



Use of Hypothetical Situations as a Methodological Resource in a Social Representations Study

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Abstract: Gender-based violence is a multifaceted problem, recurrently addressed in different fields, and its approach is always challenging. The study aimed to characterize the use of hypothetical situation vignette as a methodological resource in the study of representations and social practices of gender and gender-based violence among professionals from Specialized Police Stations for Women's Assistance (DEAMs). A total of 15 adults of different ages, genders, and roles, working at two DEAMs in different Brazilian states, who were presented with two hypothetical situations took part in the study. The data were submitted to IRaMuTeQ and analyzed in the light of the Social Representations Theory. Data suggested social representations of gender anchored in the traditional division of social roles and gender-based violence supported by ideas about gender oppression and legal norms. It is considered that the vignettes contributed to a broader understanding of these phenomena, capturing meanings, positions, and practices.

Keywords: gender, gender-based violence, social representation, qualitative research

Uso de Situações Hipotéticas como Recurso Metodológico em Estudo de Representações Sociais

Resumo: A violência de gênero é um problema multifacetado, recorrentemente abordado em diversos campos, e sua abordagem é sempre desafiadora. Este estudo teve como objetivo caracterizar o uso de vinheta de situação hipotética como recurso metodológico em estudo de representações e práticas sociais de gênero e de violência de gênero entre profissionais de Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento à Mulher (Deams). Participaram 15 adultos de idades, gêneros e funções variadas, atuantes em duas Deams de diferentes estados brasileiros, aos quais foram apresentadas duas situações hipotéticas. Os dados foram submetidos ao IRaMuTeQ e analisados à luz da Teoria de Representações Sociais. Apontaram representações sociais de gênero ancoradas em divisão tradicional de papéis sociais e de violência de gênero sustentadas em ideias sobre opressão de gênero e em normas legais. Considera-se que as vinhetas contribuíram para compreensão mais ampla destes fenômenos, captando significações, posicionamentos e práticas.

Palavras-chave: gênero, violência de gênero, representação social, pesquisa qualitativa

Uso de Situaciones Hipotéticas como Recurso Metodológico en Estudio de las Representaciones Sociales

Resumen: La violencia de género es un problema multifacético tratado en diferentes campos, y su abordaje es siempre desafiante. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo evaluar el uso de viñetas de situaciones hipotéticas como recurso metodológico para estudiar las representaciones y prácticas sociales de género y violencia de género entre los profesionales de las Comisarias Especializadas de Atención a la Mujer (Deams). Participaron 15 adultos de diferentes edades, géneros y roles que trabajan en dos Deams en diferentes estados brasileños y se les presentaron dos situaciones hipotéticas. Los datos se enviaron a IRaMuTeQ para pasar por un análisis a la luz de la teoría de las representaciones sociales. Señalaron representaciones sociales de género ancladas en la división tradicional de los roles sociales, y de violencia de género sostenidas en ideas sobre opresión de género y en normas jurídicas. Se considera que las viñetas contribuyeron a una comprensión más amplia de estos fenómenos, captando significados, posicionamientos y prácticas.

Palabras clave: género, violencia de género, representación social, investigación cualitativa

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In society, men and women establish their relationships in an asymmetrical manner, so that the former are placed at the top of the social hierarchy, seen as authorities and power holders, while the latter occupy inferior or subordinate positions. To analyze these socially constituted relationships based on a perceived sexual distinction, feminist and gender studies use the term "gender" as a category of analysis, dissociating it from a biological and essentialist

notion, and emphasizing how these perceived differences consolidate social relations (Scott, 1995).

Such gender inequality entails several consequences and social issues, including gender-based violence. This corresponds to a multifaceted — encompassing social, political, educational, cultural, and health issues — and intersectional — involving several axes of oppression, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and age, among others — issues. Thus, gender-based violence against women is understood as a problem not only in intimate and private relationships, but also in the public and in the human rights spheres (Vigano & Laffin, 2019).

In view of this social problem, one of the proposed coping mechanisms is the Specialized Police Stations for Women (*Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento à Mulher* – DEAMs). Law No. 11.340 (2006) — Maria da Penha Law —, which legitimizes the creation of DEAMs throughout Brazil, is based on an understanding that domestic and family violence against women is “any action or omission based on gender that causes death, injury, physical, sexual or psychological suffering and moral or patrimonial damage” (Art. 5).

