



WOMEN WHO BEAT WOMEN: REPORTS OF THE OCCURRENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN HOMOAFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS OF LESBIANS IN BELÉM, BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to give visibility to the subject of domestic violence in homoaffective relationships. Analyzes the occurrence reports of the Police Department of Women's Assistance [Delegacia de Atendimento à Mulher – DEAM] of Belém, Pará, Brazil, registered by lesbian women in situations of domestic violence. Uses the Content Analysis technique to explore the 48 (forty-eight) reports that were collected, referring to the period from 2011 to 2015. Its results show that a set of abusive behaviors covered by psychological/emotional, physical and patrimonial violence is one of the main manifestations of domestic violence in the affective relationship between two women.

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INTRODUCTION

The women's movement in the 1980s in Brazil played a prominent role for the visibility and confrontation of domestic violence, turning it from a private (from the home) to a public issue. By becoming a public problem, domestic violence has been highlighted in the national and international scenario. One of the questions linked to domestic violence against women is the socialization of the gender role, always present in these discussions, considering that, in the Western society, the roles of men and women are culturally defined.

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Thus, domestic violence has been studied, for a long time, under the direction of the man as the aggressor and the woman being the victim (gender inequality). The importance of the gender perspective to understand violence against women in the hetero-affective couples is undeniable. However, the gender-only perspective invisibilizes the violence in homoaffective relationships and create "myths" that violence between lesbian couples does not exist, since it's believed that women tend to be non-violent, passive, submissive, and enjoy equal power between them. This article aims to broaden the discussion of domestic violence in homoaffective relationships between women. In this context, domestic violence is defined as any violent, abusive and coercive behaviour where one individual tries to dominate, control and exert power over the other (Viggiani, 2016). Thus, violence can occur in any type of relationship, independent of sexual orientation. We tried to

understand, from the report of lesbians in situation of domestic violence, the occurrence of this phenomenon, which is yet little seen.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper results from an exploratory and descriptive research, aiming to a closer approximation, characterization and description of the problem related to domestic violence in homoaffective relationships of lesbian women, focusing on the analysis and discussion of the descriptive results to understand the characteristics of this phenomenon (Gil, 2011). For a better development of the investigation, a qualitative approach was adopted, considering it provides the deepening and exploration of a singular form of understanding domestic violence in the reports of lesbian women. The data were collected through a documentary research, which consists of a methodological treatment of documents. According to Gil (2011), documents, for the development of a scientific research, written or not, are sources that contribute to the clarification of a certain reality. Still according to the author, there are advantages and possibilities of using documentary research, such as: knowledge of the past in a more objective way; the investigation of processes of socio-cultural change in the population; and allows data acquisition without the constraints of the subjects.

Locus and sources

Domestic violence among lesbians, in Brazil, according to Avena, is very little documented and there are no official surveys and statistics on the subject (2010, p. 4). Usually, surveys are conducted using convenience sampling, in non-governmental organizations. The difficulty to access the homoaffective population was verified by Costa, Machado and Antunes (2011), who, in order to conduct a survey on domestic violence among homosexuals, had to select as participants people who belonged to some homosexual organization, representing a particularly active minority, conscious and informed, which does not correspond to the whole of the population, hidden because of homophobia. The search for official data related to domestic violence in lesbian couples led us to information related to Public Security, since the Maria da Penha Law (n° 11.340, Brasil, 2006) is extended to every and any woman in situation of domestic violence, regardless of sexual orientation. Accordingly, it was requested to the Secretariat of Intelligence and Criminal Analysis of Pará [Secretaria Adjunta de Inteligência e Análise Criminal – SIAC/PA] access to the database of occurrence records of the Police Department of Women's Assistance [Delegacia de Atendimento à Mulher – DEAM] in the Capital and Metropolitan Region. However, the locus considered for this study is the municipality of Belém, the Capital of Pará. The documentary sources for this study were official statistical and institutional written records, from the SIAC/PA database. The data sources are from primary nature, since they had direct physical relation with the analyzed facts, and there is an account or record of the experience lived (Gil, 2011, p. 253).

