

ARTICLE

Frames of violence: a reading on the pressures for the inclusion of violence against women in Brazilian public policies

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Abstract

This article aims to identify and analyze the frames mobilized by feminist movements to address violence against women and discuss their influences on public policies. The theoretical and methodological framework comprises frames (Snow & Benford, 1992). The research material consists of articles published in the newspapers Folha de S. Paulo and O Globo during periods related to three state actions that sought to combat violence against women: i) the creation of the women's police stations in 1985, ii) the Special Criminal Courts in 1995, and iii) the approval of Law 11.340, of 2006 (Maria da Penha Law). The results indicate that throughout the analyzed periods, a master frame, "violence against women," resonated in public opinion, and this issue was recognized as a problem by the state that established measures to confront the problem.

Keywords: Violence against women. Social movements. Public policy.

Frames de uma violência: uma leitura sobre as pressões para a inclusão da pauta da violência contra as mulheres nas políticas públicas brasileiras

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é identificar e analisar as *frames* mobilizadas pelos movimentos feministas para tratar da violência contra as mulheres, bem como discutir suas influências nas políticas públicas. O referencial teórico e metodológico é o das *frames* (Snow & Benford, 1992). O *corpus* de pesquisa constitui-se de matérias publicadas nos jornais Folha de S. Paulo e O Globo, em períodos de tempo relacionados a três ações estatais de combate à violência contra a mulher: i) criação das delegacias da mulher, em 1985; ii) estabelecimento dos juizados especiais criminais, em 1995; e iii) aprovação da Lei 11.340 de 2006 (Lei Maria da Penha). Os resultados indicam que, ao longo dos períodos analisados, uma *master frame*, "violência contra a mulher", ressoou na opinião pública e fez esta questão ser reconhecida como um problema pelo Estado, que estabeleceu medidas para seu enfrentamento.

Palavras-chave: Violência contra mulher. Movimentos sociais. Políticas públicas.

Frames de violencia: una lectura sobre las presiones para inclusión de la agenda de violencia contra la mujer en las políticas públicas brasileñas

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es identificar y analizar los *frames* movilizados por los movimientos feministas para hacer frente a la violencia contra las mujeres y discutir su influencia en las políticas públicas. El marco teórico y metodológico es el de los *frames* (Snow & Benford, 1992). El *corpus* de la investigación se compone de artículos publicados en los periódicos Folha de S. Paulo y O Globo durante los períodos relacionados con tres acciones estatales para combatir la violencia contra las mujeres: i) la creación de las comisarías de la mujer en 1985, ii) el establecimiento de tribunales penales especiales en 1995, y iii) la aprobación de la Ley 11.340 de 2006 (Ley Maria da Penha). Los resultados indican que a lo largo de los períodos analizados resonó en la opinión pública un *master frame* "violencia contra las mujeres", y este tema fue reconocido como un problema por el Estado, que estableció medidas para enfrentarlo.

Palabras clave: Violencia contra las mujeres. Movimientos sociales. Políticas públicas.

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INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of violence against women on the global human rights agenda has been one of the greatest accomplishments of the feminist movement over the past three decades. In 1979, when the UN presented the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, this subject, even though it appeared in discussions, was not an integral part of the document. Over the years, however, it has turned into a wedge in the fight for gender equality, which has obliged various countries to adopt some type of mechanism or policy to address this issue.

The Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women was ratified by the UN in 1993 and it defines violence against women as:

[...] any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (ONU Mulheres, 1993).

In the literature, there are various terms for this phenomenon: *domestic violence*, *violence against women*, *women in situations of violence*, and *gender violence*. Suely Souza de Almeida (2007) observes that terms vary because they refer to different practices, anchored by various theoretical perspectives. To her, *domestic violence* is a spatial notion which designates the locus of violence, the private environment. *Intrafamily violence* is similar to this, but instead of emphasizing the place where it occurs, it focuses on its endogenous production and reproduction, a modality which characteristically occurs at the heart of the family institution. The *gender violence* category which is more utilized today, emphasizes the emergence of violence within a context of socially constructed relationships, whose spatial production is societal and its nature relational. In turn, *violence against women* emphasizes the object and not the relational context of an inequality of power such as violence which only has an object and not a subject, stressing the direction, the target, being the only term that unequivocally presents women as the target of a given aggression (Almeida, 2007). Sometimes in the literature we see *gender violence* and *violence against women* used as synonymous terms, but they are not. While the former category refers to any act perpetrated against a person based on gender norms and unequal power relationships, inflicted on women, girls, men and boys, transvestites, trans individuals, etc. (The UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR], 2017); the latter specifically refers to the female sex as the violated subject. In this text, we have opted to use the term violence against women because we believe, by being designated in this manner, the object directs the action, and thus makes it possible to think of the issue as the state's actions in regard to women. In this study, we will seek to identify and analyze the frames used by feminist movements to treat violence against women and discuss their influences on Brazilian public policies. To accomplish this, we will analyze texts published in two newspapers with wide circulation: Folha de São Paulo and O Globo. "The choice of the theoretical approach using frames is justified, because it enables us to understand the dynamics of social movements and the ways that they influence *policy-making* processes. The choice of the theoretical approach of frames is justified because it allows us to understand the dynamics of social movements, the ways in which they influence *policy making* processes. This reference makes it possible to focus on various different descriptions of what sociopolitical actors offer in terms of this problem and its solutions" (Varloo & Lombardo, 2007, p. 32).

