

FEMALE PROFESSIONAL GROWTH, LATE PREGNANCY, AND CONJUGAL RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT. Women professional growth, among other social and cultural changes, has modified the standards of families in the contemporary world. One of these standards refers to the postponement of motherhood, and how couples experience this decision in the marital relationship. This study aimed to understand the decision of couples, especially women, to delay parenting, and how this decision influences the marital relationship. The research is qualitative, cross-sectional, and descriptive. Sixteen heterosexual married individuals participated in a semi-structured interview. The analysis of the interviews was performed through content analysis, from which emerged three categories: (a) Financial issue in the parental process: 'can we afford having a child?', (b) Attempt of control versus surprise of pregnancy, and (c) Late pregnancy and calmness in the conjugal relationship. There was a significant concern with respect to the financial security to get pregnant, besides the couples' desire to control the appropriate time to pregnancy, and emotional maturity experienced by the interviewees related to late pregnancy. Regarding the conjugal relationship, couples manifested that it brought unity and understanding.

Keywords: Women professional growth; late pregnancy; conjugal relationship.

ASCENSÃO PROFISSIONAL FEMININA, GESTAÇÃO TARDIA E CONJUGALIDADE

RESUMO. A ascensão profissional feminina, dentre outras mudanças sociais e culturais, tem modificado os padrões das famílias na contemporaneidade. Um dos padrões refere-se ao adiamento da maternidade e como os casais vivenciam esta decisão, na relação conjugal. O objetivo desse estudo é compreender a decisão dos casais, principalmente da mulher, de adiar a parentalidade e como esta decisão impacta na relação conjugal. A pesquisa é de cunho qualitativo, transversal e descritivo. Participaram 16 indivíduos heterossexuais casados que responderam a uma entrevista semiestruturada. A análise das entrevistas foi realizada por meio da análise de conteúdo, da qual emergiram três categorias: (a) questão financeira no processo parental: 'ter filho com que dinheiro?', (b) tentativa de controle versus surpresa da gestação, e (c) gestação tardia e calma na conjugalidade. Evidenciou-se uma preocupação significativa quanto à seguridade financeira para gestar, assim como o desejo de controle dos casais com relação ao momento adequado da gestação e da maturidade emocional vivenciada pelos

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entrevistados quanto à gestação tardia. No que diz respeito à conjugalidade, os casais manifestam que a mesma trouxe união e compreensão.

Palavras-chave: Ascensão profissional feminina; gestação tardia; conjugalidade.

ASCENSIÓN PROFESIONAL FEMENINA, EMBARAZO TARDÍO Y RELACIÓN CONYUGAL

RESUMEN. La ascensión profesional femenina, entre otros cambios sociales y culturales, ha modificado los patrones de las familias en la contemporaneidad. Uno de dichos patrones se refiere a la prórroga de la maternidad y cómo las parejas experimentan, en la relación conyugal, esa decisión. El objetivo de este estudio ha sido comprender la decisión de las parejas, principalmente de la mujer, de posponer la etapa parental y cómo esa decisión impacta en la relación conyugal. La investigación posee cuño cualitativo, transversal y descriptivo. Participaron dieciséis individuos heterosexuales casados que respondieron a una entrevista semiestructurada. Las entrevistas se han evaluado según el análisis de su contenido, del cual surgieron tres categorías: (a) La cuestión financiera en el proceso parental: '¿es asumible económicamente tener un hijo?', (b) La tentativa de control versus la sorpresa del embarazo, y (c) El embarazo tardío y la tranquilidad en la relación conyugal. Se ha evidenciado una preocupación significativa en cuanto a la seguridad financiera para la gestación, así como el deseo de control de las parejas con respecto al momento adecuado del embarazo, y de la madurez emocional vivenciada por los entrevistados en función del embarazo tardío. En lo que se refiere a la relación conyugal, las parejas manifiestan que la misma trae unión y comprensión.

Palabras clave: Ascensión profesional femenina; embarazo tardío; relación conyugal.