Procedures

In order to access the necessary information, the DEAM's records database from 2011 to 2015 was made available by SIAC. As for the temporal cut, it is worth mentioning that the initial intention was to collect data since the implementation of

the Maria da Penha Law, in 2006, but, considering the complexity of the information collected, it was decided to analyze the occurrence of the phenomenon in the recent years.

A dynamic reading of the 9.794 occurrence bulletins (OBs) was carried out, with attention to cases in which both the victim and the accused were women, reducing the sample to 78 OBs. From those, using LERBOP (software that assists in the reading of police occurrences), the cases of domestic violence between lesbian women due to the homoaffective relationship in Belém were selected. Thus, 48 OBs were identified. The pre-established inclusion criteria were: (1) they were lesbian women, of any age; (2) in situation of domestic violence; and (3) who were residents of the municipality of Belém, Pará. Exclusion criteria were all cases in which domestic violence was not configured among homosexual lesbians. The collected data were organized into an electronic worksheet and had the following variables: ages of victim and author, schooling of victim and author, victim and author's marital status, their occupation, the motivation of the violence, types of violence, presumed cause, time of relationship and the testimony of the victim. It is noteworthy that this study focuses on the reports of the lesbian women, victims of domestic violence in the homoaffective relationship. The other variables were used to support the characterization of the cases.

Ethics

Since this research involves humans, special attention is required to the ethical issues. It is relevant to clarify that: 1) the subjects of the research were not identified by their official names, as their data were kept in full secrecy, considering that their reports only make sense as part of the overall set of information; 2) all data collected were previously authorized by the competent authorities; and 3) the researchers assume all responsibility for the information disclosed by the research.

ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The data analysis was made using the Content Analysis, which Bardin (2011, p. 48) describes as a set of techniques aiming to obtain indicators (quantitative or not), through systematic and objective procedures, describing the content of messages to allow inferences related to the conditions of production and/or reception (inferred variables) of these messages. The Content Analysis sought to investigate what was explicit in the reports of women victims of violence, in order to obtain categories that allowed inferences to be made about the problem. It is organized in three phases: (1) Pre-analysis; (2) Exploitation of the material; and (3) Treatment of results, inference and interpretation. The pre-analysis was the moment of organization of the collected material for the systematization of the initial ideas. The floating reading of the OBs was carried out, for an approximation with the documents; then, indicators were established to delimit the clipping of analyzed texts, in context units and registration units. The registration unit is the basic element of meaning of an analyzed message, which aims to quantify and categorize the information. The context unit serves as an unit of understanding of the registration unit. It corresponds to the segment of the message, which dimensions, superior to those of the registration unit, are optimal so that the exact meaning of the registration unit can be understood (Bardin, 2011, p.137).

Table 1. Synthesis of the coding process

| Initial Categories | Intermediate Categories | Final Categories |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Authoritarian action (f = 2) | 1. Emotional/psychological violence (f = 72) | I. Abusive behavior (f = 112) |
| 2. Breakup (f = 2) | | |
| 3. Controlling attitude (f = 24) | | |
| 4. Feeling of fear (f = 8) | | |
| 5. Threat to coerce (f = 25) | | |
| 6. Threat of denigrating (f = 2) | | |
| 7. Silenced violence (f = 1) | | |
| 8. Guilt (f = 1) | | |
| 9. Parental alienation (f = 1) | | |
| 10. Discussions (f = 3) | | |
| 11. Cycle of violence (f = 1) | | |
| 12. Reveal of sexual orientation (f = 2) | | |
| 13. Aggressive approach (f = 37) | 2. Physical violence (f = 37) | II. Protective measures (f = 37) |
| 14. Material losses (f = 3) | 3. Patrimonial violence (f = 3) | |
| 15. Shelter rejection (f = 36) | 4. Protective measures (f = 37) | |
| 16. Request of protective measures (f = 1) | 5. Recurrence of violence (f = 2) | |
| 17. Specialized service (f = 1) | 6. Not reporting (f = 1) | IV. Trivialization of violence (f = 1) |
| 18. Recurrence (f = 1) | | |
| 19. Incentive not to record OB (Reporting) (f = 1) | | |