In Brazil, a growing number of studies have used this approach to understand the internal and external dynamics of social movements (Alonso, 2009; Dowbor, 2012; Gohn, 1997; Nunes, 2013). In the field of Administration and Public Policies, it has already been employed by Fiabane, Alves, and Breláz (2014) to study the networks and movements used for social control in representative politics; by Oliveira and Goés (2019), and M. C. L. Santos, Gonçalves-Dias, Mendonça, and Teodósio (2010) to understand how recyclable material pickers mobilize various repertoires to position themselves in relation to the National Solid Waste Policy; and it has even been used to study the mobilization of women's' movements in the recent scenario of the internet's expansion (Prudencio, 2015).

From this perspective, all of the actors are important and collaborate in public actions and the state is not synonymous with a public subject. Peter Spink (2016) argues in favor of a polycentric approach which understands what is public as not only the government's actions, but also those of society when it puts independent pressure on the government or when it creates alternative collective answers to meet its own needs. In this sense, this article contributes to a discussion of public policies designed to fight violence against women and considers how the institutionalization of a place of discussion of this problem occurred as a problem (Capella & Brasil, 2015), looking at the construction of a discursive perspective instead of adopting an instrumental view which envisions them as the final solution to all problems (Spink, 2016).

Farah (2004) has already pointed out the importance of approximating feminist movements with the country's normative and legal planes. Documental research and analyses made of the materials from the two selected newspapers demonstrates that the approximation trajectory through the lenses of frames of collective documental action in the media highlight strategic aspects of mobilization and its structures of opportunities, linking the practical and subjective aspects of the movement with state actions during the analyzed periods in terms of violence against women.

The language, concepts and categories mobilized in a frame affect the way in which the subject is described, depending on the issues formulated during the political cycles of these understandings. Frames are the point of departure for understanding how a situation is addressed before it becomes a problem, and, after, when it takes on a specific form. In this sense, the contribution of this work, in addition to bringing a new perspective about the mobilization of women against violence, can also illuminate future paths of research in Public Administration and Social Management. Like Rosa and Mendonça (2010), who in addition to describing emergency processes in public policies via the discussion of political opportunities, emphasize political-institutional variables, it is necessary to understand in a more active manner the engagement of civil society actors and their *framing* processes. In addition, it is possible to understand the social management itself that occurs in these spaces, which "[...] influences negotiations and the construction of meanings in terms of 'things that should be done' when organizations from different sectors interact (companies, governments, civil society), in a process that not only produces goods and services, but also subjectivities and identities" (Rosa & Mendonça, 2010, p. 656).

METHODOLOGICAL-THEORETICAL REFERENCES

The concept of frames is dynamic and permits the capture of qualities related to the interpretative work performed by agents in social movements: i) the conception of ideologies and belief systems as interactional realizations which become prominent in this process until they become frames; and ii) cognitive structures which produce collective action and influence subsequent framing processes. The latter suggests a recursive relationship between these two processes, or in other words, framing makes them prominent or produces frames, which in turn makes subsequent framing processes possible (Hunt, Benford, & Snow, 1994). Thus, it is important to stress that interactional frames are different from collective action frames, which possess three fundamental functions: the *mobilization of action* – which brings their members to the streets –; *mobilization by consensus* – which converts observers into members –; and *contramobilization* – which neutralizes their adversaries. In order for these functions to be in fact effective, a frame of collective action needs three fundamental components, which Snow and Benford (1988) call core framing tasks: a diagnosis, a prognosis and a reason to engage, or motivational framing.

A diagnostic framing involves identifying a problem and attributing blame or causality to an individual, a collective or its structures. A prognostic framing not only suggests a possible solution, but also identifies strategies, tactics, and targets, specifying what needs to be done to transform the problem identified by the framing into a diagnosis. These first two tasks are found in the ideational field. The last motivational framing is fundamental and also mobilizes the emotional field of the participants in the process as well as possible members. It also has the function of instigating participation through the construction of specific vocabulary, songs, slogans, banners, and artifacts which represent the movement and encourage their members to continue their mobilization.

This recursive process between a frame and framing is especially important if we think of what Tarrow (1983) terms cycles of protest. This is because they generate interpretative frames which come to be mobilized by other movements and other cycles, creating an "interpretative repertoire" (Benford, 2013). Due to their aggregating capacity and universality, some frames are shared by a large number of movements, and thus come to be termed master frames (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).

This type of analysis is based on the principle that problems are constructed, with there being competing interpretations of what they are. Thus, their political solutions are contained within the construction of the problem itself (Bacchi, 1999). Frames are written and verbal texts, which are understood to be symbolic and structural behaviors, which express behaviors (conversations, discourses – like phrases –, slogans and songs) and visual representations (photos, drawings, and caricatures), which usually manifest themselves in a joint manner. In this way, the critical analysis of frames, sometimes ends up being more descriptive, given that they detail the employed collective action frames, and their role and repercussions within society. Snow (2012) affirms that they contribute to the work of producing and interpreting meanings by focusing on what is relevant

or irrelevant in terms of an object, functioning as articulation mechanisms, because they involve various highlighted elements that form a specific group of meanings and reconfigure the way given objects are viewed or understood in relation to other objects or actors and actresses.

