

The experience of motherhood during the pandemic*La experiencia de la maternidad en medio de la pandemia**A vivência da maternidade em meio à pandemia***Abstract**

The aim was to highlight the challenges of motherhood during the pandemic and describe possible strategies to experience this moment without compromising the affective-emotional field of the binomial. For this, a bibliographic search was carried out in online databases with the descriptors: pandemic, maternity, domestic work, COVID-19. With the insertion of the pandemic by COVID-19, mothers are exceptionally busy, as they perform remote work at home, taking care of domestic activities and meeting the needs of their children, who are in continuous residence. The reduction in social interaction expands the degree of stress, there is a dysfunction in the sleep pattern and increases the levels of cortisol in the bloodstream. As a result, negative effects on the population's health emerged, such as: anxiety, fear, irritability, changes in appetite, among others. In view of this, the physical and mental exhaustion evidenced becomes a reflection in the children's behavior. It was verified the importance of a close look at mothers / women who experience the COVID-19 pandemic. As strategies, they are evidenced: asking for help from family members; division of tasks and household chores; social support; physical activity or leisure; maintaining online contact with friends / family; balanced diet; share experience reports; establish a break, however brief, for rest.

Descriptors: Coronavirus Infections; Maternity; Pandemic; COVID-19.

Resumen

El objetivo fue resaltar los desafíos de la maternidad en medio de la pandemia y describir posibles estrategias para vivir este momento sin comprometer el campo afectivo-emocional del binomio. Para ello, se realizó una búsqueda bibliográfica en bases de datos en línea con los descriptores: pandemia, maternidad, trabajo doméstico, COVID-19. Con la inserción de la pandemia por COVID-19, las madres se encuentran excepcionalmente ocupadas, ya que realizan trabajos a distancia en el hogar, ocupándose de las actividades domésticas y atendiendo las necesidades de sus hijos, quienes se encuentran en residencia continua. La reducción de la interacción social amplía el grado de estrés, hay una disfunción en el patrón de sueño y aumenta los niveles de cortisol en el torrente sanguíneo. Como resultado, surgieron efectos negativos en la salud de la población, tales como: ansiedad, miedo, irritabilidad, cambios en el apetito, entre otros. Ante esto, el agotamiento físico y mental evidenciado se convierte en un reflejo en el comportamiento de los niños. Se verificó la importancia de observar de cerca a las madres / mujeres que viven la pandemia de COVID-19. Como estrategias se evidencian las siguientes: pedir ayuda a los familiares; división de tareas y quehaceres domésticos; apoyo social; actividad física u ocio; mantener el contacto en línea con amigos / familiares; dieta equilibrada; compartir informes de experiencias; establezca una pausa, aunque sea breve, para descansar.

Descriptores: Infecciones por Coronavirus; Maternidad; Pandemia; COVID-19.

Resumo

Objetivou-se evidenciar os desafios da maternidade em meio à pandemia e descrever possíveis estratégias para vivenciar esse momento sem comprometer o campo afetivo-emocional do binômio. Para isso, realizou-se uma pesquisa bibliográfica em bases de dados on-line com os descritores: pandemia, maternidade, trabalho doméstico, COVID-19. Com a inserção da pandemia pela COVID-19, encontram-se mães excepcionalmente atarefadas, na medida em que realizam o trabalho remoto em casa, encarregando-se das atividades domésticas e suprimindo as necessidades dos filhos, que estão em tempo contínuo na residência. A redução de interação social expande o grau de estresse, ocorre uma disfunção no padrão do sono e aumenta os níveis de cortisol na corrente sanguínea. Em decorrência disso, emergiram efeitos negativos na saúde da população, tais como: ansiedade, medo, irritabilidade, alteração de apetite, dentre outros. A vista disso, o esgotamento físico e mental evidenciado torna-se reflexo no comportamento das crianças. Verificou-se a importância de um olhar atento para mães/mulheres que vivenciam a pandemia da COVID-19. Como estratégias, evidenciam-se: solicitar ajuda de familiares; divisão de tarefas e afazeres domésticos; apoio social; atividade física ou lazer; manter contato on-line com amigos/familiares; alimentação equilibrada; partilhar relatos de experiência; estabelecer uma pausa, mesmo que breve, para descanso.