Despite this law that supports DEAMs creation and establishes rules for their operation, professionals from these police stations are not oblivious to the current social thinking on gender and violence issues, so that their practical work include their technical/professional training, but also the meanings produced in broader social coexistence. This study was proposed based on the Theory of Social Representations (TSR). This theory understands that there are two levels of knowledge that coexist and complement each other: consensual knowledge, constructed in everyday social relations and by common sense, and reified knowledge, vertically transmitted by an authority, such as the law (Moscovici, 2000/2015).

TSR approaches this naïve and informal knowledge of everyday life, which is called social representations (SRs), which correspond to a way of understanding, signifying, and communicating the reality around us, encompassing values, attitudes, symbols, and positions of a given community. It is also concerned with revealing the processes involved in the production of this type of knowledge that, primarily, aims to confer familiarity to unknown, abstract, or distant issues, inserting them into the daily life of a given group (Moscovici, 2000/2015).

Considering the objectives and specificity of the investigated group, methodological decisions that could facilitate access to the universe of knowledge of interest (the SRs) were necessary, circumventing possible attempts to camouflage them through technical/formal discourse. What type of methodological design could contribute in this sense?

The TSR does not hold a single method for data collection and analysis, but a wide variety, which may be related to Moscovici’s legacy that it would be a “theory under construction.” Even so, some methods are more privileged than others, which varies according to what one specifically

intends to access: the aspects related to the cultural context that guarantee the production and maintenance of the SRs, as in the investigations linked to Jodelet’s sociogenetic/procedural aspect (1989/2015); or the SR structure and content, as in the quantitative studies linked to Abric’s Central Nucleus Theory, or even the dimensions of production of knowledge, social field and system of thoughts, as in the research guided by the societal approach founded by Doise (Sá, 1998).

In the procedural/sociogenetic line, which this investigation is based on, there is a primacy of qualitative methodologies, and the use of individual interviews, for example, is widely employed. In this case, Jodelet recommends that questions should focus on the concrete experiences of participants’ daily lives so that hidden behaviors and content emerge in the conversation (Sá, 1998). In her research on the SRs of madness in a family colony in France, Jodelet opted for an ethnographic interview approach, which allowed her to relate the information obtained based on the reports with the social practices evidenced in the data collection process (Jodelet, 1989/2015).

Given the TRS inherent openness to the use of different methodologies and the importance given to the study of practices for a broader understanding of the SR object, this research focused on the use of hypothetical vignettes in association with other instruments, thus seeking to facilitate the emergence of the interviewees’ daily behaviors and their position regarding the phenomenon, as intended by Jodelet (1989/2015).

The vignette is a data collection instrument that is rarely used in TRS studies and consists of presenting a situation, which may be real or hypothetical, so that interviewees can position themselves in relation to it. The situation can be presented by narrative, the case in this study, or visual, and can be used in qualitative and quantitative research. In this way, it is a malleable and flexible instrument that serves to capture participants’ practices, feelings, moral values, and beliefs in relation to a given question (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020; Törrönen, 2018).

In Brazil, this type of instrument has been used in some studies, but it is still not very expressive from a quantitative point of view. For illustrative purposes, it is possible to mention Coelho and Silva (2020), who used hypothetical situations about contexts of domestic violence and loss of money in which respondents had to position themselves regarding the possibility of arrests and immediate losses, evidencing less self-control in men; Fanis and Bomfim (2020), who used vignettes to investigate adherence to values of justice and generosity among boys and girls aged 11 to 14, finding that girls have a greater adherence to these values; Patias et al. (2021), who investigated the feminism SRs among Brazilians based on vignettes that portrayed different situations, and found that people positioned themselves positively or negatively based on characteristics of the people presented in the situation (for example, skin color, and activity/function, among others), which also varied according to the participants’ gender, age, and religion; Sehnem et al. (2019), who, also using vignettes of

hypothetical situations, observed that humanized reception and compulsory notification are actions that guide nursing professionals in the context of violence against women.

