

# Violence against women in the media during the Covid-19 pandemic



*Violências contra as mulheres divulgadas na mídia durante a pandemia de Covid-19*

*Violencias contra las mujeres em los médios durante la pandemia del Covid-19*

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe situations of violence against women in the Covid-19 pandemic reported in the media.

**Method:** Documentary, qualitative research, in a virtual environment, carried out with 39 reports published in the newspaper O Globo and the Universo On-line portal, between March 2020 and July 2021, in Salvador - BA. Data organization followed the steps of content analysis, with a discussion based on the scientific literature.

**Results:** In the analysis process, four core meanings were organized: social isolation denounces situations of domestic violence; Economic crisis and closed doors: justify more violence?; Tools available for ending violence against women: what changes with the pandemic?; The gender and color of violence in the pandemic.

**Final considerations:** The media released alarming data on the intensification and susceptibility of women to different types and situations of violence, especially during social isolation, in the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Nursing. Mass media. Women. Gender-based violence. COVID-19. Social isolation.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Descrever as situações de violência contra mulheres na pandemia de Covid-19 divulgadas na mídia.

**Método:** Pesquisa documental, qualitativa, em ambiente virtual, realizada com 39 reportagens divulgadas no jornal O Globo e portal Universo On-line, entre março de 2020 a julho de 2021, em Salvador - BA. A organização dos dados seguiu as etapas da análise de conteúdo, com discussão fundamentada na literatura científica.

**Resultados:** No processo de análise foram organizados quatro núcleos de sentido: o isolamento social denuncia situações de violência doméstica; Crise econômica e portas fechadas: justifica mais violências?; Ferramentas disponíveis para o rompimento da violência contra mulher: o que muda com a pandemia?; O gênero e a cor da violência na pandemia.

**Considerações finais:** A mídia divulgou dados alarmantes sobre a intensificação e susceptibilidade das mulheres aos diversos tipos e situações de violência, principalmente durante o isolamento social, na pandemia de Covid-19.

**Palavras-chave:** Enfermagem. Meios de comunicação de massa. Mulheres. Violência de gênero. COVID-19. Isolamento social.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Describir situaciones de violencia contra la mujer en la pandemia de Covid-19 reportadas en los medios de comunicación.

**Método:** Investigación documental, cualitativa, en ambiente virtual, realizada con 39 reportajes publicados en el diario O Globo y el portal Universo On-line, entre marzo de 2020 y julio de 2021, en Salvador - BA. La organización de los datos siguió los pasos del análisis de contenido, con una discusión basada en la literatura científica.

**Resultados:** En el proceso de análisis se organizaron cuatro núcleos de significados: el aislamiento social denuncia situaciones de violencia intrafamiliar; Crisis económica y puertas cerradas: ¿justifican más violencia?; Herramientas disponibles para acabar con la violencia contra las mujeres: ¿qué cambia con la pandemia?; El género y el color de la violencia en la pandemia.

**Consideraciones finales:** Los medios de comunicación dieron a conocer datos alarmantes sobre el recrudecimiento y la susceptibilidad de las mujeres a diferentes tipos y situaciones de violencia, especialmente durante el aislamiento social, en la pandemia del Covid-19.

**Palabras clave:** Enfermería. Medios de comunicación de masas. Mujeres. Violencia de género. COVID-19. Aislamiento social.

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is characterized as any action or conduct based on gender that results or may result in harm or suffering, whether physical, sexual or mental, in public or private spheres, which includes threats and deaths<sup>(1)</sup>. Health problems resulting from violence are manifested through injuries, mental illnesses, physical conditions, the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections<sup>(2)</sup>.

Thus, violence against women is a complex problem with several meanings, resulting from asymmetrical power relations based on the social macrostructure<sup>(3)</sup>. Global data for 2020 reveal that around 740 million women aged 15-24 years were subjected to situations of violence<sup>(4)</sup>.