Descriptores: Infecções por Coronavirus; Maternidade; Pandemias; COVID-19.

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environment and the continuous permanence of children in their homes, expanding the understanding of the subjective repercussions of the double shift, also known as the second shift⁴.

However, even the professionally active woman starts to appear as the main and best caregiver, as can be seen empirically. Thus, an evident burden that generates emotional suffering, socially determined, and that affects both mothers, children, and other family members⁴.

It is substantial to reflect on motherhood during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the importance of professional care plus psychological support and guidance on prevention and care. The suspension of classes and the closure of schools add to new forms of stress for caregivers, making them sometimes incompatible with other tasks⁷.

Authors⁸ point out that, during the chaos and uncertainty of tomorrow, supporting a woman-mother in the days of COVID-19, can save her from a distressing situation. Therefore, sustaining, supporting, establishing, assisting, helping, all these actions and so many others can comfort an individual. You can also seek this protection virtually, where there are groups on social networks, such as Whatsapp® and Facebook®, among other applications to welcome.

It also highlights the importance of the support network formed by a group of family members, friends, neighbors, professionals. These networks can promote emotional help (expressions of comfort and care), informational help (information and guidance) or instrumental help (provision of resources, services and problem solving)⁹.

In contrast, sometimes the permanent male presence in the home does not mean cooperation or fair distribution of tasks among the whole family, but rather an increase in the invisible and unpaid work of women. Housework becomes bigger and more exhausting as more people continue to live in the home¹⁰.

According to the IBGE, 2017, 83.7% of children under the age of 4 had a woman as the first person responsible for them, while only 16.3% had men as the main person responsible. Of these children, 46% were under the responsibility of a woman "housewife" and 37% of them by women who perform work activities, therefore, an overload condition is noted with greater proportions among women⁷.

Study⁷ refers that the suspension of classes and the closing of schools added new forms of stress to caregivers and, in many cases, made this care irreconcilable with others. In his research, he stated that, with the pandemic, the sexual division of labor, which was already uneven, tended to worsen. Even in the case of researchers and scientists, privileged workers in terms of guaranteeing income in the face of most women-mothers, staying productive academic-scientifically, without compromising the quality of the affective-emotional field of the binomial, has become a challenge.

In view of the above and the relevance that the theme currently presents, it is proposed to carry out this study based on the following guiding question: What is the impact of the pandemic on maternity? Thus, the objective of

Introduction

Maternity does not refer to a biological event, but to an experience inscribed in a socio-historical dynamic. It implies in the provision of care, affective involvement in variable measures. However, the experience of both depends not only on the individual characteristics of each woman, but also on her socio-historical background¹.

However, the way in which motherhood is experienced is compared to a metamorphosis, as it changes according to the demands and values that dominate in each society and at a given time¹.

The beginning of the year 2020 was signaled by an outbreak of a variation of COVID-19, in which the first case was confirmed in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China. As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency of international interest at the end of January 2020².

Nevertheless, on March 11 of the same year, the WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic and established measures that are indispensable for the prevention and confrontation of this new scenario. Among these measures are hand hygiene with soap and water, the habit of using gel alcohol at times when hand washing is impracticable, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, respiratory etiquette. In addition, the WHO recommends social distancing (minimum of one meter), wearing a mask, avoiding agglomerations and environmental measures^{2,3}.

The disease COVID-19 had a rapid spread and, as a result, government health institutions mobilized prevention, urgency and emergency plans to contain the exponential increase in cases, in order to avoid the overload in services to the population⁴.

Transmission occurs from one infected individual to another, or through close contact through: touching, contaminated handshaking, droplets of saliva, sneezing, coughing, secretion of the upper airways, contaminated objects or surfaces, such as cell phones, tables, cutlery, door handles, toys, computer keyboards and more⁵.

The criteria used to contain the virus had a major impact on the economy, social relationships, family life and, therefore, on people's mental health. It is inserted, in fact, in the context of the initial capitalist development, which removed the woman from the workspace, sending her to the home to carry out unpaid reproductive work⁴.