As observed, the use of vignettes of hypothetical situations can contribute to studies on attitudes, positions, beliefs, and practices regarding various matters, such as racial and gender issues, domestic violence, and violence against women. In this sense, our method is in line with the literature on TRS, justifying its adoption as one of the research instruments, partially reported here, since this research comes from a Master's thesis. This study aimed to characterize the use of vignettes of hypothetical situations as a methodological resource in the study on representations and social practices of gender and gender violence among Specialized Police Stations for Women (DEAMs) professionals.

Method

Participants

A total of 15 DEAM professionals participated in the study. The inclusion criteria was that professionals had to be part of the professional staff of the aforementioned police stations and a civil servant; the exclusion criterion was applied when the professional had a labor relation with an outsourced company. Regarding the sample, 12 participants were female and three were male; aged from 35 to 60 years; seven were Mixed, four were White, and four were Black. The length of time they have been working at a DEAM varied from three months to 32 years. Regarding their roles, participants were police officers, social workers, police chiefs, clerks, mediators, psychologists, and receptionists. Except for one participant, all had completed higher education, with degrees in Law, Social Work, Psychology, Administration, Social Sciences (the professional also had a degree in Law), Production Engineering, and History.

Instruments

Vignettes of hypothetical situations: The vignettes used are hypothetical situations that portray cases of domestic and gender-based violence. The first vignette described the story of a couple consisting of a man and a woman, in which the man suspected that his partner was cheating on him because she received messages from a guy he did not know; the man, from then on, began to make comments about the woman's behavior to others, to insult her and to threaten her, until she sought help from a DEAM station. The second vignette described the story of a couple consisting of a man and a woman; the man used to hit the woman when he was bothered by some behavior of hers, and after a situation in which the man was drunk and assaulted her, the woman sought help from a DEAM station. After the narration of each vignette, 11 questions were put to the participants, who were asked to describe: the couple's physical and socioeconomic characteristics in the story; personal

and professional opinions about the couple portrayed, the violence characterized, as well as its causes; possible referral of the situation, if it were real and addressed by the participants in their work.

Procedures

Initially, a telephone call was made to the institutions, in which the research objective was presented. Later, consent to carry out the study was obtained with a consent form, authorized by the chief of police in charge in each of the DEAMs. Afterwards, the researcher spoke to the professionals directly, on site or by letter (physical and/or virtual), to invite them to participate in the research.

Data collection. Data collection was carried out in person and individually with each participant in rooms provided at the DEAMs facilities, with the authorization of each participant by signing an informed consent form. First, data collection took place at the DEAM located in Brazil's Southeast region and, later, at the DEAM in Northeast region. Different instruments were applied in a complementary manner, starting with the application of vignettes of hypothetical situations, which are the focus of this article.

Data analysis. The data from the vignettes of hypothetical situations were transcribed in full into a LibreOffice Writer document, composing a corpus that was adjusted according to the guidelines in the manual by Camargo and Justo (2021). Then, it was submitted to the *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* (IRaMuTeQ) software, which facilitates the analysis of a large volume of texts based on several analysis possibilities. In this research, IRaMuTeQ version 0.7 alpha 2 was used and Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) was performed, yielding classes constituted from text segments (TSs); these are parts of texts coming from the corpus referring to the initial set of texts (in this case, responses to hypothetical situations), which were put together according to the similarity in vocabulary, forming a class. At the end of the DHC, a class dendrogram is generated, composed of TSs, which symbolize a grouping of words with a certain meaning within a specific context, and which differentiate them from the other classes (Camargo & Justo, 2021).

Ethical Considerations

The research followed the ethical standards of research, being authorized by the Research Ethics Committee of the university to which the authors are affiliated and respecting Resolution No. 510 (Ministério da Saúde, 2016) - CAAE No. 50700121.0.0000.5542.

Results

The software produced 2,103 TSs and classified 1,872 of them, which represented an 89.02% utilization of the