The second phase was the exploitation of the material, the moment to carry out the codification, classification and categorization of the analyzed testimonies. It was necessary to develop a refinement process by categorical grouping, following eight steps that helped construct the categories of analysis: 1) delimitation of the context unit: by reading the victims' reports, it was possible to delimit parts of these sources that reflect the broader context of the issue of domestic violence, which contributed to the characterization of the registry unit; 2) delimitation of the recording unit: clipping of the context units in sentences, based on records that revealed domestic violence as any aggressive attitude, aimed at establishing one partner's control and power over the other (Nunan, 2004); 3) exploratory survey: analysis of the registry units for the construction of the initial survey, in which the records that presented differences and similarities were classified; 4) initial categories: condensation of the surveyed records in initial categories; 5) intermediate categories: the grouping process of initial categories that presented codes of common similarities; 6) final categories: final grouping of intermediate categories; 7) judges' test: the evaluation of the construction of the initial, intermediate and final categories by 2 judges, researchers on the subject of domestic violence; the pre-established cut-off margin was 80% concordance between the judges; 8) confirmation of the final categories: from the two judges' answers with 100% agreement, the final categories were validated.

RESULTS

It was identified that the profile of the women in the homoffective relationships, both victim and aggressor, did not present significant statistical differences; in general, they present similar characteristics.

Characterization

The most frequent age group was 35 to 45 years for victims and aggressors, with the victims presenting a percentage of 35.42% and the aggressors, 31.11%. The predominant marital status was Single, for more than 70% of the participants; as for schooling, victims and aggressors completed high school, with percentages of 32.35% and 29.41%, respectively. The most significant occupation was in the servicesector (motorcycle driver, seller and shopkeeper), with 30% for both groups.

It was possible to establish that five and a half years (5.5) is the average duration of lesbian relationships in this sample. The absence of specific data was noticed, such as race, number of children, family composition and incomes; it is considered that the registration of these variables in the occasion of the OB could improve the characterization of those women.

Process of categorical refinement – reports of violence: For the analysis of the data (reports of violence of lesbian women), the process of categorical refinement was carried out, using the Content Analysis. After analyzing the documents, it was possible to carry out the progressive categorical grouping in initial, intermediate and final categories. In Table 1, the synthesis of the coding is observed.

Initial categories: By reading the reports, it was possible to identify a total of 19 (nineteen) initial categories. The construction of each category was based on the excerpts from the selected reports, supported by the theoretical framework of this research. In the initial categories, we observed the existence of similar elements that served as codes of similarity. These terms were grouped and thus formed the intermediate categories (Table 1).

Intermediate categories: After the identification of the nineteen initial categories, they were refined in 6 (six) intermediate categories. As shown in Table 1, the grouping of 12 (twelve) initial categories made possible to construct the first intermediate category: Emotional/psychological violence, referring to the excerpts that reported attitudes that caused impact, damage or emotional distress. The second intermediate category was named Physical violence, and refers to the reports that evidenced some type of aggressive action or conduct of physical character. The third intermediate category was entitled Patrimonial violence; this type of violence is listed in the Maria da Penha Law as the practice of violation of material possessions. For these two categories, there was no additional grouping; they only had their denominations changed. Next, the fourth intermediate category, Protective measures, originates from the agglutination of two initial classes. This category refers to urgent protective measures, which constitute one of the main innovations of the Maria da Penha Law. For the construction of the fifth intermediate category, called Recurrence of violence, there were two primary classes.

