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Women and health: rural women workers and experiences of violence – an exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

This is a doctoral research project of the Graduate Nursing Program of the University of Brasilia. **Aims:** To identify rural women's perceptions of experiences of violence in marital relationships, their experiences of abortion and access to health services.

Method: This is a transversal and exploratory social research project based on Feminist Bioethics theory. Data were collected in two phases: phase I – at the Daisies' March, which occurred in 2011; phase II – at meetings with leaders of the National Rural Women Workers Confederation - CONTAG. We have used a self-administered instrument specially developed for this study, which contained questions validated in other studies.

Results: This is an ongoing research. The participants include 800 women from phase I and 130 women from phase II. The results of this study will provide the basis for the development of a monitoring system with the aim of establishing equality and social justice among rural women workers.

Keywords: Rural population; Women; Abortion; Violence; Violence against women

SITUATION PROBLEM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

Currently, the Brazilian population is 190,732,694. About 51% of this total (97,342,162) are women. Approximately 29 million people (15.6%) make up the rural population, including men and women¹. In Brazil, rural work is seen as a predominantly male activity. On a daily basis, rural women workers must perform not only household chores and activities in agriculture and subsistence farming, but are also responsible for their children's education. Despite the multitude of tasks, they still manage to organize gatherings to discuss social needs. Initially, at the local and regional level and, more recently, at the national level, their main claims, concerns and issues are related to gender equality, land tenure, access to health and the incidence of violence. Unfortunately, their work remained invisible until the mid-Twentieth Century. Scholars point to advances in their organization, but also draw attention to the challenges related to intimate partner violence (IPV), including sexual violence, and the pursuit of equality for women. Thus, situations of violence, which are polysemic and multiply determined, involve the whole society on many levels - social, economic, political and cultural – and require an approach which takes into consideration the concepts of intersectionality and gender transversality². This groundbreaking study is relevant precisely because it offers the opportunity to learn about the culture and experiences of rural women workers, and their way of dealing with violence. Moreover, it is interesting to observe the importance of social gatherings and networking bodies in promoting autonomy and social transformation.

AIM

To study the rural women workers' perception of the nature of the violence committed by an intimate partner, as well as their experiences of abortion and access to healthcare services.

CORE QUESTIONS

How do rural women workers perceive or identify the existence of an unequal relationship, that is, with the predominance of "male power"? What are the types of intimate partner violence? What are their experiences related to abortion? What is the level of access to healthcare among these women?

METHOD

This is an observational, exploratory, cross-sectional social research project that aims to investigate the health conditions and the experiences of violence experienced by rural women workers. According to Brazilian regulations, this project was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research of the Department of Health Sciences of the University of Brasilia on the 14th June, 2011, under protocol nº 068/2011. The data collection process was divided into two phases: the first phase aimed to understand the rural women's perception of experiences of violence and was carried out during an event entitled the Daisies' March, which took place in Brasilia on the 16th and 17th August, 2011. For this, we have used the technique of self-administered questionnaires, which are commonly employed in public opinion polls as well as in satisfaction and political surveys³. This choice of technique was essential to ensure the respondents' anonymity. The self-administered questionnaires were developed with closed questions about violence, abortion and access to healthcare. This method is practical and suitable for obtaining large-scale data. After answering the questionnaire, the respondents handed it to the interviewers or deposited it in a folder. In the second phase, data collection was carried out through interviews. All participants agreed to collaborate after being informed about the research, and formally confirmed their acceptance by signing an Informed Consent Form. Interviews were conducted with female leaders of the Federations/Unions associated with the National Rural Women Workers Confederation - CONTAG. We used a structured questionnaire containing questions about socio-demographic characteristics,

sexual and reproductive health, violence, and violence awareness. 800 participants were included in phase I and 130 in phase II. Although the present research is still ongoing, it is already possible to say that violence pervades relationships. In terms of classification, they can be considered to be mild (insults and humiliations), moderate (jerks and slaps) and severe (death threats, beatings and use of physical force and weapons). Sexual violence committed by an intimate partner was also mentioned. The discussion will be based on the Feminist Bioethics theory. In order to break the cycle of violence it is crucial to adopt a set of prevention strategies and to improve the quality of healthcare services. It is also important to promote a higher level of engagement on the part of healthcare workers in order to improve the assistance provided to women victims of violence and discrimination, encouraging them to partake in political and social debates. The results of this study will provide the basis for the development of a monitoring system, with the aim of establishing equality and social justice among rural women workers.

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Authors' participation

Rejane Antonello Griboski - participation in research, development, gathering and structuring of the preview note.

Dirce Guilhem. PhD. Supervisor - participation in orientation and structuring of the preview note.

Leides Barroso Azevedo Moura - participation in structuring, supervision and correction of the Portuguese version.

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