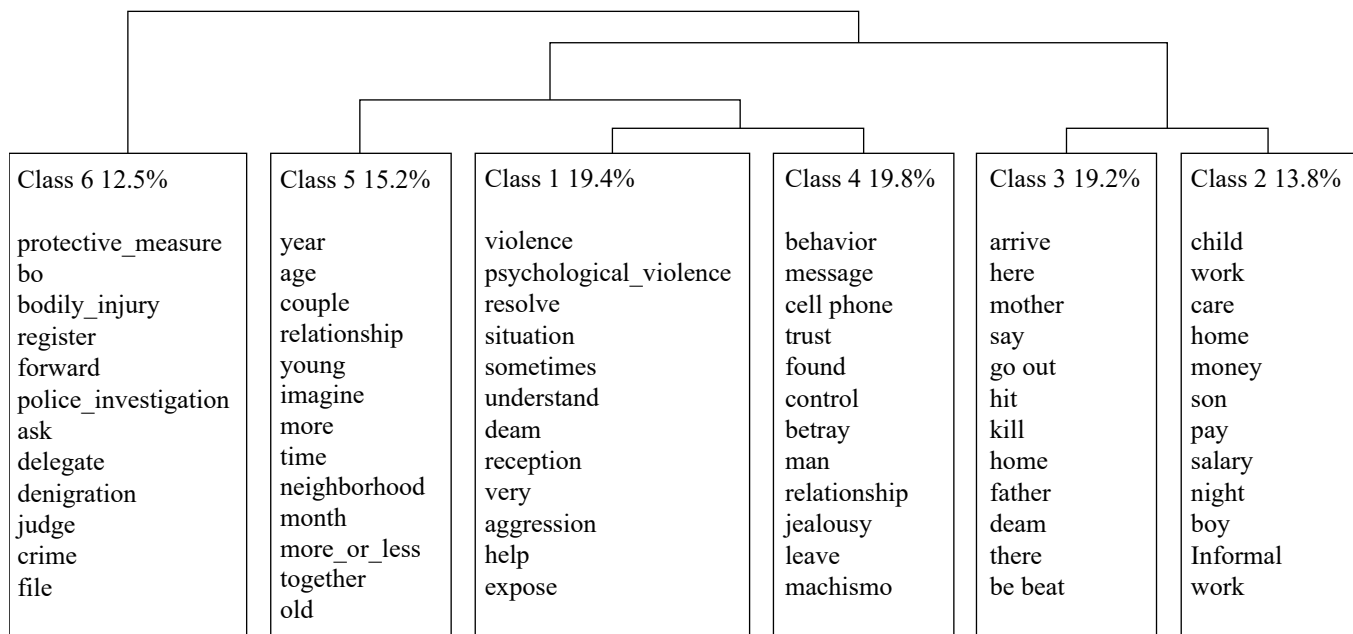
corpus. By reading Figure 1 from left to right, it is possible to notice a first corpus fragmentation, where class 6 originated, representing 12.5% of its total. The second fragmentation resulted in two groupings, the first constituting class 5, corresponding to 15.2% of the corpus, and classes 2 and 3, representing 13.8% and 19.2% of the corpus, respectively. Finally, in a fourth fragmentation, the software generated class 4 and class 1, corresponding to 19.8% and 19.4% of the corpus, respectively. Through the positions of the classes, it is possible to analyze the

distances from each other. Thus, it is noted that class 6 moves away from the other classes, having a more unique word context compared to the others. Classes 1, 4 and 5, on the other hand, comes closer to each other regarding their vocabulary, and they are therefore within the same group, as are classes 2 and 3.

In the dendrogram (Figure 1), automatically generated by the software, one can observe the typical vocabulary of each class, which indicates social representations of gender content and of gender-based violence content.

Figure 1

Dendrogram of A Corpus - the classes



Class 6, named “Professional practices at the DEAM in the criminal area,” grouped TSs on the technical mechanisms that the interviewed professionals use in the criminal part of their work with gender violence. The words in this class were mainly legal terms, such as protective measure, bo (*boletim de ocorrência* [police report]), bodily injury, to register, to forward, police investigation, to request, to delegate, denigration, judge, crime, and to file, among others. This primacy of the legal issue in this class can be noted by the following TSs: “Ask her whether she is interested in a protective measure and explain to her that she will initiate criminal proceedings against him, that he will be held responsible for these acts.” (Participant 10); “Some women just want to register the *bo*, some want to follow to conflict mediation, others who want a police investigation, others just want a protective measure, so each case is different.” (Participant 13); “Register the *bo*, she will report the incident and try to mediate conflicts. When the case is a little more incisive, a more serious aggression, we move on to criminal proceedings.” (Participant 11).