Introduction

In contemporary times, it has been common for married couples to wait for the ideal moment in which they have a financial and professional security to have a baby. According to this choice, many couples will have their first child after the age of thirty-five or forty, considered in the literature 'late pregnancy' or 'late motherhood' (Andrade, Linhares, Martinelli, Antonini, Lippi, & Baracat, 2004; Ministério da Saúde, 2012). In fact, at present, especially in the middle and upper classes of the population, one of the criteria for having children refers to the financial possibilities that the couple deems necessary to support the costs incurred after the child is born (Matos & Magalhães, 2014).

The option to have children can denote the weakening of personal ambitions, such as postponing more audacious career plans or failing to consume some material goods desired for the future. Another common concern among couples refers to the fact that having children means having another human being totally dependent affectively and financially on them. This dependence on the child would compromise the autonomy and independence of each of the partners, leading to insecurity regarding the couple's financial and relational security (Matos & Magalhães, 2014).

The participation of women in the labor market is a phenomenon present in Brazilian society. However, nowadays, we see the expansion of the insertion of women in the labor

market, with both spouses working and the income from women's work is an important factor for the economic sustainability of the family. Besides sustainability, there is also a greater purchasing power of the couples, since they are inserted in a society that has cultural values based on the individuality, in the belief that the consumption of goods is a means to live happier (Zanirato, & Rotondaro, 2016).

Adding to the financial issue, another important aspect has changed in the social representation of the women universe. Once, becoming a mother seemed the inevitable destiny of every woman, being essential to her feminine identity. In the present day, especially in the middle and upper classes of the population, more and more women are making their choices, prioritizing their professional career and their studies to the detriment of the mother-woman identity. The choice for the role of woman rather than mother as a priority is a growing reality among women's choices (Lopes, Dellazzana-Zanon, & Boeckel, 2014; Patias & Buaes, 2012).

Still, the contemporary economy has dictated consumption patterns, influencing when and how to have children. If the option is to have children, there is also the possibility of choosing how the child will be born, it may be through normal delivery or cesarean delivery. After delivery, there will be a choice of which contraceptive methods to use in order to avoid unplanned pregnancies. All these socially created demands influence couples in financial decisions and, consequently, cause them to question whether their material assets are sufficient to subsidize the costs of gestation, care, clothing and education of the child (Matos & Magalhães, 2014).

However, not only the economic context influences the way couples think about parenting. The historical and social changes linked to the feminine and masculine roles and the industrialization, brought changes in the labor market. The insertion of women in the labor market was marked by deep social and sexual inequalities. In the nineteenth century, the women of the working-class families were faced with the need to reconcile work in factories with the exercise of motherhood. Thus, the dynamics of the double responsibility begins, which, with the advance of industrialization and urbanization in the twentieth century, intensify. In this context, being or not being a mother is a growing questioning and influenced by factors related to the subjective, economic and social conditions of women and also of the couple (Biffi, & Granato, 2017, Patias & Buaes, 2012)

In fact, for a long time, the woman's social role was to be a mother. This role was built and, in contemporary times, there is a greater questioning in large part, due to the possibility of women of middle and upper social class to choose other identities that also give her social prestige. Although it remains, even today, in the social imaginary, that every woman should be a mother (Braga, Miranda, & Correio, 2018; Patias & Buaes, 2012).

Formerly hegemonic models of socially established gender roles - with women as the mother and housewife and man the provider - end up reproducing asymmetrical power relations between men and women. However, when women stand for her interests, new tensions arise regarding the patriarchal model still present in society (Giordani, Piccoli, Bezerra, & Almeida, 2018).

On the other hand, from the moment that the woman was inserted in this context of other identity possibilities than just being a mother, it was demanded of her to be an excellent professional besides being an exemplary mother, without the possibility of failing in any of the situations, because she has assumed a new role: that of helping to support the family or to be the sole provider. When entering the labor market, women assume a more equal level with men, although the sharing of tasks, mainly referring to the care of the children and the

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house chores have begun, still the woman seems to be the main responsible (Fiorin, Patias, & Dias, 2011; Guimarães & Petean, 2012).

The change in lifestyle and the professional growth of women are more significant with each passing day. Society is in increasing development and women are taking up space in all areas, becoming liberal, building their autonomy and making their choices, such as being single or married, having children or not, and what profession to follow. Thus, contemporary women seek to meet their individual needs by building their own destiny (Maluf & Kahhale, 2010).

