

Meanings of family dynamics by men who reproduced domestic violence

Significados da dinâmica familiar por homens que reproduziram a violência doméstica

Significado de la dinámica familiar por hombres que reprodujeron la violencia doméstica

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Abstract

Objective: To analyze the meanings attributed to family dynamics by men who reproduced domestic violence suffered in their childhood.

Methods: This is a qualitative research guided in the light of Symbolic Interactionism. We sought to know the oral history of men under criminal prosecutions before the 2nd Court of Justice for Peace at Home, located in the city of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. To this end, interviews were used, which were transcribed, textualized and transcribed. Data organization was based on content analysis.

Results: The statements reveal that interpreting physical, psychological aggression, neglect and witness of domestic violence experiences between parents in childhood directed constructing the meanings that family dynamics must be based on male control and domination over the wife and children, principles that guided family relationships in adulthood.

Conclusion: The stories refer to the meaning that family dynamics must be delineated based on sexual division of roles, with men being considered providers and maximum authority of the house, and women, responsible for children care. It is also noted the symbology that father-children interaction must be established in a rude and severe way. These meanings predispose to reproducing violence during adulthood, which demonstrates the importance of actions that make it possible to redefine violent family interactions, preferably still in childhood.

Resumo

Objetivo: Analisar os significados atribuídos à dinâmica familiar por homens que reproduziram a violência doméstica vivenciada na infância.

Métodos: Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa guiada à luz do Interacionismo Simbólico. Procurou-se conhecer a história oral de homens em processo jurídico junto à 2^a Vara de Justiça pela Paz em Casa, situada no município de Salvador, Bahia, Brasil. Para tanto, utilizou-se entrevistas, as quais foram transcritas, textualizadas e transcritas. A organização dos dados se deu com base na Análise de Conteúdo Temática.

Resultados: As narrativas revelam que a interpretação das experiências de agressões físicas, psicológicas, negligência e testemunho da violência conjugal entre os pais na infância direcionou a construção dos significados de que a dinâmica familiar deve ser pautada no controle e dominação masculina sobre a esposa e filhos, princípios que nortearam os relacionamentos familiares na fase adulta.

Conclusão: As histórias remetem para o significado de que a dinâmica familiar deve ser delineada com base na divisão sexual dos papéis, sendo o homem considerado o provedor e autoridade máxima da casa e a mulher responsável pelo cuidado dos filhos. Nota-se ainda a simbologia de que a interação entre pai e

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filhos deve ser estabelecida de maneira rude e severa. Estes significados predisõem à reprodução da violência durante a vida adulta, o que demonstra a importância de ações que viabilizem a ressignificação das interações familiares violentas, preferencialmente ainda na fase da infância.

Resumen

Objetivo: Analizar el significado atribuido a la dinámica familiar por hombres que reprodujeron la violencia doméstica vivida en la infancia.

Métodos: Se trata de un estudio cualitativo guiado según el interaccionismo simbólico. Se buscó conocer la historia oral de hombres en proceso judicial en el 2° Tribunal de Justicia por la Paz en Casa, situado en el municipio de Salvador, estado de Bahia, Brasil. Para eso, se utilizaron entrevistas que fueron transcritas, textualizadas y transcritas. La organización de los datos se realizó con base en el análisis de contenido temático.

Resultados: Las narrativas revelan que la interpretación de las experiencias de agresiones físicas, psicológicas, negligencia y testigo de la violencia conyugal entre los padres en la infancia llevó a la elaboración del significado de que la dinámica familiar debe estar marcada por el control y dominación masculina sobre la esposa e hijos, principios que guían las relaciones familiares en la fase adulta.

Conclusión: Las historias remiten al significado de que la dinámica familiar debe estar definida con base en la división sexual de los roles, en que el hombre es considerado proveedor y autoridad máxima de la casa y la mujer responsable del cuidado de los hijos. Además, se observó la simbología de que la interacción entre padre e hijo debe establecerse de forma grosera y severa. Estos significados predisponen a la reproducción de la violencia durante la vida adulta, lo que demuestra la importancia de acciones que posibiliten la ressignificación de las intervenciones familiares violentas, preferentemente aún en la fase de la infancia.