Countries such as Argentina, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States highlighted the increase in reports of domestic violence and the demand for emergency shelters, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic<sup>(5)</sup>. In Brazil, in 2020, there was an increase (3.9%) in the records of complaints for domestic violence, and the number of female victims of physical violence was higher in the states of Goiás (5,029 cases), Espírito Santo (1,121 cases) and Rio Grande do Norte (1,081 cases)<sup>(6)</sup>.

In the other Brazilian states, a comparison between the number of cases between the years 2019 and 2020 showed a decrease in the number of records, possibly due to the restrictive measures of the pandemic, which led to under-reporting<sup>(6)</sup>. With the emergence of the new coronavirus, in December 2019, in the city of Wuhan, China, not only was there an increase in cases of infection by Covid-19, but the situations of vulnerability and violence experienced by women were also aggravated<sup>(6)</sup>. After two years of the pandemic, data on violence with controversial and unresolved outcomes persist.

Before the pandemic scenario, historical and social factors triggering violence against women, among them, gender inequalities, sexism and structural racism were already highlighted in the literature<sup>(7)</sup>. As this is a serious worldwide public health issue, prevention actions were intensified during the implementation of restrictive measures for the epidemiological control of Covid-19.

The world media plays an important role in disseminating information on public health, with an emphasis on health crises. Disclosures about the Zika virus (2015) and Ebola (2013) epidemics already showed the intensification

of socioeconomic and gender inequalities that pre-existed in the scenario, with social and health repercussions for women<sup>(8)</sup>.

In general, disclosure on digital platforms involves fact-checking in order to prove the authenticity of the news<sup>(9)</sup>. Thus, the means of communication available in digital format are sources of primary data for scientific studies<sup>(10)</sup>.

Violence impacts women's lives and health, regardless of the phase in which it occurs, causing various kinds of suffering and individual and family sequelae<sup>(11)</sup>. According to statistical data<sup>(6)</sup>, the impacts during the Covid-19 pandemic increased after the implementation of restrictive measures, such as social isolation. Thus, the pandemic scenario has become a potential triggering factor for the increase in cases of violence against women, making it difficult to break the cycle of violence.

That said, the guiding question of this study was as follows: based on media disclosures, what types of violence did women experience during the Covid-19 pandemic? Thus, the present study aimed to describe the situations of violence against women in the Covid-19 pandemic disclosed in the media.

## ■ METHOD

Documentary qualitative research. Primary sources are used as an investigation method, that is, data exclusively from documents without an analytical approach or scientifically processed. Obtaining the information contained in the documents allows understanding of the phenomenon related to the objective outlined by the research<sup>(10)</sup>.

Data is collected in a virtual environment, in Salvador, Bahia, in the digital versions of *O Globo*, by means of an assignment, and free of charge, in *Universo On-line* (UOL). The decision to search these news databases is justified by the broad reach and credibility of its publications, the quantity of news relevant to the discussion of the subject in a limited period, for using direct speech in its corpus through the plurality of female voices, and by predominance of entities, scientific research and official documents without textual basis.

Thus, the national and international coverage of journalistic media was taken into account, and during the pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, the documents disclosed were the most read and accessed in the country, being included

in the ranking of the best news sites and main vehicles of information in the digital media<sup>(12)</sup>. They contain exclusive news sessions with discussions specifically related to the themes of gender, class and race, as follows: Plataforma Celina and Universa, available in the *O Globo* newspaper and UOL, respectively.

The March 2020-July 2021 period was considered for data collection because the events of the Covid-19 pandemic occurred during this period, as follows: reporting of the first Covid-19 case and death in Brazil; the epidemiological variations of the disease and the pandemic scenario; the intensification of crises in the field of health and the economy; initiation and expansion of the vaccination process, as well as the minimization of cases and deaths from Covid-19.

The selection of the reports was carried out based on the following descriptors: "Woman"; "Feminine"; "Pandemic"; "Covid-19" and "Health", controlled by Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) in their headlines. The reports included in the analysis are widely publicized at national and international levels. The news reports published in the various formats of report were read in full. The central theme concerned the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic for women. Articles in audiovisual format, documents not produced on a timely basis, and on other sites that belong to the *O Globo* newspaper and UOL were excluded. Only the contents of primary sources were selected.