The search for female autonomy implies investment in the public sphere and, consequently, a disinvestment in the private sphere that required women to perform social roles established by the culture related to the care of the home and children. What is explicit in this new configuration is the accumulation of a third shift in the daily life of these women, who, in an attempt to balance the demands of the domestic and professional universe, accumulate functions (Dema-Moreno & Díaz-Martínez, 2010; Simões & Hashimoto, 2012). It is clear that the entry of women into the labor market brings another theme to be administered by couples that refers to female financial gain, a theme permeated by individual, family and cultural/social subjectivity, by meanings built in the history of life of each spouse and not always easy to negotiate (Cenci, Bona, Crestani, & Habigzang, 2017). Due to these emerging demands present today, the complexity that contemporary life imposes on couples is responsible for new conjugal and relational configurations (Perucchi & Beirão, 2007).

Delaying motherhood is a consequence of changes in the social, economic and cultural context and the new roles that women have assumed. These changes can produce ambivalence between whether or not to gestate, to gestate and when to gestate. Thus, having a baby late is an increasingly plausible possibility that can bring benefits to both mother and baby (Lopes et al., 2014). It should be noted that the decision to have children is made through multiple representations experienced by women in their relational experiences. Nevertheless, the decision to exercise motherhood is often based on social pressure that still delimits gender roles, such as the fact that women necessarily have to be mothers. If the woman does not want to have children, a traditional female model is broken, not always easily solved by women (Farinha & Scorsolini-Comin, 2018, Patias & Buaes, 2012).

With regard to women's professional advancement, a study on women who work outside the home and are mothers suggests that women attach greater importance to external work than domestic work. Although both are relevant, only the public sphere is socially recognized and the private sphere is understood as an inherent obligation to the feminine gender. In this way, women understand that motherhood is a personal fulfillment, but for professional growth, having a child is a disadvantage. This data referring to the reality in the labor market is one of the justifications for women to postpone pregnancy (Fiorin, Oliveira, & Dias, 2014). However, in the late motherhood exercise, after 35 years, the woman may sometimes not feel efficient as a mother and a worker, and the ambivalence to be good in both roles can generate emotional conflicts (Travassos-Rodríguez & Féres-Carneiro, 2013).

The impacts of late motherhood can be both positive and negative. It is perceived that motherhood is linked to the fact that women are constantly growing, conquering their space and professional independence. Nowadays, with financial independence there is the possibility of several decisions that were once more difficult: if you want to marry, with whom to have children, if you want to have children and at what time, if you want an independent

production. Also, if you choose to have late pregnancy, the woman may be better prepared psychologically, because her life experience allows her to choose what she wants and better prepare for the changes that this child will bring in her life. However, as a negative point, her parents will be in old age and may need the care of the woman who, in addition to caring for a child, will have to provide assistance to parents who will need to be followed up in the aging process. Moreover, there are greater risks of complications when pregnancy is late (Ministério da Saúde, 2012; Oliveira, Rocha, Colissi, & Sifuentes, 2013). Another important aspect refers to major difficulties for pregnancy after 35 years, which can bring consequences for the marital relationship. The research conducted by Spotorno, Silva and Lopes (2008) showed that women may experience feelings of loneliness over the long duration of treatment and, in some cases, the gradual disinvestment of the spouse in the treatment process.

In fact, the choice for late pregnancy may lead to the possibility of the woman requiring assisted reproductive techniques. This choice of couples may bring about relational difficulties with regard to conjugal relationship, such as the couple's communication, aspects related to sexuality and conjugal cohesion. Pregnancy, in this case, is a period of uncertainty and reflection on the conjugal choices made. This is a time when the couple may face anxiety in expressing their feelings, as well as difficulty in understanding their partner's feelings. There may also be clarity that treatment may fail and that both spouses will have to re-evaluate the possibilities for parenting at this time of desired conjugal relationship (Silva & Lopes, 2011). In view of the above, the goal of this study was to understand the decision of couples, especially women, to postpone parenting and how this decision impacts the marital relationship.