Introduction

Worldwide, data on children in situations of violence are worrisome, especially when it occurs in the process of intrafamily interaction. A worldwide survey estimates that about 300 million children are subjected to physical and/or psychological aggression by parents or other caregivers at home.⁽¹⁾ In Brazil, in 2018 alone, over 76 thousand cases were reported to a telephone channel for complaints.⁽²⁾ This reality, whose percentages do not portray the actual number of victims due to the veiled nature of domestic abuse,⁽³⁾ demands for strategies to protect this public.

A family routine permeated by violence has repercussions for health and human development. A study conducted in South Korea shows that children living in violent homes tend to experience depression and anxiety, in addition to aggressive and delinquent behaviors.⁽⁴⁾ In Texas, a research with young people reveals positive association between physical aggression in childhood and perpetration in dating.⁽⁵⁾ Corroborating, a Brazilian research has shown that men, as they witness conflicting relationships between their parents in childhood, tend to perceive violence as something natural and reproduce this behavior.⁽⁶⁾

It is relevant to point out that the family has a social function of protecting, caring and transmitting affection to children, in order to provide their full development.⁽⁷⁾ However, immersed in the context of family abuse, these prerogatives have been violated, which requires attention on the part

of professionals, above all who work in health, social and education fields, in order to guarantee individuals a childhood and adolescence “free from any form of neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty and oppression”.⁽⁷⁾

Considering that the family is a normative system of relationships between individuals, it appears that children with a history of family violence tend to reproduce it in future relationships.⁽³⁾ Thus, based on the assumption that actions are mediated by meanings constructed from previous social interactions,⁽⁸⁾ it is believed that the meanings attributed by men to family dynamics experienced in childhood influence the way their family relationships are shaped in adulthood. Understanding that to intervene in family relationships based on violence, it is necessary to modify the interpretation of symbols and favor the construction of new meanings, the question is: How do men under criminal prosecution for domestic violence mean family dynamics experienced in childhood?

Thus, this study aims to analyze the meanings attributed to family dynamics by men who reproduced domestic violence experienced in childhood.

Methods

This is a qualitative research guided in the light of Symbolic Interactionism, which is based on three premises: human beings act based on the meanings that things have for them; the meanings originate from a social interaction established with other peo-

ple; such meanings can be modified through an interpretative process elaborated by individuals when facing different situations in their path.⁽⁸⁾

Considering that the meanings attributed to family dynamics in childhood can influence the way family interaction is outlined in adulthood, we sought to know the oral history of men under criminal prosecutions before the Brazilian 2nd Court of Justice for Peace at Home based in the city of Salvador, state of Bahia, Brazil. The inclusion criteria were being under criminal prosecution for domestic violence and having experienced or witnessed family violence in childhood. Emotionally unstable patients were excluded according to assessment performed by the service's psychologist, totaling 05 participants.

Approach with the collaborators occurred through Reflective Groups with Men developed with the purpose of preventing and coping with domestic violence. With the development of dynamics, it was possible to identify all participants who met the inclusion criteria, who were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the research. The number of participants was not previously defined, since we opted for the methodological path of Oral History, which prioritizes the deepening of discourses, to the detriment of the number of subjects.⁽⁹⁾

National and international research recommendations involving human beings were met, according to a resolution of the Brazilian National Health Council (*Conselho Nacional de Saúde*) 466/2012, in addition to following the COREQ criteria. The study received an approval Opinion (2,639,224) by the Research Ethics Committee of *Universidade Federal da Bahia* on 11/19/2014.

To know participants' oral histories, we used interviews guided by a semi-structured script contemplating sociodemographic aspects and the following guided question: Tell me what your family relationship was like as a child and how it has been today. Data collection occurred individually, from April to July 2018, in places previously agreed with men, including the research group room and the participants' own homes, but without the presence of family members.