Class 5, named “The characteristics of couples in situations of gender-based violence,” included TSs in which participants described the couples in hypothetical

situations, both physically and regarding coexistence, where they live, how long they have been in the relationship, if they have children. Some main words in this class were year, age, relationship, couple, young, imagine, more, time, neighborhood, month, more or less, together, and old, among others. The excerpts below demonstrate the meaning of the class: “...Even in longer-lasting relationships this is common. Given the reality we live in today, we have already seen situations like this after one month of relationship, but also after years of relationship, this very man’s behavior.” (Participant 1); “I believe it is a couple, a relationship, I imagine he may be very young, some 25 years, she is around 22, 23 years old.” (Participant 7); “No, there is [gender-based violence] in all neighborhoods that you can imagine, you can even imagine that it [gender-based violence] doesn’t happen in the neighborhood x, it does happen, it does happen as well” (Participant 3).

Class 1, named “Gender-based violence and its particularities at the DEAM,” brought together TSs on the different forms of domestic and gender-based violence and how professionals deal with the types of violence, mainly focusing on psychological violence and physical violence, as can be seen from the main terms of the class: violence,

psychological violence, to resolve, situation, sometimes, to understand, DEAM, reception, very, aggression, to help, and to expose, among others. The following excerpts may facilitate the understanding of this class: “Normally this type of behavior, as I described, besides physical violence, there is always a moral offense, there is always a crime against honor, psychological violence, it never occurs alone, because normally when he is hitting...” (Participant 5); “I usually put myself in her shoes, because some women, I have a box of tissues on my desk, just in case, because many women cry a lot, especially when they are victims of psychological violence, so in the case of this character...” (Participant 12); “...Of providing this reception and referring her, because we don’t know how much it has affected the person’s psychological health for being subjected to this type of violence so many times.” (Participant 6).

Class 4, named “Understanding of gender, romantic relationships and gender-based violence,” was made up of TSs police officers in which they gave their opinion as to the behaviors of people in the second hypothetical situation. The words behavior, message, cell phone, to trust, to find, to control, to betray, man, relationship, jealousy, to leave, machismo and others are representative of the class, as can be seen: “I find the man’s behavior, in legal terms, inappropriate, because it is violence, he doesn’t respect her activity, her conversations, speaks ill of her to others, threatens her, that’s it.” (Participant 4); “Many [women] accept this situation, retreat, are left without a cell phone, or give their password or, in this case, it was not her behavior, but social media have brought great instability to relationships.” (Participant 14); “...So, for me, she maintained a posture, in my point of view, perhaps correct or not, because she doesn’t have to show her cell phone to anyone, especially because the cell phone is a matter of privacy.” (Participant 15).

Class 3, named “The context of gender-based violence in the domestic sphere,” was composed of TSs in which the participants located the context of domestic violence against women from its beginning and its progression within the family until the complaint, in addition to the difficulties related to emotional issues between the woman in a situation of violence and her partner, as the perpetrator, especially in the context of families with children. Some of the words that represent this class are: to arrive, here, mother, to say, to go out, to hit, to kill, home, father, DEAM, there, be beat, among others, as can be seen: “... But many arrive at the DEAM with the case already progressing, so it’s good to come early and break this circle, it must be broken, women must break this circle.” (Participant 3); “Anything and they [men] may kill, so [she] stays in the shelter, if [she] has a child, take them to the shelter, our people go there. I’m talking about what happens at the DEAM.” (Participant 8); “He goes out with friends to drink and when he gets home, he wants things his way, so I can imagine that he beats her because he drinks alcohol...” (Participant 12).

Class 2, entitled “The routine of the family in a situation of violence,” consisted of TSs in which the participants described the routine of the couples in the hypothetical situation, reporting their social context. Some of the relevant words are child, to work, to care, home, money, son, to pay, salary, night, boy, informal work, food, among others, and we can see below some representative examples of this class: “You want to harm my marriage, I don’t want this man to be held responsible, I don’t want this man to be punished, I depend on him to survive, he provides for the house, he provide for my children.” (Participant 2); “She didn’t act sooner because she was afraid of the future, how she was going to survive, where she was going to live, she has children to raise, so she is financially dependent on him to be able to provide for herself and her children.” (Participant 9); “...But he wants his wife to continue working, earning money, but when he gets home, he wants to lie down on the sofa, he wants her to bring food for him to sit down and eat, set the table...” (Participant 15).