From this perspective, this work seeks to identify the frames mobilized by feminist movements to treat violence against women, in order to understand in what form (and whether) the way in which they are formed is reflected in the state's public policies. To accomplish this, this work's research corpus is based on specific content from two of the country's largest newspapers during distinct timespans. The use of this material as a research source regarding social movements is due to study opportunities which make it possible, given that the data extracted from them permits comparative and historic analyses. In addition, they are few other sources available for some social movements (Earl, Martin, McCarthy, & Soule, 2004).

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

We selected Folha de São Paulo and O Globo because they are newspapers with national circulation, and they cover not only local events but also events in various regions throughout the country. To create our database, we looked at three institutional moments which marked actions fighting violence against women: the creation of a permanent female police precinct (in 1985), the establishment of special criminal courts (1995) and the promulgation of the Maria da Penha Law (in 2006). Historically, these events have been indicated as the result of interactions between state governmental bodies and feminist movements fighting violence against women (C. M. Santos, 2010).

Considering these events, we established three-time intervals: immediately before and after the first two events, from 1983 to 1987 and 1993 to 1997, with each of them covering a period of five years. The last interval, from 2004 to 2006, has a shorter duration due to the focus on the Maria da Penha Law, which is considered the greatest accomplishment of the feminist movement in terms of fighting violence against women (Pinto, 2003). These time periods were established because the dissemination and resonance of a frame does not happen in a rapid manner, and these intervals help identify changes in how they are reported, which could have happened between one moment in time and another. In addition, they help identify the frames present in each period.

In the selection of the articles which were included in our database, we used the search engines of these newspapers' digital archives. The texts were filtered by using the following descriptors: "violence against women", "domestic violence", "women in situations of violence", "gender violence", "female police precinct", "special criminal courts", "Maria da Penha Law". The descriptors were chosen because they were the main terms used in the literature which discusses violence against women during the studied period.

The selection of the articles included searches in both newspapers and the creation of a database. The first filter resulted in 344, 607 and 275 articles, respectively, for the periods 1983-1987, 1993-1997 and 2004-2006. We excluded the texts that were not related to the subject, such as summaries of films and books, advertisements for television programs and theatrical plays, and announcements for events unrelated to the subject, which only mentioned the descriptors, but did not discuss the subject or were restricted to the announcement of when services were offered. In cases in which the same text appeared various times with different descriptors, we only counted it a single time.

With these selections, we created a database with 421 articles from these three periods. For the first period, we located 186 texts, for the second 165, and for the third 61. Then we analyzed them and identified "who" was named as the perpetrator of violence and with what frequency, and the "types of violence" in the newspapers. In addition, we proceeded with a qualitative analysis of the articles in which all of the texts were located and all the main issues that they address were catalogued. This analysis enabled us to identify the frames which resonated in these texts: in the 1983-1987 selection it was recognition; in the 1993-1997 selection it was prison sentences; and in the 2003-2006 selection it was human rights.

Those who love do not kill: the frame of recognition (1983-1987)

In the first period, we found 186 articles in which we identified the presence of the recognition frame, or in other words, a group of ideas which made it possible for various organizations and feminist groups to present the problem to public opinion and put pressure on the state to act. Box 1 below shows the number of articles analyzed for each year.

Box 1
Number of articles analyzed for the period from 1983-1987

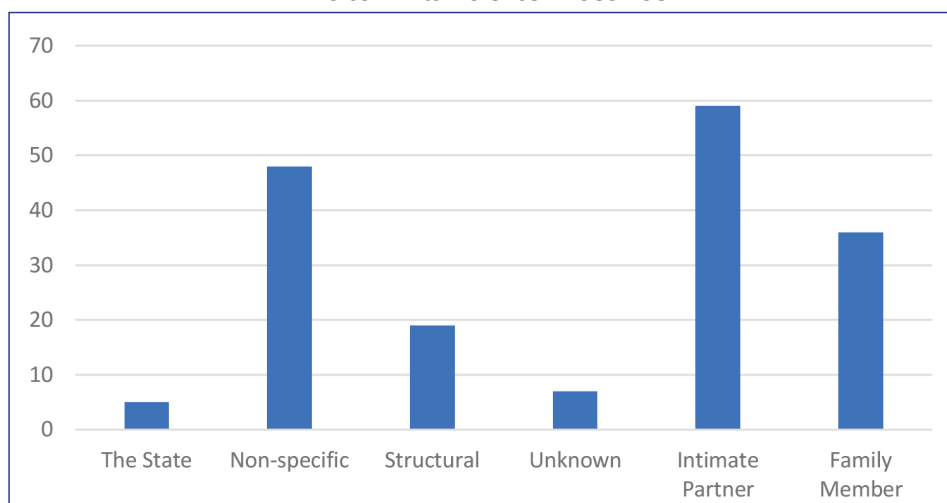
| Year | Keywords | Per year |
|------|--|----------|
| 1983 | Violence against women | 11 |
| 1984 | Violence against women/domestic violence | 16 |
| 1985 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 35 |
| 1986 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 76 |
| 1987 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 48 |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In this group of texts, the movement’s diagnosis was oppression, given that women were seen as “victims”. The prognosis to overcome this situation of violence was increasing the awareness of “masculine domination” as a fundamental element required to take a position on this issue. Feminists viewed this awareness as a solution and a strategy in their search for justice. They fought for the recognition of a daily situation in the lives of millions of women, choosing violence committed by intimate partners to represent the need for justice, and at the same time they exposed the unequal treatment afforded to women by the legal system.

Graph 1 shows “who” in these articles was frequently responsible for violence against women. Even though many of the texts did not specifically identify the author of the aggression, the intimate partner was the most often cited, followed by family members, structural violence, unknown violence, and the state.