The interviews were recorded in audio and lasted an average of two hours and thirty minutes. For systematization, initially full transcription of all oral content was performed, then the following steps were performed: textualization (organization of discourses in the first person of singular, excluding unnecessary elements); and transcreation (text logical organization).⁽⁹⁾

After this process, the reorganized material was presented to participants, who checked its content and signed the Informed Consent Form. All statements were then organized based on content analysis, contemplating the following steps: pre-analysis; material exploitation; treatment of results and interpretation.⁽¹⁰⁾ After an exhaustive content reading, discourses related to each axis theme were identified, emerging the analytical categories, whose findings were interpreted in the light of symbolic interactionism. It is emphasized that categorization was made possible by NVIVO[®] 11, created to favor qualitative data organization, and that during discourse analysis was performed peer-review, thus avoiding interpretation solutions.

Results

Five men under criminal prosecution for domestic violence were interviewed before the 2nd Court of Justice for Peace at Home in the city of Salvador. They were between 27 and 41 years old and declared themselves mixed-race. With regard to religion, three reported being Catholics, one Evangelical and one Spiritualist. Concerning education, two had completed higher education and three had completed high school. Income ranged from one thousand to one hundred *reais* (*reais* is the Brazilian currency, 1 *real* corresponds to about 5.5 US dollars) to ten thousand *reais*. All reported being single and having broken up with the partner who reported violence.

Oral History pointed to the experience of a childhood full of physical, psychological aggression, neglect, in addition to domestic violence witness between parents. Interpreting these experiences, in turn, directed constructing the meanings that family dynamics should be delineated in the sense

Chart 1. Meanings attributed to family dynamics by men who reproduced domestic violence experienced in childhood

Family dynamics		
Childhood experience	Meaning	Adulthood experience
My stepfather was a rude man who always spoke harshly and aggressively to me. I was a kid who couldn't do anything. He forbade me to leave the house, play with other children. For anything, he'd fight and yell at me. (H1)	Father must be rude to his children	I didn't like my kids playing on the street and not even having a lot of friends. I'm not much of a conversation, either. I speak once. I am like my father: I think son should be raised strictly, even if they find me rude. (H1)
I grew up in a violent home! My father was the owner of reason and no one could question the attitudes taken by him. Every time they got out of it, he beat my mother. We (children), on the other day, got beat up and grounded. (H2)	Husband/parent should not be questioned	I won't allow my wife or children to answer me. So when this happened I ended up being aggressive to the point of hitting her and punishing my children. (H2)
As a child, I witnessed a lot of fights between my parents. Most of them were because my father didn't want my mother to have friendship sit-ins. I always wanted to know where she was going and who was going with her. He didn't like her going out with her sisters. (H3)	Husband must control women's social interaction	I always monitored my wife's cell phone and friendships. [...] I kept imagining that people could somehow influence our relationship. (H3)
Whenever my mother discovered some cheating, they ended up fighting and she was spanked. We even witnessed him stabbing her. After all, she always forgave him and moved back in together as if nothing had happened. (H4)	Husband may have extramarital relationships	Even though I was with her, I had several other relationships. When she found out, she'd come asking about it and pressurizing me to confess the cheating. We argued a lot about it and I lost my temper. Sometimes it would result in physical aggression because I pushed her or even spank her to leave me alone. My mother always forgave my father's betrayals, so she should forgive me too. (H4)
My father worked all day and my mother stayed home, but she didn't take care of me or my brothers. She wouldn't clean the house, she wouldn't cook, and she wouldn't bathe us. When my father came home from work and saw that situation they argued. (H5)	Husband must provide the home and wife to take care of the house and the children	We used to fight a lot because I came home from work and found my daughter dirty. [...] I called her irresponsible, sow, dumped, slutty. I've pushed her a few times. I demanded that she take good care of our daughter and the house. (H5)

that men are rude to their children, unquestionable, have control over women's social lives, have social permission to have extramarital relations, besides being home providers, while wives are the ones in charge of caring for the house and children. Based on these meanings, the patterns of family relationships in adulthood were established (Chart 1):