During the selection process, 39 reports were identified, which were read in full and organized in Microsoft Word documents, including the following elements: data source, title, date of publication, session, author's name, focus of the report and images used. The methodological guideline for data organization and analysis was developed according to thematic content analysis phases: pre-analysis; material exploration, categorization or coding; treatment of results, inferences and interpretation<sup>(13)</sup>.

The analytical path comprised the choice of documents, detailed readings of their content, formulation of objectives and hypotheses; coding and grouping to compose the recording units, based on the identification of the theme; and finally, critical analysis for the treatment of the identified results. In this segment, the construction of four core meanings

emerged that revealed the intensification of situations of violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The data used are in the public domain and, *a priori*, do not require approval from the Research Ethics Committee and/or prior authorization from the people who participated in the reports.

## ■ RESULTS

Violence against women was addressed in 39 reports, with emphasis on 22 titles, as shown in Chart 1. Despite the emphasis on the titles, the reports address multiple discussions about the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic for women and the situations of violence experienced in that period. The publications took place mostly in the sessions of platforms Celina and Universa, of *O Globo* newspaper and UOL, respectively, on the referred period. The publications took place mostly in the sessions of platforms Celina and Universa, of *O Globo* newspaper and UOL, respectively.

The reports presented different situations of violence against women, portraying realities experienced in different countries and in different regions of Brazil, with variations of records related to the epidemiological profile of the Covid-19 pandemic, since its emergence.

The main forms of violence identified were associated with historical and social issues, mainly gender and race, with manifestations of domestic and sexual violence, as well as increased vulnerability in various areas, according to articles 6 and 19 of Chart 1, which report discussions beyond the context of domestic violence. In addition, there were implications for health, the labor market and women's lives, both in public and private spaces. The records revealed that the rise in contamination rates and deaths from the coronavirus coincided with the increase in publications on violence, and as cases of Covid-19 reduced, so did publications.

In the process of analysis of the content of the reports, four core meanings were identified: social isolation denounces situations of domestic violence; Economic crisis and closed doors: does it justify more violence?; Tools available to stop violence against women: what changes with the pandemic?; The gender and color of violence in the pandemic.

O GLOBO NEWSPAPER		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
01 04/02/2020	Women and children first: collectives create mapping of vulnerable mothers during the coronavirus crisis	Mapping of vulnerable mothers during the Covid-19 pandemic, including women facing situations of violence to guarantee basic life needs
02 04/03/2020	Coronavirus: pandemic impacts women differently. And this needs to be taken into account to face the crisis	Social isolation increased the exposure of women, especially black women, to situations of violence. An example is domestic violence favored by the fact that the victim had to live with the aggressor full time during that period. Thus, there was an increase in the rates of complaints to the violence services.
03 04/06/2020	UN calls for protection for women during coronavirus lockdown	Women were susceptible to violence within their own homes, after the beginning of restrictive measures. An warning is given about the need to include the theme of violence in response plans against Covid-19.
04 04/15/2020	Coronavirus: study points out the impacts of Covid-19 on women	The number of cases and reports of domestic violence has increased considerably around the world, especially among black and peripheral women. The factors that explain this situation include exposure of women to aggressors and difficulties in seeking help or reporting during social isolation.
05 04/22/2020	Coronavirus: during quarantine, domestic violence increases even more in Latin American countries.	Statistical data from several countries indicate the exponential growth of gender violence, femicides, requests for help and complaints since the beginning of confinement.
06 04/22/2020	Coronavirus: four nurses report the exhaustion experienced during the fight against Covid-19	Women are part of the group most vulnerable to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nurses are particularly vulnerable due to exposure to the coronavirus in their professional activities, and because of their role as caregivers in the home environment. Although they are responsible for domestic care, they are also included in the statistics of domestic violence.