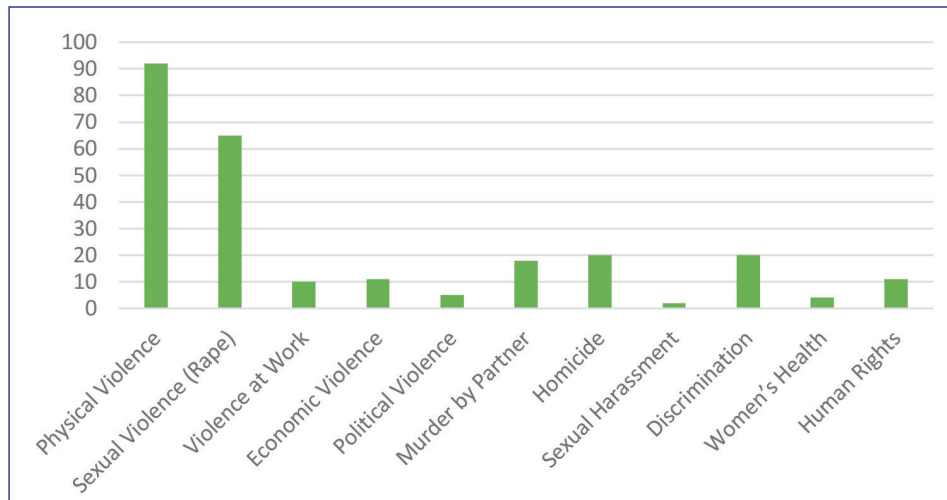
Graph 1
Who commits violence – 1983-1987



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Graph 2 shows the main forms of violence reported during the period. In first place was physical violence (beating); in second place, other forms, such as private imprisonment, chaining, burning, stabbing, rape, sexual abuse, and homicide.

Graph 2
Types of violence committed – 1983-1987



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The articles emphasize the physical violence against women presenting two common elements; the evidence of a crime committed and the fight against impunity. Even though it is mentioned, discrimination was not understood as a structural and institutional issue, but rather one perpetuated by men. There was an effort to take this subject from the private sphere and place it in the public sphere, as well as a tendency to value punishment of these crimes by the legal system. We cannot forget, however, the social and political context of Brazil at that time. In 1985, the redemocratization process was beginning after 21 years of military dictatorship, whose efforts were centered on denouncing violations of civil rights and the formation of new political arrangements. The journalistic texts sought to introduce the subject of violence against women as a crime, reporting data and numbers collected by feminist organizations that assist women in situations of violence. Within this scenario, the institutionalization of the São Paulo State Council on the Female Condition by Franco Montoro through Decree nº 20,892 of 1983 (Decreto nº 20.892, de 4 de abril de 1983) was also widely noted, given that it represented the state's recognition that there was a problem with the way women were treated in Brazilian society.

Pamphlets and posters described women as oppressed and men as acting with impunity. The motivational elements created by activists were widely reported by the mass media, which widely reinforced in public opinion the idea that women suffered (and suffer) a specific type of violence. During this period, the slogan "Those who love do not kill"¹ became the order of the day at all protests and demonstrations, in addition to "Reduce violence against women" and "Those who kill women will be convicted". Also in this vein, the NGO SOS Corpo (SOS Body) launched the campaign "Silence is violence's accomplice", which also became a slogan in feminist awareness campaigns.

Beginning in 1985, the newspapers began to publish statistics collected by female assistance organizations. In articles, they emphasized the seriousness of the subject and the need for the state to recognize this problem. In 1985, through Law nº 7,353 of 1985 (Lei nº 7.353, de 29 de agosto de 1985), the National Council on Women's Rights was created, linked to the Ministry of Justice. Municipal, state and national councils began to debate and construct public policies for women. In addition, entities like SOS Mulher (SOS Women)², the Brazilian Order of Lawyers, and unions sought to sensitize the population about this subject. In an official pronouncement, Ruth Escobar, then President of the National Council on Women's Rights, affirmed that the immediate work of this governmental body would be spent creating daycare centers and curbing violence

¹ It was used in a public act for the first time in Belo Horizonte in 1980 to protest the deaths of Maria Regina de Souza Rocha and Eloísa Ballesteros (Fleury-Teixeira & Chrystus, 2019).

² SOS Mulher (SOS Women) launched the "impunity dossier", which reported 14 murders and aggressions against underage women whose aggressors acted with impunity (O Globo, 1985, p. 1).

against women (O Globo, 1985, p. 5). In that same year, they launched a national “Fighting Violence Against Women” campaign, which mainly addressed beatings and rapes in the family home (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Official advertisement



Source: O Globo (1985 p. 7, p. 9).

In August 1985, the first Female Protection Police Precinct, specialized in dealing with crimes against women, was created in São Paulo (Pasinato & C. M. Santos, 2008). Many articles came to focus on the services provided by this precinct – which quickly spread to other Brazilian state capitals – and its data about the registered occurrences. A little over a year after the inauguration of the first unit, there were 26 similar units in 16 states and the Federal District. Together they registered 14 thousand complaints (Folha de São Paulo, 1986).

After this initial period, the articles came to focus on women’s lack of awareness of their rights, indicating that these police precincts acted more as guidance and counsel centers than government bodies to curb this violence. The novelty of these units broadened institutional awareness of the crimes committed in addition to producing data, and they also engrained an awareness of the gravity of this issue, which enabled society to deal with it more directly. With a space devoted to reporting and obtaining specific assistance, journalistic accusations of violence increased.