Discussion

This study allowed us to unfold that, in the process of interaction in the domestic environment, men, still in childhood, seize symbols and meanings inherent to family dynamics, around which, mean the social roles that men and women should assume throughout their lives. One of these meanings refers to the well-defined attributes that delimit the spaces of action between genders, in order to naturalize the social division in the public sphere, aimed at men, and in the domestic sphere, inherent to women. In view of this experience, they reproduced the meaning that they are obliged to provide for the family, while women must take responsibility for caring for home and children.

This situation was questioned intensely in the 1970s, in the context of the feminist movement, faced with demands for their rights, especially for equality in working conditions, wages and also in the division of domestic tasks. Among the achievements, women then start to occupy spaces and roles

previously assigned to men, such as the support of the house.⁽¹¹⁾ However, this fact did not bring the male resignification of the meanings that permeate the space held as women."⁽¹²⁾

Thus, unlike the role of providing the house, which currently has more than 28 million Brazilian families headed by women,⁽¹³⁾ to the social functions of care for home and children, for instance, did not present the same transformation, with timid participation of men in household chores, which, in most cases, is a form of "help".⁽¹⁴⁾ Rooted in the biological function of pregnancy and breastfeeding, these roles are still markedly played by women, persisting gender inequality, which culminates in female work overload.⁽¹⁵⁾ This reality, apprehended in the interviewees' family models and reproduced in the current family relationship, evidences lack of awareness of men regarding responsibility in division of household tasks, especially child care and education.

However, in meeting the reconstruction of social roles, there is a movement in which some men resonate their role and outline their husband/father subjectivity with new meanings. Even if slowly, progressively, men who incorporate the contemporary figure of husband/father in their corporality and affection are slowly, taking over, among other actions, caring for the house and children.⁽¹⁶⁾

However, in the case of interviewees, this study reveals a childhood permeated by absence of paternal affection and expressed through rude word use,

lack of dialogue and inhibition of interaction with other children. It is emphasized that the control of interpersonal relationships, expressed in the prohibition of leaving home to play with other children, makes it impossible to reflect and reconstruct experiences experienced in family spaces, a setting detrimental to child development.⁽¹⁷⁾ Therefore, the community space of interaction is lost, consubstantial for reflection of experiences in the family relationship, leaving the school space to learn other meanings to male social relations.⁽¹⁸⁾ Furthermore, absence of reference of affection in parent-child relationship is a driver of harm in child development and, when permeated by violence, further amplifies the repercussions of a physical and psychological nature.^(3,19)

Regardless of the understanding about the importance of playing for child development, the family context permeated by lack of dialogue, harsh speech and discussions refers to the child the belief that the parent-child relationship should be established in the same way. In this setting, it is important that men who have experienced father-child relationship fragility in childhood, by living the experience of being a father, break the stereotypes of the past, understood as being provider and hostile, and open possibilities for spaces for care, dialogue, emotion and affection.⁽²⁰⁾ It is necessary that, even in the face of a severe and authoritarian father figure, an experience lived in childhood by participants, men have the opportunity to modify the symbols understood, which will favor more tolerant and affectionate behavior in the family relationship. A study carried out in Indonesia addresses that affectionate relationships with the father can reduce aggressive behavior of children, which points to the importance of family link in child education.⁽¹⁸⁾

Another meaning unveiled from statements refers to the understanding that the husband/father should not be questioned. For interviewees, it is the duty of men to govern the family through the principles that wives are hierarchically subordinate to their husbands; and children, subordinate to their fathers, so that wife and children cannot contest the husband/father. This conception is supported by a study carried out in Scotland with young people

who affirm that the definition of the role of chief for men is established so clearly that any questioning of their attitudes is not acceptable, and may even use violence in an attempt to affirm while possessing reason.⁽²¹⁾ Thus, in the family context, men learn that women and children must submit to male authority, expressed in decision-making in relation to domestic determinations.

