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*Corresponding author

Ana Paula Medeiros, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of Ribeirão Preto, University of São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, Brazil

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Mini-Review

Domestic Violence throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Brief Review of the Impacts and Possibilities for Intervention

Ana Paula Medeiros* and Valeria Barbieri

Department of Psychology, University of São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic stimulated social isolation and, as a result, many health systems stopped offering face-to-face assistance to users. Among the affected public, there are women in situations of domestic violence. This review aimed at investigating the impacts of the pandemic on domestic violence, as well as identifying which means of intervention were used along the period. It was found that domestic violence increased during the pandemic, but the number of complaints decreased, as a result of the greater proximity between victim and aggressor, with both staying at home throughout the days. New researches are needed so that other possibilities for intervention beyond the remote environment may be established.

Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic initiated in Brazil in February 2020, being intensified in the following months, which imposed the need of social isolation to minimize the cases of contamination. Until January 2023 and according to the coronavirus Brazil panel [1], more than 36 million cases of the disease were confirmed, in addition to approximately 695,000 deaths. Although Covid-19 is still present, as well as the adoption of some procedures, such as the use of masks, certainly the isolation was more intense throughout the years 2020 and 2021, with a large part of the health services resuming their services throughout 2022, after the vaccination campaign that reached most of the population. Therefore, the years 2020 and 2021 were those with the longest periods of social isolation with a decrease in face-to-face assistance to the people. Other services offered by the Unified Social Assistance System, or SUAS, also provide assistance to families in different situations of social vulnerability, among them the various forms of violence, including domestic violence, focus of this study, which is understood as the intentional use of power or physical force by a man maintaining an intimate relationship of affection with a woman, harming the integrity of the victim [2].

Considering that domestic violence occurs mostly in the family environment, in continuous period of social isolation, and based on the fact that the assistance services in such cases were affected as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, this study aimed at analyzing the publications regarding domestic violence from 2020 onwards, dealing with caring strategies offered to women. The scientific-based platforms "SciELO" and "Periódicos Capes" were used in the researches, using the keywords: "domestic violence", "pandemic" and "woman". The articles were selected for relevance, thus providing an explanation of the impacts of violence throughout the pandemic and what interventions were held addressing women involved.

Discussion

The numbers of reports of domestic violence in Brazil are alarming and have increased over time, especially after the enactment of law no. 11,340, of August 7, 2006, known as the Maria da Penha Law [2]. This Law created mechanisms to curb domestic and family violence against women and over time strategies were also created for complaints, such as the Disque 180, to also register and forward anonymous complaints. Only from 2006 onwards there are data relating to complaints receiving a more careful look, with greater systematization of numbers of complaints, assistance and disclosure of occurrences. In relation to such data, it is first necessary to highlight the underreporting of complaints, once it is estimated that many cases of domestic violence not reported to competent areas, either because of the woman's fear of complaining and suffering retaliation by the aggressor himself, or being exposed to the family and society. Moreover, society still views that one should not interfere in other people's relationships and that public policies lack a profitable assistance to address demands, which frequently inhibit actions by third parties witnessing violence.

Despite the increase in complaints over time, since the systematization of the data, it was found that during the pandemic years, notably 2020 and 2021, there was a decrease in complaints of domestic violence, despite the increased records of lethal violence (femicide) resulting from domestic violence, according to data from the 2022 Brazilian public security forum [3]. The data lead to conclude that domestic violence during the pandemic may have increased, but that there was a difficulty for women in accessing reporting services, as well as health and social assistance to disclosure complaints. Considering social isolation and the pandemic context, there was an increase in cases of unemployment in Brazil, closing of schools and consequent permanence of children at home, burden on parents to take care of their children and do other tasks, as well as a decrease in leisure activities outside the residences. In this way, women remained most of the time in contact with their aggressors and the families were exposed to stressful situations, increasing the possibilities of occurrence of violence episodes.

In the same sense, social isolation contributed to the weakening of accessing women's support networks. It is mentioned, then, that families involved could not access family groups, letting the aggressor protected from denunciations and external interference. In addition, health services, offered mainly by SUAS, as recommended by the Maria da Penha Law, stopped offering face-to-face assistance and support groups, aiming at isolation, which weakened the women's possibilities for complaints. A large part of the researches carried out throughout the pandemic focusing domestic violence indicates the need to establish public policies addressing such context, considering the difficulty of women's access to face-to-face



assistance and the permanence of the aggressor most of the time in the residences [4-6]. However, few studies were analyzed pointing out effective possibilities for intervention within this group.

Vieira [5] mention that the delimitation of strategies for recording the occurrence is important in cases of domestic violence. However, it is understood that this should not be the only mean considering that women are experiencing physical, emotional and social vulnerability, needing to be assisted in areas beyond the occurrence record. The authors identified that digital platforms throughout the pandemic were created to deal with complaints, as the Human Rights BR app and three websites: ouviria.mdh.gov.br, disque100.mdh.gov.br and ligue180.mdh.gov.br [5]. Concerning the use of digital media, Fornari et al. [7] stated that these were the greatest gain and possibility of intervention during the pandemic. In this sense, it was identified that the record of occurrence and the services provided by SUAS (judiciary, public security and health) were offered primarily by remote means. Nevertheless it could be observed that there are positive and negative points in these strategies, the first referring to women staying at home, once they have other tasks, such as childcare, and on the other hand they may not have guaranteed secrecy during the attendances, once the aggressor may be in the residence, and also because they may not have internet access, which is not available to everyone.

Ornell et al. [8] outlined intervention strategies that can achieve positive results when adopted during social isolation as to teleassistance to women, providing health, legal, psychological and attendance assistance; identification of a support network that can intervene in case of serious violence – if victim and aggressor remain in the same residence; awareness of health professionals as to complaints when the victim attends these services; enhancing the possibility of face-to-face assistance at SUAS, using other prevention strategies, such as social distancing [8]. It is noteworthy that no studies were found that address the psychological aspects of women in situations of domestic violence throughout the pandemic. However, understanding that domestic violence causes significant damage to women, such as excessive anxiety, fear, insecurity, social isolation, low self-esteem and depression, it is possible to analyze that the pandemic context itself, the overload resulting from this period and the lack of support from the social network intensified the negative consequences and made it difficult to seek help, which leads to a greater demand for care at the emotional level for the post-pandemic moment.

Conclusion

A small number of publications encompassing domestic violence throughout the Covid-19 pandemic were found, what can be explained by the fact that it is a recent event.

For the same reason, it is understood that there was little time to carry out empirical research, which might led to a greater number of analyzed theoretical research. It can be seen that the publications are limited on the longer time of coexistence between the victim and the aggressor, due to social isolation, lacking data on strategies and action needed to minimize and inhibit aggressions. Only on line means to register complaints are shown, as well as services offered by SUAS, through remote mode. The absence of studies that focus on the mental health of women who suffered violence during the pandemic hinders a broader understanding of which consequences of violence are more related to the pandemic period and which are commonly present as a result of the experience of various forms of aggression by partners, which makes it difficult to define care and attention strategies for this group. It was not found a research focusing specifically psychological approaches concerning women in situations of violence throughout the pandemic, as well as other strategies for the access of victims beyond the remote environment. Thus, more researches are needed as to delimiting approaches on such issues and other situations that may require social isolation.

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