**Chart 1** - List of headlines published in O Globo newspaper and UOL. Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, 2020-2021

O GLOBO NEWSPAPER		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
07 04/28/2020	The new coronavirus pandemic will have 'catastrophic impact' for women worldwide, UN warns	During social isolation, there was an increase in the rates of domestic violence, forced child marriages and genital mutilations, in addition to the lack of access to contraceptive methods and family planning.
08 05/22/2020	I had no choice': economic crisis as a result of the coronavirus increases exchange of sex for housing	The Covid-19 pandemic has generated unemployment and loss of income, especially for women. During the period, the number of requests for sex in exchange for housing during social isolation increased.
09 05/30/2020	Coronavirus: reports of violence against women increase by 35.9% in April, during the quarantine	Since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been an increase in reports of violence against women, especially domestic violence and attempted femicides. Most of the calls corresponded to information about the protection network and rights.
10 06/01/2020	Femicide cases grow 22.2% in Brazil during quarantine to contain new coronavirus	Twelve Brazilian states showed an increase in femicides committed by partners and ex-partners of the victims. The loss of income and the consumption of alcoholic beverages were considered factors that amplified the cycle of violence. On the other hand, limited access to justice led to a decrease in face-to-face complaints of harassment and sexual violence. Creation of the electronic police station for women, in São Paulo.
11 06/12/2020	New epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic, Latin America sees numbers of domestic violence and femicides skyrocket	In Latin America there has been an increase in cases of violence against women, especially domestic violence because of the danger within the home favored by living with their aggressors. The rates of femicide and sexual violence were also alarming in the period. Complaint channels reported an increasing number of calls, although this number may be even higher due to the difficulty for people to seek help or report abuse due to the restriction on movement imposed by the pandemic.

Chart 1 - Cont.

O GLOBO NEWSPAPER		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
12 06/19/2020	Mental health: women are at greater risk of experiencing psychological distress related to Covid	Among the impacts of the pandemic, mental health has been reported in several studies, revealing that women face a particular risk of increased mental suffering related to the scenario, especially because of their vulnerability to situations of violence.
13 06/30/2020	UN report warns of persistent violations of the rights of girls and women around the world	The pandemic has exposed the situation of extreme vulnerability in which millions of women live around the world. Increase in cases of domestic violence and violation of rights, through harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and forced child marriage.
14 09/06/2020	Coronavirus, Zika and Ebola: why women are most affected by pandemics	Pandemics have historically deepened inequalities between men and women. Women are more susceptible to the risk of domestic violence and are disproportionately disadvantaged by loss of income in times of economic instability.
15 09/30/2020	With the pandemic, women will lose 10 years of advances in the labor market	Susceptibility of women in situations of vulnerability to situations of violence, especially domestic violence. Factors that intensify greater exposure to vulnerability: financial instability, lack of home and health structure, overload in daily life and care tasks.
16 10/19/2020	Femicides and violence against women increased during the pandemic, but complaints decreased	Increase in cases of femicide and requests for restrictive measures against partners and former partners. Decrease in records made at police stations and complaints related to bodily harm and rape due to restrictive measures.

Chart 1 - Cont.

O GLOBO NEWSPAPER		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
17 11/23/2020	Covid-19 pandemic made violence against women skyrocket around the world	Increase in cases of violence against women around the world, with emphasis on rapes, disappearances and femicides. Overload faced by associations that help women victims of violence, increase in calls to report violence in different countries of the world, growth of sexist violence, including female genital mutilation and forced child marriage
18 11/25/2020	Violence against women persists, but the pandemic has removed victims from the health system in Rio: notifications have dropped by 34%	The Covid-19 pandemic has overloaded health units, and as a result, victims of violence have been removed from care services. In 2020, there was a reduction in the number of notifications registered in health services, although cases of violence were increasing exponentially at that time. The percentage shows that black women were the most affected by violence.
19 01/29/2021	Women are the majority on the front line, but are excluded from decision-making in the fight against Covid-19	Although 70% of frontline workers fighting the coronavirus are women, they are excluded from the participation in the disease response and recovery plans. Setbacks in gender equality have always been observed, however data show that the damage caused by the pandemic, such as the increase in domestic violence or the drop in income, became even more evident in this period.
20 02/10/2021	The pandemic leaves more than half of women out of the workforce in Latin America	The economic and social effects of the pandemic are expected to have a significant impact on women's autonomy, including their vulnerability to domestic violence.
21 03/04/2021	Five cases of violence against women were registered per day in 2020, according to a study conducted in five states	Records of cases of femicide and violence against women stood out in the pandemic. Criminals - companions of the victims. Peripheral women had less access to reporting channels.