Discussion

With this work, it is possible to realize that the methodological resource adopted, that is, presentation of vignettes of hypothetical situations, contributed to the investigation of SRs and gender practices and gender-based violence among DEAM professionals, in a way that enabled participants to give meanings, making their beliefs clear and positioning themselves in the face of the phenomena studied based on concrete (although hypothetical) cases, which helped avoid “ready-made” and socially desirable speeches.

As the professionals positioned themselves with regard to the vignettes, anchoring and objectification, which are the SR-forming processes, were revealed. Jodelet (1989/2015) describes that anchoring captures elements of a “new” or “strange” object and inserts it into a category of everyday practical knowledge. In objectification, these elements are naturalized and incorporated into cognition schemes, giving concreteness to a previously abstract concept. Results found showed a view on the division of tasks based on a gender distinction, so that content based on biological conceptions appears. In this sense, the participants attributed to women the idea of caring for children, home and husband, therefore their work is primarily domestic. In the case of the man, his responsibility was linked to the work environment, and he was required to be the financial residence provider.

Jodelet (1989/2015) explains that SRs originate through the integration of new elements into familiar categories, with the objective of giving meaning to that “strange” reality and organizing everyday relationships. In this way, it can be understood that the ways in which professionals represented men and women in the hypothetical situation are related to the SRs of men and women in their daily lives. For Scott (1995), gender symbols are designated based on these perceived sexual differences, which outlines

the subjectivity of men and women in society and their roles in social relations, as, for example, the idea of women as mothers and caregivers, and the man as the family's financial provider.

Despite recent changes resulting from feminist struggles, which have led to more women in the job market, it is important to highlight that this gender representation, in which women are subject to domestic work and men to public work, is reinforced by a capitalist and bourgeois notion in which middle and upper class white women and men have this configuration. In the case of low-class, peripheral, black and mixed-race women, in addition to domestic work, there was also public work, such as field work and housemaids, among others (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Gonzalez, 2020). Furthermore, Coutinho and Menandro (2015) demonstrated that paid professional work for women does not necessarily result in a change in the conception of women as caregivers, but it is considered an additional task to this responsibility.

Besides the gender issue, professionals also highlighted specificities according to the cases of gender-based violence portrayed, and access to this information was facilitated by the instrument, since participants needed to describe the people in the vignette. Thus, in addition to gender inequality, contexts such as couples with or without children, older or younger and low or middle/high class people, were related to the context and possibility of confronting gender-based violence. In the case of couples with children and older people, in the opinion of those interviewed, there is greater difficulty ending the marriage and the domestic violence that the woman suffers, as there is not only an emotional bond between the couple, but also a concern for the emotional and financial care for the children, taking into account the idea that despite the woman being a victim of violence, the perpetrator of the violence is considered a good father, in addition to this woman's feelings of guilt and affection towards this man. In this sense, emotional and financial dependency was seen as an obstacle to fighting against violence.

However, these professionals considered that women's financial independence is not enough to stop violence. The professionals understood that machismo in society is linked to the idea that women must be submissive to men, being considered objects of their possession and subject to their control, so that this situation in the emotional relationship is identified as one of the causes of violence, along with other causes, such as alcohol use, inappropriate behavior of the people involved, such as having seen the man's behavior as exaggerated and explosive and the woman's as unnecessary for provoking jealousy. By this logic, alcohol can emerge as a justification for violence, somehow removing the man's responsibility as the perpetrator, and female behavior can be seen as the motivation for violence, which sustains blaming this woman for the violence suffered (Frugoli et al., 2019).

It is worth highlighting that the hypothetical situations contributed to the professionals' positioning in relation to the violent situation, as it allowed them to evaluate the actions of the characters they described, placing themselves in favor

or against them. Jodelet (1989/2015) suggests that SRs can guide everyday practices. In the vignettes, the professionals assessed that women should always report situations of violence, which demonstrates that these professionals' practices are guided by legal standards.

It is also possible to observe indications regarding the couple's age and social class. Although professionals reported recognizing that racial and social class issues are connected in Brazil, they seem to be reluctant to express themselves based on hypothetical situations. What initially occurred was an attempt not to take a stance on the racial issue, relying on the idea that violence against women is universal. Nevertheless, as the vignettes required participants to provide descriptions about the people and the context of domestic violence, issues that intertwine gender, race, class, motherhood, and other social markers were revealed. Therefore, it is important to highlight the importance of understanding gender-based violence against women from this perspective, which takes into account different contexts and interrelated axes (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Gonzalez, 2020).