Method

Design

This is a descriptive, cross-sectional, qualitative study. Because it is a research with descriptive design, it will indicate the thematic categories that emerged from the interviews, contextualizing them through the speeches of the participants or interviewees (Cervo, Bervian, & Silva, 2006).

Participants

Sixteen heterosexual married individuals participated in the study. Eight of them have completed higher education (four men and four women). Of these, two are PhD (one man and one woman) and two have completed specialization courses (one man and one woman). One technologist (woman). The other individuals have only completed high school. On the socioeconomic level, the participants had family income ranging from 1 to 10 minimum wages, with the majority receiving around 5 minimum wages. Other characteristics of the participants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1- Occupation, gender, age and age she became pregnant

Profession	Gender	Age	Age she became pregnant
E1M. Cost Analyst	Male	36	
E1F. Occupational Safety Technician	Female	34	34
E2M. Merchant	Male	37	
E2F. Merchant	Female	35	35
E3M. Professor	Male	42	
E3F. Self employed	Female	43	43
E4M. Administrador	Male	38	
E4F. Food Engineer	Female	37	36
E5M. College professor	Male	47	
E5F. College professor	Female	47	38
E6M. Truck driver	Male	38	
E6F. Saleswoman	Female	38	38
E7M. Administrator	Male	40	
E7F. Pharmacist	Female	38	36
E8M. Mechanician	Male	41	
E8F. English teacher	Female	35	34

Source: The author's. (2016). E1M* = Interviewee 1 – Male.

Instruments

As a data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview was prepared based on the main theoretical assumptions found in the literature reviewed, associated with late pregnancy. The guiding questions were: (a) What are the reasons/justifications for late pregnancy? (b) Is there any reflection/consequence of late pregnancy in the marital relationship?

Data collection procedures

Participants were selected by the criterion of convenience, being indicated by the relational network of the researcher with the snowball effect. Firstly, it was started by a couple who volunteered to participate. After, this couple indicated another couple and so on. The researcher made phone calls informing about the purpose of the research and invited the individuals to participate. In view of the acceptance, the interviews were scheduled and performed individually, with each spouse, according to the availability of each participant and occurred in the residence or at the workplace of the same. The interview was recorded

and later transcribed in full. This research is part of a larger project entitled 'Dinheiro, casais e famílias ao longo do ciclo vital familiar', which was approved by the Research Ethics Committee under CAAE opinion 44191015.0.0000.5319. It followed all the rules set forth in Resolution 466/12.

Participants received a copy of the Informed Consent, which was read at the time of the interview in order to reinforce issues such as confidentiality, preservation of participant identity and assurance that the study results would be used only for the purpose of research. All participants were informed that the interview would be recorded in audio and that, after analyzing the transcripts, the files would be erased. Finally, the participants were informed that they could give up participating in the research without any losses.

Data analysis

The interviews were reliably transcribed and data were analyzed by the content analysis technique proposed by Bauer (2002). This method of analysis comprises the following steps: (a) Pre-analysis: comprises the floating reading of the material, so that the researchers know the documents and the text, being involved by impressions and orientations. At this stage, the transcribed interviews were read and reread; (b) Exploitation of the material: in this step, the systematic administration of the decisions taken, whether manually or not, is applied. This phase essentially consists of coding operations, according to pre-formulated rules. At this stage, two researchers classified the content of the interviews into similar aspects and gave names to the categories; and (c) Treatment of results, inference and interpretation: the raw results are treated to make them meaningful and valid, constituting thematic categories for discussion. The categories emerged from the interviews, that is, they were constructed inductively, they are: (a) Financial issue in the parental process: 'can we afford having a child?', (b) Attempt of control versus surprise of pregnancy; and (c) Late pregnancy and calmness in the conjugal relationship.

Results and discussion

The interviews evidenced that, with the increasing insertion of women in the labor market, with the financial achievements from this insertion, and with the importance of their remuneration for the support of the couple, the woman gained more power of decision on the moment of gestation. This power of choice is guided not only by the desire to exercise motherhood, but also by aspects related to the moment of her professional career and the needs understood by the couple as essential to be able to manage. Therefore, couples seek to organize themselves professionally and financially through the purchase of apartment/house, car suitable to include a baby and other material goods, before attempting the first pregnancy. This is a decision, in many cases, based on mutual agreement.