Table 2. Final category Abusive behavior (f = 112)

| Final Category Dashboard | |
|--|---|
| Category | Recording/context unit examples |
| Emotional/psychological violence (f= 72) | “have been separated for about 3 months, but she called the rapporteur for a conversation, at which time the rapporteur was not willing to resume the relationship, motivating her to make threats, under the textualls ‘that she would denigrate the rapporteur’s image, take everything from her, to end her professional career and, after, she would end rapporteur’s life’” (P03) “called her family and revealed the sexual orientation of the rapporteur, additionally threatening to tell [the victim’s] mother” (P31) |
| Physical violence (f= 37) | “punched several parts of the rapporteur’s body in public, tearing her clothes and exposing her breasts” (P08) “the rapporteur was beaten by punches, slaps and kicks by her partner” (P14) |
| Patrimonial violence (f= 3) | “started to threaten her by saying ‘you’ll see what I’m going to do with you and this apartment, when you return you will not find anything in here’” (P27) |

Note: For a better comprehension of the excerpts, originally in Brazilian Portuguese, all the quotes in the tables were translated.

Table 3. Final category Protective measures (f = 37)

| Final Category Dashboard | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Category | Recording/context unit examples |
| Protective measures (f=37) | “was offered shelter, but it was not accepted by the rapporteur” (P39) “regarding to the Protective Measures established in the Law nº 11.340/2006, [the rapporteur] opted for the following: Against the aggressor: Prohibition of certain conducts, including: a) - approximation to the offended, her relatives and witnesses, setting the maximum distance between these and the aggressor; b) - contact with the victim, her relatives and witnesses by any means of communication; c) - visiting certain places in order to preserve the physical and psychological integrity of the victim” (P45) |

Table 4. Final category Recurrence of violence

| Final Category Dashboard | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Category | Recording/contexto unitexamples |
| Recurrenceofviolence (f=2) | “she also reports that she has sought the social service of this specialist, which initially softened the problem for three months, but then it continued...” (P27) “since the separation there have been several disagreements, which have already been recorded in previous reports” (P16) |

Table 5. Final category Trivialization of violence (f=1)

| Final Category Dashboard | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Category | Recording/contexto unitexamples |
| Trivializationofviolence (f= 1) | “according to the rapporteur, she asked the unidentified Military Policemen to be taken to a police station and was oriented by them to reflect if that was what she really wanted, because on that occasion, as it was Sunday, the station would be very busy” (P45) |

The initial name of this category was “Recurrence”, but, as a suggestion of one judge, it was changed to “Recurrence of violence”. The last intermediate category refers to the trivialization of violence or to the reprivatization of domestic violence as of little importance. It is noteworthy that the preliminary name of this intermediate category was “Not to record OB”, but, as a suggestion of one of the judges, it was changed to “Not reporting”.

Final categories

After the performed processes, it was noticed the need for a new grouping of the first three intermediate classes, resulting in the final category Abusive behavior. This category reflects the behaviors that contribute to the most diverse forms of violence that women experience in intimate relationships. For other final categories, there was no need for another grouping (Table 1). In order to validate the refinement process of the initial, intermediate and final categories, two judges evaluated and calculated the level of agreement for the constitution of the terms. The evaluation resulted in 100% agreement, with adjustments in the nomenclature of some categories. Finally, the reports were organized into 4 (four) final categories: 1) Abusive behavior; 2) Protective measures; 3) Recurrence of violence; and 4) Trivialization of violence.