Chart 1 - Cont.

O GLOBO NEWSPAPER		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
22 03/07/2021	Brazil recorded 105,000 reports of violence against women in 2020; almost 300 a day	There was a significant increase in reports of violence against women in 2020 in Brazil, most of them concerning intra-family violence. Main measure adopted by the federal government - disclosure of service channels. Complaints also began to be made via the mobile application. Main victims - brown women aged 35-39 years old, with high school education and income of up to one minimum wage. Aggressors: white men, between 35 and 39 years old.
23 03/08/2021	Number of women victims of domestic violence in Rio was 250 per day during the Covid-19 pandemic	The alarming increase in cases of violence against women and femicides. Underreporting due to the imposition of restrictive measures and full coexistence with the aggressor, usually the victim's partner or ex-partner.
24 03/08/2021	Violence against women: a hidden pandemic made worse by Covid-19	Exacerbation of gender-based violence against women. Increase in the number of calls to gender-based violence hotlines, and in some cases more people requesting access to shelters or other support services. Increased risk factors for violence.
25 03/17/2021	Favela mothers: without income and without government aid, women feed their families with donations coordinated by the communities	The economic and social crisis directly affected women, single mothers and informal workers. Thus, assisted vulnerability leads to gender violence, an emergency issue. During this period, many women began to survive on donations and emergency aid and were subjected to male control, in the form of violence.

Chart 1 - Cont.



O GLOBO NEWSPAPER		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
26 03/29/2021	'He held me captive and abused me': the terrible daily lives of victims of domestic violence in the pandemic	Significant increase and severity in cases of violence against women, since the beginning of confinement, worldwide. Increase in the number of requests for emergency shelter and complaints to service channels. Increased unemployment, alcohol and drug consumption and reduced access to social services during the pandemic are other factors that have aggravated the situation.
27 06/07/2021	One out of four Brazilian women suffered violence during the pandemic, according to a study	The moment of breaking up the marital relationship is the moment of greatest risk and exposure of women to violence. The most severe cases are reported among separated and divorced women.
28 06/14/2021	Amid the increase in sexual violence in the pandemic, a group fights for the right to safe and legal abortion	Increase in the number of requests for legal abortion as an indicator of the increase in sexual violence in the country during the pandemic. Main victims - girls up to 12 years old.
29 07/15/2021	In Brazil, one complaint of domestic violence was registered per minute in 2020	Significant increase in calls to the 190 number to report occurrences of domestic violence and increase in the number of urgent protective measures granted by the courts of justice in 2020 - indications that the health and economic crisis caused by the pandemic has exacerbated violence against women. Decrease in the number of face-to-face complaints, mainly reports of threats, sexual harassment, rape and rape of vulnerable people.

Chart 1 - Cont.

UOL		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
30 04/14/2020	From domestic violence to unemployment, the coronavirus is more cruel to women	Increase in domestic and sexual violence, as a result of social isolation, and the possibility of online reporting in cases of violence, in the state of São Paulo.
31 05/08/2020	Women form support networks against domestic violence during the pandemic	Covid-19 pandemic, social isolation, economic crisis, mental illness - abrupt increase in cases of violence against women and in femicide rates. Promotion of outreach campaigns, apps, guidance by women-led organizations to break the cycle of violence.
32 07/21/2020	Covid-19 pandemic is affecting women's mental health, UN warns	Unpaid work, loss of employment and income, the increase in domestic violence due to the pandemic may be contributing to the mental deterioration of women, especially those aged 10-24 years.
33 08/2020	THE OTHER OF THE OTHER: Violence against black women did not start during the pandemic	Violence against women does not happen only in Brazil, but here there is an extra impact, as to this problem are added those resulting from racial violence, enormous economic inequality and many others, such as slums and unemployment.
34 11/23/2020	Violence against women soars around the world during the pandemic	Increase in cases of violence against women and femicides in several countries around the world and growth in the rates of complaints and calls to the pertinent channels in cases of violence against women caused by living full-time with the aggressors and limitations of access to justice.