Financial issue in the parental process: 'can we afford having a child?'

In this category of analysis, the changes made by the couples in their relational configurations are evident. Individuals interviewed believe in the need for the 'right' moment of the relationship to have children. In the verbalization of one of the participants in the research, the attempt to choose the best conjugal moment and the financial security to have a child is clearly described in her speech. One can also observe how the participant

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emphasizes her responsibility and formation needs, of feeling financially secure in order to be able to become pregnant. E4F:

Because I always put them as if they were goals for me to achieve in life, you know, so I had to study first [...] to have my financial independence, [...] I had to be secure because I think that a child is not a joke, we cannot suddenly have a baby, so, you know, [...] I have to be secure to do it.

This professional and financial security is related to the preparation considered 'ideal' so that nothing is lacking to the firstborn. The need presented by the couples interviewed to avoid as much as possible the anguish about the lack of money and the consequences that the couples believe they would have if something unexpected happened, makes them invest in the professionalization and, consequently, in the financial security, with the intention of trying minimize the possible suffering of the family. This choice is shown to be an important factor in the choice of couples for late pregnancy. Interviewee E5F, who gave birth at age 38, argues:

And then with the arrival of our daughter, it was good to have everything we had when she was born, [...] we had our house, we had a financial stability, we both had jobs, we had the conditions to have a maid, so that was good. Of not having the anguish of not having the money, [...] So for us it was important.

It is evidenced in the verbalization of the interviewees a concern with the acquisition of material goods that allow a more harmonious family relationship with the arrival of a child. As Zanirato and Rotondaro (2016) pointed out, it is now common belief that consumer power is a means to live happier. In the participant's verbalizations are perceived these aspects such as, for example, on the need for the parental couple try to provide the greatest comfort to the future baby. E2M, in his report, says that the couple have been working hard to realize what they are aiming for, but that, according to him, their efforts are classified as insufficient: "So we tried to build a little thing in life and then give a little comfort for the child". The use of the diminutive 'little thing', 'a little' weakens the economic gain won by both partners, just as there is no emphasis by the participant on the relational, affective aspect exercised by the couple in the experience of parenting.

In addition to the concern about financial sustainability itself, the couples interviewed are also aware that they will need, unlike their parents, to invest for a longer period in quality academic formation for their child, which does not only include financial investments in childhood, but also in adult life, as it is known that young people experience a longer period of training before entering the labor market. In addition, they believe that they need to meet the diverse financial needs along this path of formation of the child and that the child must have comfortable conditions of subsistence. Couples exemplify needs as follows: having the money to subsidize the work of a nanny, a caregiver, the best possible school, the faculty desired by the child, as well as all expenses arising from this choice. The interviewee E9M says: "[...] at first this one, try to give a study, something like that, college. If not, also get the hands dirty, right?" There is evidence of the care and commitment for the child to have a job that is mediated by academic formation, that is, the child must have a better future, with higher financial compensation. The child may become a mechanical engineer, not a mechanic like his father.

It was observed in this study that all couples considered late to gestate want or wanted to have children. However, this desire was constantly postponed due to something that was in the foreground, for example, the concern with the acquisition of the home: "How

am I going to have a child if I have nowhere to live?” (E4F). Another justification is that “Raising a child costs a lot today, first I have to be well stabilized financially, then I can pay someone to take care; I have a good health plan” (E4F).

Again, in the verbalization of the participants interviewed, the emphasis is on the economic demand and the presence of someone, a paid third-party, who assists in the care of the child enabling the couple to maintain their bond with the public universe, so that they can continue working and ensuring the sustainability of the family. It is questionable in what principle of sustainability the interviewed couples are based on their verbalization, because there are created needs and couples, involved in a social context of consumerism, are not always able to reflect on their real needs, desires and marital and parental plans that contemplate their subjectivities.

Interviewee E4F reports on the couple’s choices:

[...] we have good jobs, me and my husband, but it’s not easy, now we can work to pay someone to take care of him. But right now, he’s going to mirror who spends most of his time with him, raising my son, and I have to get back to work and leave him with someone else, it’s not easy, you know?.

