mais da metade da população reside no meio rural. Os participantes foram 16 pessoas que residiam em áreas rurais destes municípios e eram vinculados a grupos de saúde organizados pela Estratégia de Saúde da Família (ESF) rural. Como critério de inclusão elencou-se: estar residindo há pelo menos cinco anos em área rural, pois o fator tempo é um determinante na elaboração das representações sociais. O critério de exclusão consistiu em residir há menos de cinco anos em área rural. Neste estudo empregaram-se para a geração dos dados técnicas projetivas e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Para análise dos dados obtidos mediante a oficina empregou-se o *referencial teórico-metodológico* das Representações Sociais.

Resultados: A análise resultou em duas categorias temáticas: "Representações sociais da violência doméstica nos cenários rurais ancorada nas relações desiguais entre mulheres e homens" e "Representações sociais da violência doméstica nos cenários rurais ancorada nas relações familiares e geracionais".

Conclusão: A violência doméstica nesse contexto, se trata de um fenômeno complexo que envolve diferentes gerações que circulam no espaço privado, demandando ainda muitas ações de cuidado e enfrentamento a esse agravo.

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Introduction

Violence is a phenomenon expressed in different forms and contexts, such as the family, in both urban and rural areas.⁽¹⁾ This study addresses domestic violence, which includes any action or omission practiced in the domestic environment by individuals living within it, with or without parental functions, even if only sporadically.⁽²⁾

Domestic violence affects especially vulnerable populations, such as children, women and the elderly. In this sense, observing the international scenario, a study developed in Romania, with participants between 18 and 75 years of age, showed that 53.7% experienced some domestic violence situation,⁽³⁾ denoting its intergenerational character.⁽⁴⁾ Another study pointed out negative consequences of this violence on the health and well-being of those who experience it.⁽⁵⁾

This violence is strengthened due to the singularities of the rural scenario, such as geographic distance of the health, education, social assistance and security services, as well as the generational reproduction of this aggravation.⁽⁶⁾ Although domestic violence is an object of several research studies in health, in the rural scenario it is incipient, and focuses on women, which reveals a lack of studies that involve other individuals who experience situations of violence.

Due to the complexity of this problem, we added to the study the Theory of Social Representations, a method of knowledge originating and shared from common sense, in which the individual is integrated into the environment and becomes capable of constructing a practical reality. Thus, it is justified to understand the social representations of domestic violence from the view of the population that lives within the rural scenarios, making it possible to comprehend the meanings enunciated in the historical and social developments, and thus, to subsidize the development of new care practices in this singular context.⁽⁷⁾

Therefore, we sought to answer the guiding question: what are the social representations of domestic violence against women and men living in rural settings? In order to respond, the study aimed to understand the social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, from the perspective of women and men living in these contexts.

Methods

A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive study, from the Social Representations theoretical-methodological perspective. This perspective intends to make familiar something that is unfamiliar, by using anchoring and objectification, which is based on the participants' memory of an event and its accumulated observations.⁽⁷⁾

The scenario was composed of two small municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in which more than half the population lived in the rural areas.⁽⁸⁾ Participants included 16 people living in the rural areas of these municipalities, who were members of groups organized by the rural Family Health Strategy (FHS). The inclusion criterion was: living for at least five years in the rural areas, as time is a causal element for development of social representations. The exclusion criterion consisted of residing for less than five years in the rural areas. No other attribute constituted a justifiable exclusion criterion.

Considering the pluri-meteorological character of social representations, it is recommended to adopt diversified procedures for data generation and analysis. Thus, in this study, the generation of projective technical data⁽⁷⁾ and semi-structured interviews was used.⁽⁹⁾ Projective techniques included objectification and anchoring. To objectify is to discover the iconic quality of an idea, that is, to reproduce a concept in an image.⁽⁷⁾ Anchoring comprises the assimilation of the image obtained during objectification, making it familiar.⁽⁷⁾

For organization of the data collection, the nurse responsible for the rural FHS in each municipality was first contacted, and, along with Community Health Agents, they selected the rural community, as having a health group working with the participation of women and men was established as a prerequisite. After scheduling, the research team, composed by the main researcher and three undergraduate nursing students, went to the community hall of each community in which the groups were conducted.

In order to develop the projective technique, a collage workshop was conducted, in which newspa-

pers and magazines were made available to the participants. Using the question, “what does domestic violence in rural settings mean to you”, figures were cut out and the objectification was performed. The anchoring allowed participants to expose their thoughts using figures that represented domestic violence in the rural settings. Two audio-recorded workshops were conducted, one in each municipality, in the community halls of the rural communities, with an average time of three hours, and the observations were registered in a field diary.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 16 participants, aiming to complement the data from the workshops. A two-part guide was developed: the first contained closed-ended questions concerning socio-demographic data; the second consisted of open-ended questions regarding the object of study. Sampling by exhaustion, in which data collection ends when all the eligible subjects participated in the study was used to establish the sample size.⁽¹⁰⁾

The interviews were scheduled and conducted at the participants' homes, with an estimated average duration of one hour; they were audio-recorded. If participants reported that they would not feel comfortable at home, the interview was scheduled to be conducted in a room in the rural FHS. As the aim was for privacy and anonymity of the participants, interviews were rescheduled when other people were present in the home.