Chart 1 - Cont.

UOL		
SERIAL NUMBER DATE PUBLICATION	TITLE	RESULTS
35 03/05/2021	Women suffer in silence from domestic violence during the pandemic in Brazil	Increase in cases of domestic violence in the first months of the pandemic, due to the unemployment of couples and confinement with the aggressors. As the Covid-19 outbreak has subsided, the number of complaints has increased and more women have left their homes to report to the police.
36 03/09/2021	The pandemic caused a negative transformation in the lives of women in Latin America	The Covid-19 crisis highlighted another pandemic, more invisible and difficult to fight: gender violence.
37 03/12/2021	Every minute, 25 Brazilian women suffer domestic violence	15% of Brazilian women aged 16 or over reported having experienced some type of psychological, physical or sexual violence perpetrated by relatives or intimate partner/ex-partner during the pandemic. Figures compatible with the profile of victims of femicide in the country (women aged 30-44 years old and with low education).
38 04/29/2021	The pandemic delays participation of Latin American women in the labor market by 10 years	Women under the age of 25 with less access to education were the most impacted. The setback makes the situation of economic dependence borderline, with an impact on the increase in domestic violence.
39 06/25/2021	Three times more than men: during the pandemic, women spend more than 170 hours taking care of children	Effects of the economic crisis on the Covid-19 pandemic reduce wage equality, female participation in the workforce and unemployment, especially among black and Latino women; increase in the rate of cases of violence around the world.

**Chart 1** - Cont.

Source: Research data..

### **Core meaning 1 - Social isolation exposes situations of domestic violence**

Since the beginning of the pandemic, women were vulnerable to the increase in various forms of violence in several countries around the world, due to the need for confinement rules to control Covid-19, which recommended that people “stay at home”. Compliance with this protective measure, however, contributed to the maximization of violence indicators as victims and aggressors lived full-time together at home, as shown in the following excerpts from the reports:

*[...] no country is free from the coronavirus epidemic, just as no country remains on the sidelines of the collateral explosion of sexist aggression, a scourge that has worsened worldwide due to the restrictions imposed by Covid-19<sup>(14)</sup>.*

*[...] in all countries, forced to enact travel restriction measures to curb the spread of the virus, women were trapped in unsafe homes. ‘The home is the most dangerous place for women<sup>(15)</sup>.*

*[...] she states that she felt ‘trapped in her own home’, with an unemployed, drug-using and violent husband. During confinement, he spent the day on the phone, playing games, hitting or abusing me<sup>(15)</sup>.*

### **Core meaning 2 - Economic crisis and closed doors: does it justify more violence?**

The socioeconomic crisis, generated by the pandemic, increased the situations of tension in interpersonal relationships, especially marital ones. At the same time, restriction of access to justice services, referral of health services, loss of financial autonomy, limitation of social contact and spaces of refuge, made it difficult to seek help to break the cycle of violence, which is consistent with the following excerpts:

*[...] the growing tension in relations is clear to anyone who monitors the cases of violence against women in this period. When women look for us, they are already very emotionally drained, afraid that men, who are more present at home, will take an aggressive attitude<sup>(16)</sup>.*

*[...] it is not only social isolation that causes conflict. The pandemic has also affected the economy. In general, the*

*husband and wife lost their jobs. There was an increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages in a period of great anxiety, which led to more violence. Layers of vulnerability come together. The dwellings are small, many consist of a single room<sup>(17)</sup>.*