The female police precincts were endorsed by the State Council on Women’s Rights as the main public policy in this sector, and they also emphasized the need to open more units all over the country (O Globo, 1985, p. 5). The National Council on the Female Condition launched advertising pieces about the dangers of silence which ran in various national media outlets using the slogans: “Learning to be submissive begins early and creates inequality and violence against women” and “It’s easier to ignore it, but it’s much more violent. Violence against women just leads to more violence” (Figure 1).

Of all the articles published during this period, 26 featured declarations from the feminist point of view, discussing the increase in complaints and the recognition of the situation as a crime against people and not against customs, as it had been understood up until then. We can say that the objective of the activists at that time was to give the necessary recognition to the issue of violence against women by mobilizing people to act: the enemies that needed to be fought were invisibility and silence. Within this context, the use of language in terms of crime was important in that the solution of the problem was inscribed in its formulation (Bacchi, 1999). Maria Amélia Azevedo Goldberg (1985, p. 4), the National Council on the Female Condition’s Coordinator of the Commission on Violence Against Women, defined the governmental body’s vision by stating “[...] violence is expressed through the sexual, psychological or physical abuse practiced by men, with the explicit purpose of subjugating women against their will.”

The creation of the female police precinct was an important movement to establish violence against women as a crime and, at the same time, it was an admission of the state that conventional police precincts were chauvinist. More than this, it acknowledged that chauvinism was institutional.

In terms of resonance, it can be said that the frame of recognition managed to reach the population and affect the lives of thousands of Brazilians. It served as a way to give form to a situation and transform it into a “serious problem”. However, it was based on an essentialist and universalist frame based on a binary construction of gender. The political cost of choosing this group of ideas was the silencing of voices and agendas within the feminist movement itself. According to Ferree (2003), by renouncing transversal issues, this frame resonated in Brazilian society at the time, producing specific actions and leaving aside other interpretive schemes such as violence against lesbian and Black women. Violence against women came to be synonymous with conjugal and sexual violence, so that the mere awareness of its existence became the solution to fighting it.

Broadening the issue: the frame of prison sentences (1993-1997)

In this second period we identified 165 articles, which are divided by year in Box 2 below.

Box 2
Total number of articles analyzed for the period 1993-1997

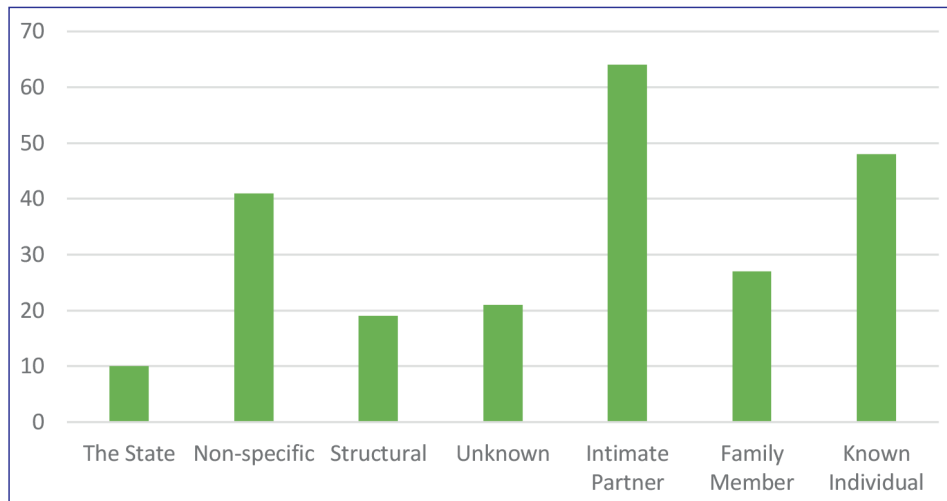
| Year | Keywords | Total number per year |
|------|---|-----------------------|
| 1993 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 25 |
| 1994 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 36 |
| 1995 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 54 |
| 1996 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts | 32 |
| 1997 | Violence against women/domestic violence/female police precincts/ special criminal courts | 18 |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

It is important to point out that a United Nations’ World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, the year that registered the highest number of analyzed newspaper articles. At this time, the central issue in these articles was no longer the recognition that women suffer from violence. The struggle was now to reform the Brazilian Penal Code so that it would alter how the legislation understood crimes against the female sex. The use of terms such as “inequality” in these articles reinforced the idea of a structure and privileges which placed women below men in the hierarchy. Thus, we identified in these texts the *frame* of prison sentences, in which the diagnosis was of a structural nature related to the problem, and the prognosis was “justice” for women. Its focus was on the need for specific legislation, the increase in female participation in politics and education, and greater awareness of violence and broader rights. The influence of international organizations was also very present, above all the discourse that this was a global problem which deserved to be taken seriously as a public subject.

In Graph 3, we can perceive that there was a relative reduction in violence by an intimate partner compared to the previous period, even though they were still the individuals most frequently responsible for the violence. Another important piece of data has to do with the appearance of a new person responsible for violence, a known man, who was generally a colleague at work or a friend of the family who circulated in the social sphere of the woman who suffered from this violence.