Abusive behavior: This category appeared to be the most frequent, in 73.69% of the analyzed reports. It was composed of three subcategories: (1) Emotional/psychological violence; (2) Physical violence; and (3) Patrimonial violence. Table 2 shows the dynamics of the abusive behavior category. It is understood as abusive behavior any attitude, action or conduct practiced by one member of the couple towards the other, aiming to dominate, control and exercise power over the partner (Pitilli, 2016). Such behaviors manifest themselves in different forms and cause great damages to the life of the woman in situation of domestic violence. For this research, it is considered emotional/psychological violence an abusive behavior characterized by threats that cause suffering for the victim, which can be verbal, written, from intimidating gestures and situations that have the intention of denigrating, calling names, criticizing, manipulating, humiliating, causing guilt, reinforcing internalized homophobia (Pitilli, 2016, p. 10). In the first report of emotional/psychological violence, it is observed the similarity of the abusive actions that can occur in both straight and homoaffective relationships. The desire of the aggressor to resume the relationship and the victim's refusal is a trigger to a series of threats, willing to intimidate and force the victim to remain in the abusive relationship. These behaviors were recurrent in the analyzed reports. It is observed in the second report, as highlighted in Table 2, a

form of emotional/psychological violence that occurs only in homo-affective relationships, which is the threat of revealing one's homosexuality (Vickers, 1996; Costa, Machado; Antunes, 2011; Cantera, 2007, Pitilli, 2016). This type refers to the threat, by the aggressor, of revealing the sexual orientation of the partner to her/his family, friends and boss, in case they do not yield to the aggressor's demands for control and power (Nunan, 2004, p. 8). Fear of suffering from prejudice and sexual discrimination by relatives, peers and society as a whole makes it difficult to assume homosexuality for many lesbians. Thus, these women experience a "double closet" (Costa, Machado; Antunes, 2011), the first not to assume that they are lesbian and the second not to admit violence within the relationship.

The subcategory Physical violence refers to abusive behaviors that cause harm to the physical integrity of the victim. Violent acts may include punching, showing, pulling hair, biting, kicking, use of weapons or guns, throwing objects, strangling, among others. These behaviors, for Costa, Machado and Antunes (2011), were considered the most severe forms of violence, sometimes leading to death. The reports reflect the physical aggression suffered by lesbian women, which reveals the myth of the socialization of women as prone to non-violence, that aggressions between lesbians are mutual or that, in relationships between two women, power is more symmetrical. However, it is emphasized that, regardless of the type of relationship, physical violence is a serious problem that damages the victim's life. Regarding to Patrimonial violence, which is the last subcategory of this group, in general, it is characterized by behaviors that cause losses and destruction of material goods. The typification of this violence in the Maria da Penha Law has the purpose of protecting and safeguarding the patrimony of women who are in a situation of vulnerability and insecurity to manage their lives. The existence of this type of violence in lesbian relationships is observed as a way of controlling, harming and threatening the victim.

Protective measures: Protective measures was the second most frequent category, in 24.34% of the studied reports (Table 3). The protective measures contained in the Maria da Penha Law constitute a true advance for the confrontation and immediate repression of the situation of domestic violence against women. Protective measures are intended to safeguard life and ensure the protection of women's human rights. The Law highlights two types of protective measures: 1) those that protect the victim; and 2) those that restrain the abuser. It was verified in the reports the offer of shelter as a protective measure of urgency, in order to remove the victim from the home and from living with the aggressor. It should be noted that the Article 35 of the Maria da Penha Law provides the creation of services to prevent and assist women victims of domestic violence; among these services, there are shelters that can serve women and their dependents. In this context, it is up to the police authority, at the time of the occurrence, to inform about the services to which the woman is entitled, which was observed in most of the reports; however, none of the women accepted this service. Shelter services, in general, are structured for the care of women in hetero-affective relationships. Nunan states that it is believed that lesbian could use services aimed at heterosexual women, but, since shelters are open to all women, it is possible that the victim does not feel safe, since the abuser may have access to that place (2004, p. 14). In other report, we notice the request of the protective measure by the victim. This fact was observed in only one

report that requests a protective measure to compel the aggressor. However, in the study conducted by Diniz and Gumieri (2016), which analyzed the implementation of protective measures in the Federal District, from 2006 to 2012, the authors found that, in 95% of the cases of hetero-affective relationships, protective measures were asked by the victim. It can be observed that the low request of protective measures by lesbians can be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the applicability of the Maria da Penha Law in cases of domestic violence in the homo-affective relations.