*[...] the lower number of records of some occurrences is less associated with a decrease in cases of violence against women and more associated with the difficulties and obstacles they encountered by women in the pandemic to report the situations of abuse to which they are subjected, in addition to the instability of the services in this period, understaffing and less consultation hours and increased demands<sup>(18)</sup>.*

### **Core meaning 3 - Tools available to stop violence against women: what changes with the pandemic?**

The analyzed data revealed an increase in the notifications of complaints since the beginning of the confinement. Among the forms mentioned, links to reporting channels and/or online incident bulletins stand out. In this regard, requests for emergency shelters for women in situations of violence increased, as shown in the following excerpts:

*[...] since the beginning of the health emergency, we have seen an increase in the different forms of violence against women, with more calls to emergency assistance channels compared to gender violence, and, in some cases, more people requesting access to shelters or other support services<sup>(19)</sup>.*

*[...] in the first six months of 2020, 147,379 calls were made to 190 to respond to incidents of domestic violence compared to 142,005 in the first six months of 2019. However, complaints filed for bodily injury decreased from 122,948 in the first half of 2019 to 110,791 in 2020. The total number of registered rape cases fell by 22.9% in the same comparison (33,019 cases in 2019, against 25,469 in 2020<sup>(18)</sup>.*

*[...] Law 14.022/20, enacted in July 2020, regulates the registration of online and telephone incident reports of domestic and intrafamily violence. In addition, it aims to streamline assistance to victims, and has established the automatic extension of existing urgent protective measures as long as there is a state of emergency in the national territory<sup>(20)</sup>.*

### Core meaning 4 - Gender and color of violence in the pandemic

Gender violence has increased since the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, with emphasis on female genital mutilation and forced child marriages, femicides and death threats with higher rates among black women. And, as a predisposing factor to unemployment and an increase in extreme poverty, cases of sextortion or exchange of sex for housing have increased. The following excerpts highlight some of these situations.

*[...] estimates that disruptions to the various relief, empowerment and education programs caused by the pandemic will result in an additional 13 million early marriages between 2020 and 2030. Two years of delay in programs to fight female genital mutilation means that two million women will be subject to the practice. In general, harmful practices occur at times when there is less social control and a smaller supply of public services<sup>(21)</sup>.*

*[...] black women were the most affected, representing 66% of all these victims. In the same period, femicide of black women grew by 30% (5.6 for each group of 100,000 women), while that of non-black women grew by 1.6% (3.2 for each group of 100,000). The much higher increase in lethal violence against black women shows the inability of the Brazilian State to develop specific and necessary public policies for the most affected racial group<sup>(22)</sup>.*

*[...] with the loss of jobs, many people - and women are the most vulnerable - are unable to pay their rent. If I didn't have sex with him, he would kick me out. As a single mother, I had no choice. I didn't want to lose my home<sup>(23)</sup>.*

## ■ DISCUSSION

Historically, violence pervades women's daily lives and experience and, at the present time, the implementation of restrictive measures, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, has led to the aggravation of cases and types of violence, from moral harassment to femicide<sup>(5)</sup>. The intensification of violence against women, in the context of the pandemic, was evidenced by the analyzed reports<sup>(15,17)</sup> and corroborate global data, revealing that one in three women, of reproductive age, suffered some type of physical or sexual violence by their intimate partners in the year 2020<sup>(4)</sup>.

The unequal power relations derive from sociocultural and economic aspects rooted in patriarchy, especially in the private space. In this regard, the analysis of the reports

showed that social isolation imposed a longer time of contact between family members, culminating in conflict situations, including violence against women<sup>(14,24)</sup>. Due to the longer time that women spent in the home space – a place of protection and security versus oppression and violence – with their aggressors, generally partners or former partners, there was an increase in cases of domestic violence<sup>(25)</sup>.

It is estimated that the scenario favored the intensification of violence in the domestic space, compared to the public sphere. The indices point to a reduction (10.9%) in notifications of intentional bodily harm, threats (16.8%) and rapes (23.5%), which require presence in order to register complaints<sup>(6)</sup>. Therefore, there was greater use of tools as a way of coping to break the cycles of violence<sup>(19,18)</sup>. However, it should be said that the reduction in these cases may be related to underreporting resulting from social isolation.