Researchers⁶ discuss in their study the existence of other pandemics that occurred between the 14th and 21st centuries, among which are: influenza 1889-1890, Spanish flu 1918-1920, Asian flu 1957-1958, Hong Kong flu 1968-1969, Russian flu 1977-1978, avian influenza 2003-2004, the last being the 2009 pandemic for H1N1.

Reflecting on the psychological aspects of motherhood leads to recognize about the overload of work accumulated by women, especially mothers, with the intensification of family life in the context of social isolation, proposed as an action to contain the infection by COVID-19, motivates a reflection on the spatiality and density of domestic relations⁷.

Analyzing motherhood, inserted in the context of the pandemic, leads to professional work in the home



the study was to highlight the challenges of motherhood during the pandemic and describe possible strategies to experience this moment without compromising the affective-emotional field of the binomial.

Methodology

This is a descriptive study of bibliographic review.

The sources used as resources for research and data collection were the online databases: Google Scholar, Virtual Health Library, SciELO, among others, to search for articles with the keywords: "Pandemic", "Maternity", "Housework", "COVID-19".

Complete scientific articles in the Portuguese language were selected, as well as ministerial ordinances on the topic presented, without determining the time.

Data collection on the databases was carried out between the months of February and July 2020.

For the analysis of the selected texts, central ideas that guided the research were identified, such as demonstrating the maternal difficulties faced, the importance of motherhood during the pandemic, as well as proposing ways / strategies to experience this pandemic period without harming the binomial.

Results and Discussion

In a scenario that it is necessary to remain at home indefinitely, it is carried as a privilege to those who can "afford" not to go out, and yet it is jointly emotionally exhausting when there seems to be no other way out of preventing the spread of the disease. virus⁷.

The women who are at the base of the services considered essential are the ones who have the greatest difficulties because they must accumulate functions, in addition to the routines outside the home, allow their children to depend on living with relatives or people close to the family, exposing themselves to risks of infection by COVID-19. Too many are the reports or posts on social networks, with hundreds of thousands of comments and shares, addressing the topic of maternal exhaustion in the pandemic⁷.

In this perspective, mothers are exceptionally busy, insofar as they are doing remote work at home, taking care of domestic activities, and meeting the needs of their children, who are in continuous residence time.

Authors¹¹ suggest some guidelines to soften and make this experience subtle. They say that combining multiple assignments generates exhaustion and anxiety. In addition, the mother / woman does not need to handle everything, since it can result in mental overload. In contrast, the study shows some strategies that may be able to mitigate this impact on motherhood, such as requesting and accepting help from family members, guiding them to share burdens and tasks, so that everyone can help and share to create new habits.

Study¹² shows that individuals enjoy the confinement to catch up on domestic activities, to strengthen or not strengthen family ties, to study, read, listen to music, watch films or perform any activities, in order to improve the quality of life in a situation of isolation.

However, for some parents, it is exhausting to stay with their children at home full time, since they are used to the frantic pace of urban life and a detached routine with those who maintain an affective relationship.

Study¹³ states that the reduction in social interaction expands the degree of stress, there is a dysfunction in the sleep pattern and increases the levels of cortisol in the bloodstream. As a result of this pandemic, negative effects on the population's health emerge, such as: anxiety, fear, irritability, altered appetite and increased consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.

In this sense, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), of the United States, recommends some guidelines to reduce the side effects of the pandemic, among them are ensuring online contact with friends and family, practicing physical exercises, techniques relaxation and maintain a balanced diet. In addition, it is necessary that the information shared about COVID-19 corroborates with reliable sources. In view of this, the physical and mental exhaustion evidenced in the adult, becomes a reflection in the children's behavior¹³.

The mother / woman does not need to be the only one responsible for the children full-time, in some moments, within the reality of each one, support should be requested for older children who are able to observe and entertain the youngest children to both enjoy moments of fun and care. It is necessary to denaturalize the idea of women as main caregivers^{7,11}.

Enjoying the home as a safe, resting, and protective environment should be a guaranteed basic right, but in practice it is still a privilege of class and gender¹⁰.

It is also worth mentioning a study¹⁴ which addresses cognitive behavioral therapy, through psychoeducation, which becomes an effective strategy for the general population, when associated with relaxation and breathing techniques to control anxiety, favoring the maintenance of mental and physical health.