The Terms of Free and Informed Consent were read and explained by the main researcher prior to data collection. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed it in duplicate, and a copy was given to the participant and the other was maintained by the researcher. Due to the anonymity of the participants, the nomenclature (P) was used for the participant, followed by male (M) or female (F), to differentiate the participant's sex, and a respective ordinal number referring to the interview order (e.g., PF1, PM2, PM16). Data collection occurred from November of 2015 to January of 2016.

The data obtained through the workshop was analyzed using the theoretical and methodological Social Representations references, following Padilha's steps.⁽¹¹⁾ Objectification was performed at the

initial moment, which consisted of the process of making something real. Using the collage, a figurative nuclei corresponding to the themes was formed, which represented and expressed the concreteness of the idea.

During the anchoring phase, the material developed during the collage was interpreted by participants, obtaining significance. This moment enabled the collection of symbolizations and perceptions from verbal reports about the object of study. In the sequence, the themes representing this knowledge were identified, constituting the symbolic nuclei.

In the third phase, configurations given by the researcher to the social representation of domestic violence in rural contexts were validated by participants, confirming or disagreeing with the identification of the nuclei of this representation. In the fourth and final phase, the information was systematized; the themes were grouped into figurative nuclei and a symbolic nucleus.

A thematic content analysis was used to evaluate data from the semi-structured interviews, which was divided into three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results obtained, and interpretation.⁽⁹⁾

Finally, the empirical material of the workshop and semi-structured interviews was separated into two categories: Social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, anchored in unequal relationships between women and men; and, Social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, anchored in family and generational relationships.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, protocol number 514,865. National and international standards of research ethics involving human beings were met.

Results

The participants were mostly female (81%) with a mean age of 55 years. Regarding the level of education, 68% of the participants had not completed

elementary school, 6.25% completed elementary school, 12.5% completed high school, and 6.25% had not completed high school. As for marital status, 75% were married, and the remaining 25% were a combination of unmarried, widowed and those in a stable union.

Social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, anchored in unequal relationships between women and men

The first category reveals that violent relationships in the domestic space in rural areas are anchored in the asymmetries of power and authority between men and women, and are manifested among other situations in an uneven division of labor.

I think (domestic violence) is against the wife [...] the woman is employed by man. (P.M.2)

I think that rural woman is more assaulted than the urban one, because certain men are saying, "Go to work while I'm turning to the other side of bed[...] this happened close to home." (P.F.15)

These asymmetrical relationships also are manifested through psychological violence, using words that undermine the women's self-esteem and which reinforce male domination.

[...]the way they treat, sometimes they do not slap, but what they say to women puts them down. (P.F. 5)
[...]The woman is not free of this kind of thing [...], inside my family, I have watched my father ordering my mother to shut up, that she should not get involved, that he alone would solve the problems. (P.M.16)

Another form of domestic violence that permeates the relationships in rural settings is of a physical nature.

[...]a man who mistreats a woman [...]. (P.F.9)

In general we see the neighbors, we know that they come home breaking everything and the woman has to endure [...], a chain is only as strong as its weakest link (the woman). (P.M.16)

Social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, anchored in family and generational relationships

The second category presents domestic violence in the rural settings as part of family, generational and

work relationships, revealing that children and the elderly are also susceptible to this violence, in addition to women.

The following statements reveal the paternal figure as the one in power, exercising dominion over the all the family members, who are susceptible to domestic violence in the rural context.

In the past, milk was taken from ten cows, the woman used to do it. When it began to make money, men began to enter in this business, hence the milk became a high-scale production [...] then, 20, 30 cows were used, and the workforce of women and children was abused. Many men believe that this is normal: leaving the woman and children working. (P.F.11)

The family nucleus in rural settings was identified as composed by several generations, which favors the representation of domestic violence also against the elderly, related to abandonment by the family and institutionalization.

This image is an abandoned old lady, in an asylum. She is sad and this is domestic violence because there is no one taking care of her. (P.M.2).

Domestic violence in rural settings against the elderly is also anchored in the improper use of their financial resources by caregivers, usually their children. Often the elderly provide the passwords of their bank accounts and, as a consequence, they do not receive their money in full.

We used to go to a house where the woman said: my salary is so small, I do not receive all my salary [...] the son made loans and when they went to receive the money, they said your salary did not come entirely. (P.F.15)

Participants represented domestic violence in rural settings against children, anchored in abuse and sexual violence, most often perpetrated by parents.

[...]Violence is like the father who does not like his son and mistreats him. (P.F.4)

Sexual violence also affects children. (P.F.15)

Discussion

The limitations of this study are related to it being a descriptive, qualitative study, especially due to the restricted number of participants. However, the re-

sults show a potential for providing visibility to the particularities of domestic violence in rural settings, for which public policies should be reviewed and implemented, considering equity and humanization of care in different settings.