Furthermore, men assimilate, since childhood, not only the way of relating to their children, but also the right to decide on the life of their partners and, thus, their control.⁽²²⁾ The nature of male authority, reinforced by the ideal that women should be submissive to men and that they have the right to control them, was also revealed in the study, illustrated in the statements that refer to the control of social life. Men realized, even when they were children, that one of the reasons for marital conflicts between their parents referred to deprivation of women's freedom, especially regarding the right to come and go and relationships of friendships. From these childhood experiences, they learned the meanings and reproduced similar behaviors as adults.

This socially shared conviction that men must control women is a masculine necessity; it is permeated by the ideal of conjugal hierarchy and by attributions of the female role in a conjugal relationship as a caring and faithful wife, dedicated exclusively to motherhood and home.⁽²³⁾ As for restriction of female freedom, this can be justified by the fear of interference from third parties in the relationship, as pointed out in a study developed with women who experienced violence.⁽²⁴⁾

When assuming extramarital relationships, men in this study reveal that, from the parents' relationship, they naturalized such behavior as inherent to men; therefore, the woman's agreement is expected. In fact, a study developed at Columbia adds that men's extramarital relationships give them social titles of virility.⁽²⁵⁾ In contrast, with regard to the social construction of female loyalty, when women do not meet this obligation, men tend to adopt aggressive behavior, with female murder in the name of honor legitimized for years.⁽²⁶⁾ Anchored in gender inequality, this permissiveness for the homicide of

women, considered an adulteress, fueled their social demotion, the feeling of hatred and the application of violence.⁽²⁷⁾

It is important to emphasize that the meanings abstracted from the experience of men who, in childhood, witnessed family relationships based on violence, end up contributing to the naturalization of male power; therefore, the social asymmetry between genders is reinforced, which in turn intensifies the constancy of domestic violence. To change this reality, health, education and social action professionals are essential; in addition to favoring identifying children in situations of family abuse, they will be able to promote actions based on dialogue, respect and sharing of tasks and powers between genders, in order to enable the apprehension of new symbols and meanings capable of transforming the future family dynamics. In the meantime, the Health at School Program (PSE - *Programa Saúde na Escola*) is as an important instrument in this process due to the potential to work with children and adolescents.⁽³⁾

Although the study is limited to representing the discourses of a small group of men inserted in a given cultural context of northeastern Brazil, not allowing generalization of the findings, as well as for not grasping the symbology of family dynamics attributed by men whose childhood was not marked due to relationships of violence, the results contribute to the performance of nursing and other health sciences by enabling a greater understanding of potentially harmful meanings for being-man-husband-father development. The statements provide elements for health professionals to reflect on the importance of educational strategies to be implemented as early as possible with children in order to enable the construction of family symbols based on affectivity, respect and symmetry between genders.

Conclusion

The statements of men under criminal prosecutions for domestic violence reveal that interpreting family experiences in childhood led to constructing the meanings that family dynamics must be based on

male control and domination over wife and children. All statements refer to the understanding that the family system must be organized based on sexual division of roles; men are considered providers and maximum authorities of the household, and women are responsible for caring for their children. The speeches also demonstrate the symbology that father-children interaction must be roughly and severely outlined. These meanings predispose reproducing violence during adulthood and the perpetuation of this phenomenon in society; this demonstrates the need to develop actions that make it possible to redefine family dynamics by men with a history of domestic violence, preferably still in childhood.

Collaborations

Magalhães JRF, Gomes NP, Estrela FM, Silva AF, Carvalho MRS, Pereira A, Cruz MA and Carneiro JB declare that they contributed to study design, data analysis and interpretation, article writing and approval of the final version to be published.

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