As to the interference of participants' social variables in their reports, the results did not demonstrate significant differences according to gender, race, age, length of service, and schooling in the preparation of SRs. This may be related to the fact that patriarchal ideas permeate the culture of society and institutions (Segato, 2003).

From the vignettes of hypothetical situation, it was possible to identify possible differences in the treatment of women depending on the type of violence involved in the complaint (whether physical or psychological) in the DEAM routine. It is clear that psychological violence was more related to attitudes of acceptance, while physical violence was more related to attitudes of referral, as, legally, it requires that it should be dealt with in the criminal sphere. The welcoming stance emphasized in cases of psychological violence is seen as a more "feminine" practice, then some participants pointed out that female police officers would be more appropriate to assist women in situations of violence, which may be related to an idea that women, from childhood, are raised to have more values related to generosity, as demonstrated by Fanis and Bomfim (2020).

In this regard, listening is part of police work, unlike what Sehnem et al. (2019) found, since, in the case of interviewed health professionals, this practice demonstrated a need for strengthening and execution. On the other hand, both in the study by Sehnem et al. (2019) and in this research, one emphasized the need to reinforce the welcoming attitude since the women in situations of violence arrives in the service network (whether in the health or police sphere), guaranteeing more extensive professional training, whether during graduations or training courses. Other belief related to the reception of victims is whether the participants understood them as true victims, people who actually suffered violence, or false victims who reported it with the aim of revenge, just like Frugoli et al. (2019) also pointed out in their research at a DEAM.

From the classes in the dendrogram, it is also noted that these forms of violence were described mainly using legal nomenclatures, such as the name of the typology or crimes, such as “bodily injury,” and “denigration.” This demonstrated the connection of vocabulary with legal knowledge, which can be understood as part of the reified universe, which is characterized by being knowledge coming from an authority, in this case the law (Moscovici, 2000/2015). More specifically, reified knowledge was found in class 6, which, as previously mentioned, brought a more differentiated vocabulary from the others, which may have occurred precisely because it was constructed, above all, by legal terms. In this class, it can be observed how the reported practices were procedures imposed by the professionals’ and DEAMs’ responsibilities as institutions to combat gender-based violence.

It is possible to note that, although the Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11.340, 2006) mention the issue of gender as a condition for understanding domestic violence within the scope of this law, in professional practice there was a primacy of legal procedures and a focus on criminal issues. The creation and dissemination of laws and training must also be linked to raising awareness to end the naturalization of gender-based violence, and it is important to promote a feminist ethic that breaks down the power hierarchies that maintain violence, which can be widely disseminated by mass media (Segato, 2003) by disclosing new SRs (Moscovici, 2000/2015) and contributing positively to the construction of more egalitarian gender relations (Morales Córdoba, 2023). Furthermore, it is essential that public policies and the media do not universalize gender-based violence, paying attention to issues of race, class, and other social markers that intersect with gender (Staliano et al., 2023).

This emphasis on crime, even reported by professionals, is also dependent on laws. In the case of psychological violence, it can be observed that, together with physical and moral violence (demonstrated by the word ‘denigration’ mentioned by professionals), it was the most prominent. This may have occurred as an effect of Law No. 14,188 (2021), which conceives it as a specific crime of psychological violence against women, giving greater attention to the criminal aspect of this type of violence, which was previously underestimated (Siqueira & Rocha, 2019). This focus on the punitive aspect is part of the DEAM’s routine (Frugoli et al., 2019).

However, in the case of the DEAM in a municipality in the Brazil’s Northeast region, psychological violence is not necessarily dealt with in the criminal sphere, as there is also the possibility of carrying out police mediation work within the institution with the aim of resolving gender-based violence in cases in which physical violence does not occur (because in these cases the law requires the initiation of a police investigation). Despite professionals interviewed at the DEAM in the Southeast municipality having recognized that domestic and gender-based violence should not be understood or dealt with solely with a criminal focus, this type of work is not carried out in this institution, but by referral to other services.