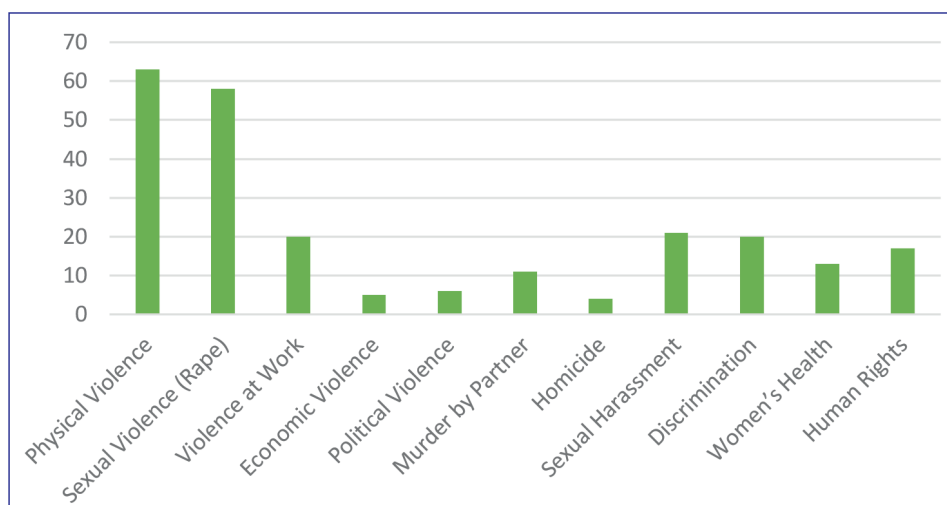
Graph 3
Who commits violence – 1994-1997



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In terms of the type of violence, it was possible to perceive an amplification of the discussion of this subject in these two newspapers. Physical and sexual violence continued to be the most often cited, but other forms of violence, such as those that occur at work and sexual harassment, also began to appear.

Graph 4
Types of violence committed – 1993-1997



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In 1993, the Globo Group launched a national campaign in its printed newspapers and TV stations encouraging accusations of crimes committed against women. Using the slogan “Impunity leads to violence. Don’t let it hurt you. Denounce violence” (O Globo, 1993, p. 15), it had two lines of argument: one criticized the judicial system for not punishing aggressors and emphasized the need to fight impunity; the other sought to reinforce (in an unfortunate manner) the proactive role of women

in relationships. It was a change in the tone of the reporting and the way women who suffered violence were treated – still as the “victim”, but also as being responsible for the aggression itself.

In the texts which presented institutional data about this phenomenon, two new pieces of information became recurrent: alcohol and unemployment as factors which aggravated violence, as well as the number of cases in which women did not press charges. The articles also emphasized that few cases resulted in prison, and many of them just resulted in fines. There was an explicit complaint in terms of the penal code being out of date, given that as mentioned before, it interpreted these situations as crimes against customs, with the exception being those committed by guardians.

Then a new term appeared on the agenda: a discussion of sexual harassment and rape in the work environment – presented in six articles. Among the greatest challenges according to these texts was collecting proof and the procedures for filing complaints, given the work and social hierarchical positions of the aggressors, and a woman’s risk of losing her job.

Another issue which began to appear during this period involved female sexual health. We identified three texts on this subject, one about abortion, another about family planning, and a third about sexual tourism.

In May 1996, Folha de São Paulo published the main proposals of the National Program of Human Rights promoted by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who envisaged:

Protect Women’s Rights

Short Term

National Program Fighting Violence Against Women, integrated assistance centers for women at risk from violence, and policies to fight sexual domestic violence.

Medium Term

Regulation of Paragraph XX of Article 7 of the Constitution, which addresses how to protect women in the job market, the revoking of discriminatory norms in infra-constitutional legislation, legislation to fight gender-based discrimination; offering the gender perspective in education; and the training of public employees and school curricula.

Long Term

Implementation of laws which ensure equal rights for men and women (Folha de São Paulo, 1996, p. 48).

This was the first mention of the term “gender” that we identified in the researched articles which did not refer to violence, but rather fighting discrimination and including this perspective in school curricula. It is important to highlight that the term “domestic violence” as an indicator of acts of violence committed against women in the domestic environment continued to be used with great frequency.

We identified six journalistic texts which explicitly supported feminist movements or ideas. At the time, there were a large number of specialized NGOs which were dedicated to this subject, which was frequently on the agenda of their partnerships with various governmental bodies created – and reactivated, in the case of the National Council on the Female Condition – by the government at the time.

In 1997, a Globo article cited the document “Equality strategies” published by the National Council on Women’s Rights, which presented federal government action plans with practical measures for public policies and legislation to implement the commitments assumed by the Beijing Conference in 1995. At this time, feminists began to register their dissatisfaction with the Special Criminal Courts and their demands for changes in the program’s references. The movements advocated a more inclusive focus in terms of public policies:

These women advocated the reformulation of the female police precincts due to the creation of special civil and criminal courts, as well as the integration of the racial perspective in programs related to domestic and sexual violence. Most of the women who are battered and raped are Black or of Mixed Race (Alves, 1997, p. 4).

It is interesting to observe that there was already a feminist demand for the recognition of intersectionality between race and gender in cases of violence against women. To summarize this period, we can say that activists pressed for the phenomenon to be understood as a public problem and the responsibility of the state. This battle developed in two ways. The first focused on the legal aspect and argued for a change in judicial orders to remove the problem from the private sphere and treat it like an event that has serious consequences for public life. The second sense sought to change women’s views of violence, guaranteeing support for them so that they could escape their situations.