Recurrence of violence: Recurrence of violence was the third category; it presented an absolute frequency of 2 (two) occurrences. In Table 4, we can see the reports that supported the construction of the category. The main objective of the category Recurrence of violence was to confirm that episodes of domestic violence do not occur in a unique and isolated way, but in a cyclical one. This category refers to women who, in previous situations of abusive behavior of the partner, were seeking for help to face violence. Related to the low frequency of this category in the reports of lesbians in situation of domestic violence, Schraiber et al. (2008) argue that women seeking specialized services are those who experience more severe domestic violence. The tendency to deny violence in the affective relationship means that victims do not seek professional support, or do so as the last resort. One issue to be pointed out is whether specialized services have adequate training to deal with situations of domestic violence in the homosexual relationships. However, perhaps the low frequency of this category is related to issues as prejudice, discrimination or not wanting to reinforce negative stigmas to homo-affective relationships.

Trivialization of violence: The last category was Trivialization of violence, and it was the less frequent, with only 1 (one) occurrence. Table 5 presents the report that showed the category on screen. The category Trivialization of violence refers to acts that means to trivialize, disparage and reprivatize the conflict of domestic violence. The report that gave rise to this category resurrects the discussion of domestic violence as a crime of "less offensive potential", what was abolished by the Maria da Penha Law. Trivializing episodes of domestic violence by giving little importance to their significance may contribute to the victim being convinced that violence is somehow her fault and could have been avoided if she had known how to act (Nunan, 2004, p. 3). Domestic violence being seen as a private and personal problem, especially in lesbian relationships, contributes to the invisibility of the phenomenon. In the context of homosexual relationships, there are some aggravating myths that can contribute to the trivialization of violence, such as: 1) the belief that homo-affective relationships are ephemeral because they privilege sexual aspects to the detriment of affective ones; 2) the common sense that quarrels between lesbians is a mutual conflict, there is no victim; 3) the idea of judging that violence in homo-affective relationships is normal (VICKES, 1996; Nunan, 2004; Cantera, 2007). The unveiling of these myths about the lesbian community can help in the visibility and overcoming of domestic violence.

Final Considerations

Guiding the discussion about domestic violence among homosexual women was challenging and at the same time, enriching. A challenge due to the few researches that approach

this subject, complemented by the lack of information of official character that evidences this phenomenon. The categories of analysis (Abusive behavior, Protective measures, Recurrence of violence and Trivialization of violence) made it possible to perceive the characteristics of violence among lesbians from the victims' statements/reports. In this paper, we highlight there are more similarities than differences in the occurrence of violence in hetero and homoaffective relationships, as already shown in the works of Vickers (1996), Nunan (2004) and Pitilli (2016). From the exploratory analysis, it was possible to identify that the aggressors use various forms of threats, in an attempt to control and exert power over the victim to remain in the violent relationship. Otherwise, it is understood that these same threats drove the victims to seek protection and denounce their (ex)companions. It is necessary to break the silence that hangs over the reality of the lesbians who experience situations of violence in homoaffective relations. Above all, it is necessary to contribute to the visibility of the problem, so that every woman can have the conditions and State support to overcome violence. The study carried out has its limitations, once it was not able to continue with the research regarding the unfolding of the situation of violence after the reporting taken into effect by the victim, in the DEAM; if the victim was referred to a care service for women in situations of domestic violence; whether the protective measures were upheld or not by the court. However, it is believed that these limitations can be transformed into possibilities of study for future research, as well as the extension of the study of violence in the trans and homosexual relationships of men and women. From the exposed, it is understood that there are many questions to be explored in the universe of understanding homoaffective relationships. In addition to the violence derived from prejudice and sexual discrimination to which homosexuals are recurrent targets, domestic violence among people of the same gender is a real, serious social problem that must be faced by all.

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