Police mediation, which is the intervention of a third party to mediate the conflict, has proven controversial in the issue of domestic violence, as, on the one hand, it emphasizes the affective issue related to this type of violence, expressed by the woman who does not want to criminalize the partner or ex-partner with whom she often has children together, and on the other hand, it runs the risk of returning violence to the domestic sphere, placing it in the position of “marital conflict,” if carried out without a critical reading gender (Cavaler & Macarini, 2020), which can reinsert women into the cycle of violence, characterized by phases of tension, conflict and honeymoon, in which the perpetrator of violence is once again forgiven (Barretto, 2018).

In summary, the research showed that gender representations are anchored in the conception of women as caregivers and men as providers, permeated both by reified knowledge – when highlighting the issue of machismo and sexism in the division of domestic tasks and in family and social relationships between men and women, and by common sense knowledge, which ends up naturalizing these relationships. This knowledge, however, was not found in a completely separate way in the classes produced by IRaMuTeQ, which can demonstrate that they occurred in an articulated and flexible manner, what Oliveira (2014) called hybrid knowledge, which is characterized by being a way of practical and technical knowledge that involves common sense and formal knowledge. On the other hand, regarding the issue of gender-based violence, there was a greater emphasis on the DEAM procedures, which can be read as expressions of reified knowledge, which also produces practices in these institutions.

In this investigation, hypothetical situations helped understand the practices reported by professionals in relation to concrete cases, for example, when they took a position in order to highlight that the issues of reception and police mediation were specific or more present in cases of psychological violence, while legal guidance prevailed in physical violence. It is important to highlight that, in the case of psychological violence, the choice of whether to report it or not is up to the woman, but the research noted a greater openness on the part of professionals to accept these cases, since physical violence is understood as unacceptable and life-threatening. In short, it can be said that IRaMuTeQ contributed to capturing the professionals’ technical and specialized knowledge, as well as that resulting from common sense, and that the hypothetical situation instrument allowed professionals’ positions and practices in relation to situations of gender-based violence to be explored, favoring their apprehension.

The results regarding gender SRs demonstrated that, despite an attempt by participants to break with gender stereotypes, the representations were still mostly anchored in the ideas that women are caregivers and men are providers. There was also no evidence of a critical understanding of gender issues in institutions, despite the laws being guided by this perspective; therefore, what seems to govern professionals’ practices are more protocol procedures on domestic violence.

It is understood that the vignettes of hypothetical situations contributed to the reports of common practices, as well as allowing explanation about differences in care based on the type of violence reported (psychological, moral or physical). Notably, other types of violence — such as property and sexual violence — were rarely mentioned, which may have occurred because they were not covered by the situations portrayed, which leaves room for new research in the field, with the use of more vignettes of hypothetical situations. Another important issue to be emphasized is that, despite the professionals having mentioned and related the gender-based violence portrayed with axes such as age and class, they had difficulty positioning themselves in the face of racial issues, which probably occurred due to the belief that Brazil is a mixed-race country. Due to this difficulty, one believes that the most recommended should be to discuss this issue with the use of hypothetical situations so that participants are unaware that this topic is being analyzed.

Although the vignettes minimized ready-made speeches about gender and gender-based violence — controversial topics in society — this instrument presented limitations, which could be overcome, for example, if used combined with ethnography, which would also give access to the participants' daily lives, rather than just their reports. Furthermore, the small sample of participants may have been a limitation, in spite of being proportionally significant for the body of DEAMs professionals and for the type of research carried out (qualitative). Future research with larger samples may demonstrate other results.

Another limitation of the research, of a theoretical-methodological nature, was the dialogue with a small number of studies that also used hypothetical situations as an instrument for data collection, due to the scarcity of specialized literature. This highlights the importance of carrying out further analyses with this instrument, which has proven to be useful for accessing content that is not always explicit in a more direct approach, such as interviews.

With this study, it can be emphasized the importance of laws, devices, protocols, and training that can encompass the complexity of the phenomenon of domestic violence and against women, with a focus on gender and the diversity of women, so that police practices can be based on these differences and public policies do not become tied to an abstract idea of women, nor contribute to reinforcing unequal gender constructions. The importance of using a methodology that allows capturing the meanings and practices of gender and gender-based violence is also emphasized, which expands the possibilities of investigation in Psychology and specifically in SR studies.

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