The diagnosis was still the same: men commit violence against women, but now under the refining lens of gender, a perspective which explains that the phenomenon was intimately associated with a system whose structure guaranteed the impunity of aggressors. Even though various types of violence appeared in the two newspapers, the most frequently reported ones were those which occurred in the domestic environment. In them, it was the intimate partner who was responsible, and the most common types of violence were beatings and rapes. The prognosis was to mobilize these women to fight for their rights, to make them aware that this situation was wrong, because otherwise they remained silent, becoming accomplices to the violence.

There was an effort by feminists and members of the government to deal with this issue as a violation of human rights, and despite the countless reports of the increase in violence against women, the tone was positive, with reports of conquests and measures that were being taken. Even though there was not much news about feminist demonstrations as in the previous period, activists were present on the public scene acting in NGOs and even governmental institutions. Therefore, there was a broadening of federal government actions in collaboration with the movement.

Within this frame, even though the gender perspective brought new issues with it, such as discrimination and the fight for equality, which made the structural element of relationships viable, the discussion of racism was incipient and homophobia and other forms of violence suffered by women were not the object of discussion.

The internationalization of the problem: the frame of human rights (2004-2006)

During the last period we identified 61 articles. Box 3 displays the number of articles in terms of the year they were published.

Box 3
Total number of articles analyzed for the period 2004-2006

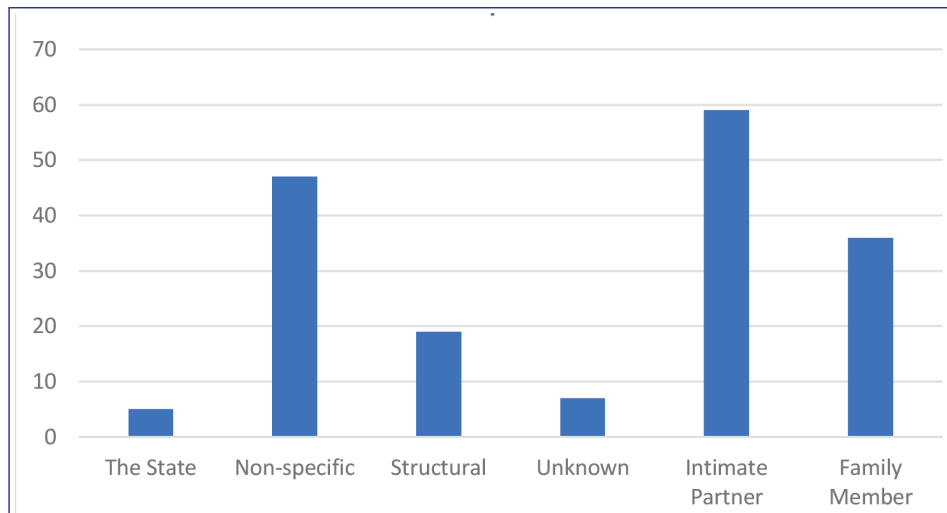
| Year | Keywords | Total number per year |
|------|---|-----------------------|
| 2004 | Violence against women/domestic violence/gender violence/female police precincts/special courts | 18 |
| 2005 | Violence against women/domestic violence/gender violence/female police precincts | 21 |
| 2006 | Violence against women/domestic violence/gender violence/female police precincts/special courts | 22 |

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Following a trend that began in the previous period, violence against women came to be understood as a complex international problem that affects various spheres of life and human rights and needs to be eradicated through integrated action. The gender lens accentuated its emphasis on social structure, and the fight came to be against a phenomenon which was recognized as a state responsibility. It was a period of institutionalization for policies and governmental bodies oriented towards women, during which occurred the federal government’s implementation of the National Plan for Women’s Policies and the creation of the Special Secretariat for Women’s Policies.

In Graph 5, it is possible to identify the perpetrators of violence which appeared with greatest frequency in these articles.

Graph 5
Who commits violence – 2004-2006



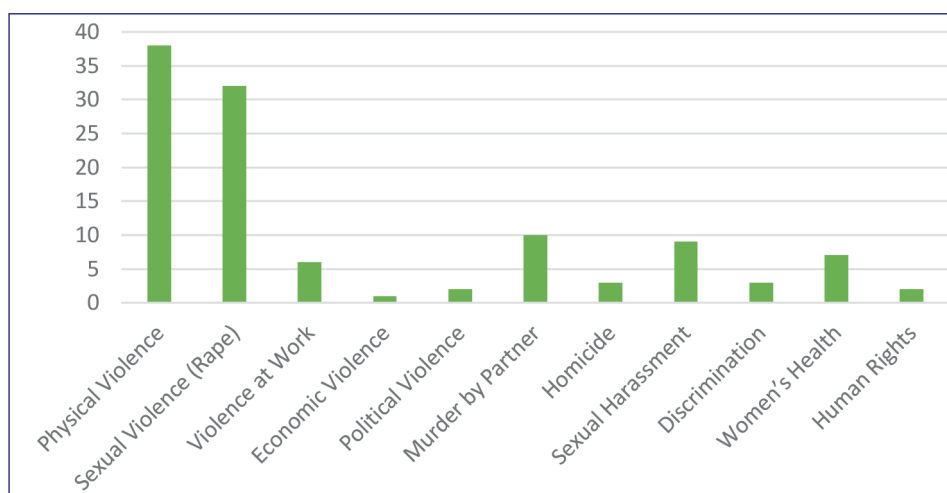
Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Like the previous periods, the intimate partner was still the main perpetrator of violence. The difference was in the fact that articles began to include the issue of repeating incidents of aggression, and thus, previews of death. Discontent with the handling of this problem by the special courts grew, as can be noted by the clamor for more rigorous legislation.