In addition, social support emerges as a protection tool that helps individuals cope with situations of mental exhaustion. Therefore, the importance of using other non-presence possibilities is emphasized to strengthen the bond of social support, by means of remote meetings with telephone calls and video calls¹⁴.

However, the middle- and upper-class population enjoys some hobbies, which differs from lower class people who do not have that same access. Given that individuals who live in small places, with few resources and with a larger number of people, have greater difficulty in adhering to these strategies, as many do not have access to applications or Internet connection and, due to this, due to the housing structure, for it is sometimes impossible to perform relaxing, fun activities or any physical activity¹³.

For authors¹¹, it is necessary to organize breaks for your own rest and to do what brings you satisfaction, such as meditating, reading, listening to music, talking by electronic means, or practicing some physical exercise. Even if these intervals are not for long periods, it is necessary and beneficial, and the difference will be noticeable for everyone. Study¹⁴ corroborates this finding when he states



that regular physical activity helps to regulate sleep and control anxiety.

The ability of children to assist in domestic activities based on their age is based to stimulate autonomy, responsibility, and sense of organization. The child can be instructed to store the toys, tidy up the room, thus, all members contribute to the maintenance of the home and reduction of maternal burden¹¹.

Some strategies recommended by authors¹⁵ to the population is offered in the form of booklets, informational materials, channels for psychological listening to mitigate negative feelings. Online consultations have taken place to understand the mental health status of the population in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, in a distant way, it is proposed to offer psychological care, which consist of assistance and protection in crisis situations, thus reducing stress, providing comfort, and activating the social support network, since feelings of anxiety, sadness, fear, loneliness and anger are expected in the context of a pandemic.

Sharing reports of experiences in times of turbulence develops a sense of universality and brings feelings of relief. The presence of social support networks before, during and after high impact situations increases the viability of maintaining mental health after a crisis. Therefore, suggestions for maintaining mental health need to be widely disseminated. Advertising can be done on radio and television channels, social media, or sound cars¹³.

Authors¹⁶ portray in their study that guilt and uncertainty may occur in the duty to play a social role resulting from a socialization process in which girls and boys internalize the social world as being the objective reality. It is in this process that an objective event is assimilated as bound for coherence, subjectively making the meaning "to be a woman" and "to be a mother", strongly internalizing the woman / mother, who feels obliged to follow an ideal mother pattern, so that when not achieved as expected by society in general, self-blame is generated.

In contemporary times, domestic work, formal or not, is specifically attributed to women, representing an inequality between the male and female genders. This work is signaled by pain, oppression, and illness. Systematically, the woman herself internalizes in the relationships, the obligation of these chores, and exempts herself to take care of herself, to have moments of leisure or even rest¹².

It is understood that there is no right or wrong when it comes to motherhood, each woman has her peculiarity

Conclusion

From the results, it was found that the difficulties are real and there are countless mothers / women with physical and mental overload.

The activities that were part of the population's routine, specifically to mothers / women, due to the appropriate measures of protection against COVID-19, were suspended indefinitely, forcing the need for new routines, which many families were not prepared for.

It was verified the importance of a careful look at mothers / women who experience the pandemic, who try to reconcile motherhood with so many other tasks, accentuating an overload.

As strategies to experience this moment without compromising the affective-emotional field of the binomial, it is evident:

- Request help from family members.
- Division of tasks and household chores.
- Stipulate a routine with activities and tasks with the children.
- Social Support.
- Relaxation and breathing techniques.
- Physical activity or leisure.
- Keep in touch online with friends / family.
- Balanced food.
- Online assistance.
- Share experience reports.
- Check information from reliable sources about COVID-19.
- Establish a break, even if brief, for rest.
- Disclosure for health maintenance strategies.

The consequences of social isolation on psychological well-being and the act of mothering, during the chaos of the pandemic, should be better explored, in order to encourage, as well as adopt strategies for the development and implementation of public policies with actions focused on motherhood, with an emphasis on the prevention and promotion of physical and mental health for mothers at times like this.

The current pandemic scenario, as observed in this study, further reinforces and highlights the appreciation of motherhood.

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