And, at the end of her reflection, she points to an aspect that is present in parenting that concerns the feminine responsibility for the care and education of the child. The ambivalence is established, since work brings a great source of satisfaction both financially and personally (Lopes et al., 2014), but the parental role is perceived as insufficient.

Attempt of control versus surprise of pregnancy

A relevant aspect that should be considered, and that was verified in this research, is the attempt of control versus the surprise of pregnancy. The couples interviewed sought to plan the right moment to conceive, as explained in the previous category, prioritizing professionalization and financial stability with the belief in the possibility of controlling also the moment of fertilization. However, this expectation of control is not always set at the desired moment for many reasons, many of them refer to the consequences of an organism that is not biologically at the most appropriate reproductive period.

The desired conception, according to the couples interviewed, occurred at a time when, for various reasons, defocused family, marital and social pressure regarding the need for gestation. Several interviewees reported their stories of difficulty to become pregnant from the moment they understood being prepared to have children, repeated miscarriages, reflections on the possibility of adoption, a period of sadness and more investment in studies and work while administering the consequences of their decision to late pregnancy and, during this period of disinvestment of pregnancy pressure, the unexpected happened, as the interviewee E7M reports: “And in the trip, the baby was conceived”. The same thing happened with interviewee E8F: “And while I’m going to focus more on studies, I focused more on that part and forgot the story of getting pregnant, I’m going to start a college. The day I started college, on the first day, I found out I was pregnant”.

Couples think or act as if they have the possibility of controlling time, actions and desires. They often do not realize that it does not depend on the 'organized economic house' to become pregnant. As the respondent E6M states: “And, of course, we tried for two years, she stopped taking contraceptives to get pregnant, then she did not. Then when we went to see a doctor, that’s when it came, right? [...] we did not have to undergo a treatment”. There are other elements present in the pregnancy process, whether conscious or unconscious. It

is noticed that the power of consumption in Brazilian households is increasing and the search for financial independence is a condition of contemporaneity. When the woman reaches her financial autonomy, the couple feels more confident to enter the new stage of the family development cycle (Saraiva Junior, 2010).

The family and social pressure experienced by couples regarding professional growth and parenting is constant. They must have financial autonomy, material possessions, have children and conditions to care for them. Such complexity is a factor that ends up delaying the arrival of the first child. Once the exercise of motherhood was a stage in which the man took care of finances and the woman took care of the children, but this thought is part of the past. Today the woman has gained space in all social spheres and is choosing, along with the partner, the best time for herself, assuming that this time exists; therefore, they think and organize the late pregnancy. The couples are making it clear that motherhood still has its value today, although they postpone pregnancy by organizing in other spheres. Especially in the middle and upper classes of the population, there is a tendency for couples to have their children late, but in such a way that the woman does not have to abandon her profession or leave the social environment because of late pregnancy. In fact, contemporary women has other roles besides motherhood, and the couple's understanding of women's permanence in post-pregnancy professional practice is increasingly present (Barbosa & Rocha-Coutinho, 2007)

Late pregnancy and calmness in the conjugal relationship

The conjugal relationship after the late pregnancy, according to the interviewees, brings closeness, patience, affection and companionship to the couple, especially of the masculine gender; it brings a sense of calm to the relationship. Pregnancy is an event that brings the couple closer together and provides a space for reflexive dialogue about the moment of life they are living. It is also a time of challenges and the need for constant dialogue to balance the exercise of parenting. This fact is evident in the report of E7M:

“Reflection, I think that in the sexual part there are not so many, I think what interferes with, say, the mood [...] there are days that both are so finished, right. But our relationship, so [...] we share his creation, share some tasks that only the mother does, other tasks that is just me”.

The changes that occurred in marital relations and in the exercise of parenting over the decades show less asymmetrical relational differences, and the couples interviewed report this search for a balance between the public and private universe of both spouses. Nowadays, the man is authorizing himself and being authorized by the woman to assume the care and affection with respect to the children, which, once, was an exclusive task of the woman. In this new form of shared parenthood, the masculine and the feminine end up approaching in a relation of belonging and affection. This is evidenced in a fluid way and, according to Negreiros and Féres-Carneiro (2004) and Jablonski (2010), must be observed with a critical eye, with ethics and a new perspective, because a new reality of family constitution arises that must be respected.