Women are more susceptible to situations of physical and sexual violence, and in times of humanitarian crises, the risk is not uncommon, as seen in previous epidemics<sup>(8)</sup>. The profile of victims of violence, intersected by class and race, are mostly black and poor women, according to the reports used in this study<sup>(22)</sup>. These women face racial issues and conditions of overlapping vulnerabilities in parallel<sup>(24)</sup>.

The advance of the pandemic generated unemployment and loss of income, which boosted situations of vulnerability to gender and racial violence against women<sup>(17,23)</sup>. For men, the crisis enhanced the loss of the image of provider of the home, generating violent behavior; for women, there was a loss of financial autonomy and difficulty in breaking the cycle of violence<sup>(26)</sup>.

In this context, it should be noted that the abusive use of alcohol was a risk factor for the generation of situations of violence against women. The substance can enhance feelings of male power and control<sup>(17,27)</sup>.

With regard to violence against women, misogyny perpetuates the inferiority of gender, resulting in violence and, in extreme cases, femicide<sup>(17)</sup>. In 2020, compared to the first half of 2019, there was an increase (0.8%) in intentional homicides of women, and in cases of femicide (1.2%)<sup>(6)</sup>. The data are related to the limitations of the critical route for breaking the cycle of violence, mainly due to the distance from the support networks, essential for coping with and mitigating the effects of violence<sup>(18,28)</sup>.

In this context, health services were redirected, as a priority, to cases of Covid-19, relegating care to women victims of violence and limiting referrals to the health sector, including essential sexual and reproductive health services<sup>(18,29)</sup>. Other factors that made it difficult to seek care were the fear of exposure to the coronavirus and contamination by Covid-19<sup>(24)</sup>.

Limited access to health services causes significant damage to women, especially victims of violence<sup>(24)</sup>. Experiencing violence has implications for health conditions, triggering and/or aggravating pre-existing psychosomatic illnesses, interfering with the quality of life and in the social field, as a result of loneliness and loss of support network, reducing coping and making it difficult to break the cycle of violence<sup>(11)</sup>.

Therefore, the pandemic highlighted and enhanced aspects inherent to the issues of social and historical constructions, shaped by the association of gender inequality, with its various constitutive elements of patriarchy and misogyny, culminating in the various forms of violence mentioned in this study. It is necessary to fight violence against women at the various spheres of public power, through the implementation of public policies and coping strategies, in order to provide women with autonomy and active participation to reduce and break the cycle of violence.

A limitation of this study concerns the number of sources used and the restriction of materials available on the internet, and other means of communication are not considered. It should be noted that these limitations are partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the development and conclusion of the study characterize an achievement by a team of female researchers, in a context of social isolation, facing overload and household chores. Therefore, this study constitutes a strategy for women's struggle to face gender inequalities that promote violence.

## ■ FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite the fact that violence is a structural and historical problem, this study provides evidence about the intensification of cases of violence since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, and with its advance, the number of raped and murdered women has multiplied in several countries of the world. Social isolation has become an element of vulnerability, with implications for the increase in cases of violence against women, in the public and private spheres.

The results presented relevant data that emphasize the importance of the media in publicizing everyday situations and confirm the complexity of the phenomenon of violence in the context of the pandemic. They also revealed the constant struggle of women in the search for strategies to face the different forms of violence perpetrated. Likewise, they report the fragility of laws, policies and actions to fight this violence in contexts of humanitarian crisis, when the threat to life highlights social inequalities due to male domination.

That said, it is important to broaden discussions about this phenomenon, through investment in research and gender

education, in permanent education activities and in the training process of several areas of activity, especially in the area of health and Nursing. It is suggested to strengthen practices and actions to break the cycle of violence, and strategies for coping with and preventing the aggravation of situations, in addition to reporting. Furthermore, it is believed that interaction and integration between professionals, services, the community and the media, with actions of empowerment, support and acceptance for women, can support strategies to mitigate or even eliminate this phenomenon.

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