In the first category, the participants indicate gender heterogeneities in rural settings established in the male-female relationship, which result in an unequal division of labor, among other things, resulting in the overwork of rural women. This study corroborates these findings by identifying that rural women are subject to double or triple working hours, in addition to domestic services, child and home care, and work in the field. The later, although provided by rural women in a manner similar to or equal to men, is considered as only supportive,⁽¹²⁾ which places these women in a secondary position and makes their work invisible. It is one of the main sources of inequality between men and women.⁽¹³⁾ Thus, the rural women's work is one of the main sources of inequality between men and women.⁽¹⁴⁾

Another element representative of domestic violence, expressed in the results, is psychological violence, which seeks to maintain dominance of the male figure over the woman. Studies have demonstrated that this form of domestic violence is one of the most present in everyday relationships, characterized by swearing, threats, intimidation, and restriction of women's freedom.⁽¹⁵⁾ Still, phenomenological research with women who experienced domestic violence revealed that nonphysical violence has more impact on the relationship with the husband and/or partner, showing long-lasting effects.⁽¹⁶⁾

Physical violence is also cited by participants as one of the forms of domestic violence perpetrated against women in the rural settings. The study indicated that women who live in this context experience physical violence more frequently and severely than those living in urban areas, and isolation is a potential factor for this situation, as there are fewer people to witness such situations of violence.⁽¹⁷⁾ In this sense, physical aggressions in general are accompanied by non-physical forms, such as social isolation, control and coercion⁽¹⁵⁾ used to maintain women as submissive and men as dominant over

women in the domestic environment. Regarding the submissiveness of women, this is presented as acceptable for women,⁽¹²⁾ with the use of violence to resolve problems in the man-woman relationship being naturalized in these relationships.⁽¹⁸⁾

In this context, women have difficulty identifying the domestic violence they experience, because it is so culturally integrated in our society, as a result of the social development of men as superior in relation to women.

The second category indicates that domestic violence is present in family relationships in rural contexts, affecting women, elderly and children. This diversity of members who experience this problem is explained by the family nucleus that tends to be composed by several generations. Still, it is due to the fact that domestic violence has become a way of solving problems within the domestic space, manifested in a heterogeneous way for each member, depending on the roles and powers that have been historically constructed.⁽¹⁹⁾

Thus, one manifestation of domestic violence occurs by the use of male power over other family members, especially in the work context. The exploration of family work referred to by the study participants is based on the hierarchy of power integrated in the model of patriarchy. This is one of the most remote forms of control, legitimized by tradition and hierarchical levels, in which the imposition of power occurs in general, from the father to the children, and from man to woman.⁽²⁰⁾ Today we can still see the remnants of this model in the domestic space, which often ends up being instituted with the use of violence

Domestic violence against the elderly living in this context were demonstrated to be related to abandonment by the family, institutionalization and also the improper use of the money of the elderly by their caregivers, who are usually their own children. This study corroborates these findings by revealing that family members fail to provide basic needs to the elderly, isolate them socially, and still appropriate their financial resources, causing them suffering.⁽²¹⁾

The participants also represented violence against children, expressed by mistreatment and violence of

a sexual nature. One study showed that children or adolescents, in general, suffer violence by someone with whom they have consanguinity or who is in the role of caregiver, and this can be a grandfather, uncle, cousin, brother, stepfather, stepmother. Thus, its occurrence occurs within the domestic space, and it is not made public due to the economic dependence of the minors on the aggressor; this is potentiated by the distance from services.⁽²²⁾

Child abuse is less likely to be punished, because there is no surveillance and children are vulnerable because they are not supported in seeking help, as the parents are, at the time, their reference.⁽²³⁾ Still, sexual violence against children is considered a hidden face of violence against them, since, for the most part, they cannot verbalize their apprehensions and sufferings.⁽²⁴⁾

The results indicate that domestic violence affects family members in the domestic environment at different levels and intensities, especially those from immature generations and the elderly. Thus, this problem goes beyond man-woman relationships, reaching a network of broad intergenerational relationships, harming the generations that are at the beginning or at the end of life.

From the social representations of domestic violence in rural settings, this problem is introjected into the relationships of private space, and is passed through the generations in a natural way, as part of the structures that support relationships in the domestic environment.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that domestic violence in the rural settings, based on the social representations of men and women, is a complex phenomenon involving different generations that circulate in the domestic space. These representations are anchored in unequal relationships between men and women, manifested by the sexual division of labor, and in physical and psychological violence against women, as a way of maintaining male dominance over women. The representations are also anchored in family and generational relationships,

expressed by the use of the paternal figure's power over other family members, as well as by the abandonment of the elderly and the use of their financial resources by their children, and by sexual violence and mistreatment against children.

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Collaborations

Honnef F contributed to the conception and study design, data collection, analysis and data interpretation, and the article writing. Costa MC contributed to the article writing and relevant critical review of the intellectual content. Arboit J contributed to the article writing. Silva EB and Marques KA contributed to the final approval of the version to be published.

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