According to the participants, the calmness happens due to financial balance, which brings emotional balance, as the couple does not wear out with basic survival issues and thus manages the demands of the first child with more balance. Moreover, the higher the professional qualification, the greater the job security and the economic value of the couple. Due to economic security, there may be fewer marital conflicts, with regard to the

unexpected expenses arising from the presence of one more member in the family nucleus and, consequently, more balance in the relationship as a whole. The report of E5M illustrates the changes in life together since the arrival of the son:

Yes, the conjugal relationship changes a lot, a child is a milestone, children are a milestone in many ways, right. It changes, so first thing is that certain things you once considered very important, then they are relativized [...] I think, therefore, that it is a moment, almost a test of maturity of a couple, a child.

The couples reported that the relationship strengthened, as they perceived a greater maturity in the relationship, a coexistence of living and letting live, respecting the time of each spouse (Schimiti & Sarzedas, 2008).

In the verbalization of the couples interviewed, it was evident the approach experienced by the couples after the late pregnancy, an approach that intensified even before the birth of the child. Respondent E3M says, "Maybe, I think we even created more emotional bonds, because we start talking, start thinking about names, talks more and seeks godparents [...]". And the interviewee E2F says: "The pregnancy has brought us closer still, because from there on the doctor he accompanies me, on the ultrasound exam [...]. So, I think we united even more, a union even greater than it was before, a more affective union".

The affective relationship between the couple in this new journey of late pregnancy and the adjustments couples have to make reflects on how the couple will educate the children and the values that will be passed on to the new family member. The couple's negotiating capacity at this time, respect for differences of opinion, changes of habit that end up happening with the arrival of the child, the abandonment of certain tasks that were once individual in conjugality and are now parental in the care of the child and in the many demands, are for the good progress of the relationship and the education of the children (Braz, Dessen, & Silva, 2005).

One factor that draws attention, based on interviews, is the security that late mothers have of their own development, whether personal, in relation to studies or their professional and financial condition. This security is voiced by the interviewee E8F: "We are already stabilized financially, home, finally, everything scheduled. First, we will have a house, a car, then we already have it, you're calm about it". It is evident in the verbalization of the participant her security with respect to the financial question and that, financial stability is one of the aspects relevant to the relational harmony of the couple that decides to late pregnancy. In the research conducted by Dias, Schumacher, and Almeida (2010), there is evidence that the positive meaning attributed to income for people is closely related to higher levels of satisfaction in the marital relationship.

Final considerations

The purpose of this study was to understand the decision of couples, especially women, to postpone motherhood and how this decision impacts the marital relationship. It has been found that female professional advancement significantly interferes with the decision of when the couple will have a child. In fact, all the women interviewed were working at the time of the research and their profession was very important, as well as being a mother.

Concerning conjugal relationship, it can be seen that the increasing insertion of women in the labor market and of men in the family universe is verbalized as a change that brings benefits to conjugality in the process of late pregnancy, since they refer to having more serenity in the conjugal process and also greater financial stability to meet the needs that they believe are necessary for the exercise of parenthood. It is important to highlight that, for the couples interviewed, there are some needs to have children, which also impacts the decision for postponement.

In fact, the married individuals who participated in this survey reported the fear of not having enough money to subsidize their children studies and not being able to financially provide the children from the difficulties they report they have faced in their lives. Such concerns relate primarily to the need for long and costly vocational training and to the understanding that their children need to have their financial needs met as long as they are dependent on them.

The study was limited to a number of sixteen married heterosexual individuals for the level of resistance found in couples to participate in the study. The most used justifications were related to overwork. However, it may be thought that ambivalent issues coexist in the conjugal universe with regard to the exercise of parenting and the professionalization of both spouses who are not always verbalized by the couples and that more research can be carried out to clarify these aspects. It is suggested, for future studies, correlational studies that can investigate relationships between social, economic, cultural and psychological variables with late pregnancy.

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