Thus, some of the main points of violence against women addressed by the media during this period were: a) the creation and actions of governmental bodies which dealt with women’s issues; b) the participation of international organizations and the work developed on this subject – especially the World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization, the United Nations, and the Organization of American States; c) the feminization of HIV/AIDS; and d) the appearance of therapy groups for aggressive men.

Graph 6 shows that physical violence appears most frequently followed by rape. During this period, however, the focus of discussions on women’s health shifted from abortion to sexually transmitted diseases and family planning.

Graph 6
Type of violence committed – 2004-2006



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The articles about sexual violence emphasized the increase in the number of cases and the growing trend of accusations by women. Thus, as happened before with the subject of physical violence, these articles also pointed out the inefficiency of the law in dealing with these women and punishing their aggressors. In an extensive editorial, which recalled the story of Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes who inspired Law nº 11,340 of 2006 (Lei nº 11.340 de 07 de agosto de 2006), the newspaper O Globo showed that 91% of Brazilians viewed aggression against women by their partners and husbands as being “very serious” (Helena, 2005, p. 17). Even though it was not associated with female health, violence against women came to be widely discussed in this area. In that year, the WHO published a report which indicated that the Brazilian female population was “[...] more susceptible to violence from people they know at home than from strangers” (O Globo, 2005, p. 34).

Two extensive reports announced the passage of the Maria da Penha Law on August 7, 2006. Recognized as the fruit of the battle of the women’s movement and various organizations within civil society, one of the texts noted:

[...] mechanisms need to be created to deal with this violence, including criminal courts and places to take care of victims of violence. Seeing this law passed after so much struggle is nonetheless a victory against domestic, family and even psychological violence” said one of the Coordinators of the Pernambuco Women’s Forum (Fontenelle, 2006, p. 7).

The efforts made to punish this violence, which were very evident during this period, were centered around the thesis of providing continuity to the discussions initiated in the previous period. There was, however, an important change in the conception of the phenomenon and the tools needed to combat it. The diagnosis recognized that violence is culturally produced and rectified, indicating the existence of a structural element that should be considered. The previous fight against impunity placed the need for judicial instruments to face this problem on the public agenda, as well as public policies to guarantee women’s rights (Farah, 2004; B. R. M. Santos & Rezende, 2020). The prognosis, on the other hand, postulated that this role was not up only to women, given that this violence was a human rights issue. Thus, the solution to the problem would be in the hands of society as a whole, and the instrument to face it would be to (re)educate both parties.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the 1970s and the 1980s, the subject of violence has been addressed as one of the greatest problems facing the female population. In this sense, it can be said that, due to the pressure applied by the feminist movement, there was a transnationalization of the debate about gender inequalities. In the year 1975, termed the International Year of the Woman by the United Nations, it was one of the strategies used to encourage debate in Brazil and the world. In addition, conferences and international forums, which many Brazilian women participated in, made it possible to trace local and regional strategies in the fight against inequality. The feminist movement brought plurality to this discourse, making it possible to approach this subject from various perspectives. The first mobilizations against this phenomenon revolved around murders of women and the impunity of their intimate partners. In the 1990s, with the consolidation of the redemocratization process in Brazil and the expansion of feminism, the debates came to center around the conceptualization of violence and how (and whether) other categories should be included in this definition.

Considering the definitions of Snow and Benford (1992), we understand this phenomenon as the master frame, because it articulates a group of generic ideas about “violence” and “women”. However, we have identified that it is of a restricted type, given that it utilizes a small repertoire of definitions which describe conjugal and family violence against women, observing them only through the lens of gender. With little interpretive discretion for civil society movements and organizations, this vision does not make it possible to address this subject in an intersectional manner or take into account other forms of violence (such as symbolic violence). In no way does this mean to say that these issues have not been addressed by these movements, but we have to admit that this has occurred in a very restricted manner, and it has not reached public opinion in the same way.

Most of the analyzed journalistic articles in this study report violence (murder, rape and/or beatings), public policies that combat this problem, and statistics related to it. Our analysis has enabled us to perceive that, even though the “violence” and “women” categories have been expanded to include other conceptions, this subject has been understood in a restricted manner, as part of a binary relationship which has conjugal and family violence as its greatest expression. This construction

certainly has undergone changes over time, but its construction process has had an overall impact on the way violence against women and solutions to it are portrayed in the present day.

At first, the main point appeared to be giving due recognition to violence specifically committed against people of the female sex, removing this violence from the private sphere and making it public. This phenomenon certainly became visible because women's complaints and demands were heard by the state. Later, when visibility had been achieved, there was the fight for recognition of the gravity of these events. Considering this aspect, legal mechanisms to punish those who commit this violence were debated, and by admitting the importance of transforming this individual problem into a public problem, women in situations of violence have been offered a judicial system which is capable of dealing with their accusations.

Later, when the vocabulary of this fight changed with the entrance of the frame of human rights, two aspects became evident. First of all, violence against women is a worldwide social issue, and therefore it should be everyone's responsibility; and secondly, the judicial mechanisms used to deal with this issue are no longer (or never were) sufficient. Punishment by itself is not enough; we need to diminish the problem.

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