

Women's opinion on fatherhood and on men's activities of care**A visão da mulher sobre a paternidade e as atividades de cuidado desempenhadas pelo homem****La visión de la mujer sobre la paternidad y las actividades de cuidado desempeñadas por el hombre****Received: 05/09/2015****Approved: 18/06/2016****Published: 01/09/2016****Aline Costa de Sousa Kawamura¹**
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This study aims at analyzing women's conception of shared parenthood and child-raising responsibilities. This is a quantitative and descriptive research that included the participation of one hundred (100) women hospitalized at a University Hospital in the city of Curitiba, PR, Brazil. The results show that single women have little support of the father in child-care activities and that they tend to assimilate the man's role. Women in a *common-law marriage* or married claim to recognize the importance of a father's care, although in most cases they restrict the number of activities they can perform. It is important to emphasize that health professionals should encourage for parental responsibility to be equally shared, so the father's participation is not merely complementary to the mother's.

Descriptors: Paternity; Child care; Role playing.

Este estudo objetiva analisar a concepção feminina a respeito da paternidade e o compartilhamento de responsabilidades relacionadas ao cuidado com os filhos. Trata-se de uma pesquisa descritiva de caráter quantitativo que contou com a participação de cem (100) mulheres internadas no Alojamento Conjunto de um Hospital Universitário de Curitiba. Os resultados encontrados apontam que as mulheres solteiras possuem pouco auxílio do pai nas atividades de cuidado com a criança e que elas tendem a assimilar o papel masculino. As mulheres em relações estáveis ou casadas alegam reconhecer a importância do pai, embora, na maioria dos casos, restrinjam o repertório de atividades desempenhadas. Aponta-se a necessidade dos profissionais de saúde fomentarem junto às mulheres o compartilhamento do cuidado com o pai de modo igualitário, não apenas complementar à maternidade.

Descritores: Paternidade; Cuidado da criança; Desempenho de papéis.

Este estudio objetiva analizar la concepción femenina sobre la paternidad y el intercambio de responsabilidades relacionadas al cuidado de los hijos. Se trata de una investigación de carácter cuantitativo que contó con la participación de cien (100) mujeres internadas en el Alojamiento Conjunto de un Hospital Universitario de Curitiba, PR, Brasil. Los resultados encontrados apuntan que las mujeres solteras poseen poco apoyo del padre en las actividades de cuidado de los niños y que ellas tienden a asimilar el papel masculino. Las mujeres en relaciones estables o casadas alegan reconocer la importancia del padre, aunque, en la mayoría de los casos, restrinjan el repertorio de las actividades desempeñadas. Se apunta a la necesidad de que los profesionales de salud deban fomentar la responsabilidad parental compartida de modo igualitario y no solamente como complemento a la maternidad.

Descriptores: Paternidad; Cuidado del niño; Desempeño de papel.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of family, as well as its organization, is directly related to the historical moment and the dominant culture, and has suffered numerous changes as societies evolved¹. In the XIX century, the family core was characterized by the authority of the father, who was usually the head of the family, while domestic and children care was exclusively a woman's responsibility¹. The power exerted by men was even greater thanks to the fact that their wives and children depended on them economically².

From the 1960's in, the fight for equality and for women's rights, the expansion of feminist movements and the insertion of women in the job market have influenced in the traditional identity of "provider" associated with men^{2,3}. Women are currently in a process of rediscovery and expansion of their space in society and in their own domestic and familial lives⁴. This process has opened some space for the fathers to take care of their children and do the housework⁵. Since it is more and more necessary for the women to help paying for the expenses of the house, it also becomes necessary for the men to help with the needs and demands of the children⁵.

Paternity, when seen as based in the emotional distancing of the father from his children and as having the financial support as a focus, remounts to old values guided by the "asymmetry of gender relationships, as well as in a vision of the world according to which men and women perform different roles when caring for the children and the house"⁵. However, the fathers, besides being important for the development of their children and the construction of their emotions, are also considered capable of providing all the care usually attributed to maternity⁵.

It should be noted that the participation in occupations can occur individually or depending on others, and the actions expected by society can be improved and conceptualized by the client^{6,7}. Therefore, it is highlighted the importance of new studies which discuss the several profiles of women and connect these

characteristics with the practice of fatherhood⁸. That is because "learning to be a father, in the current context, is the great challenge of the XXI century"⁹. Still, it is important to highlight researches that point at the passive acceptance of the fathers of the positions taken by their partners regarding the care for their children¹⁰.

It is notable the relevance of studies which aim at analyzing the point of view of women regarding the practice of fatherhood, since they can become "mediators in the relationship between father and son, or convert themselves in obstacles to prevent that relationship from actually happening"⁸. Women need to be aware of the importance of paternal care, which is necessary for a child's development, together with the strengthening of those connections, which demands the mother to cede some space for this care to take place⁸. Therefore, this study aims at analyzing the conception of females regarding fatherhood and the sharing of responsibilities connected to the care of children.

METHOD

This study was conducted at the Accommodation Annex of the General Hospital of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). The Accommodation Annexes (AA) are a care system implanted in Brazil from the 1990s on, and it is characterized by the permanence of the mother together with the neonate, for 24 hours a day, until both are discharged from the hospital. Among their main objectives are the development of the care women have with their children, and the incentive to the participation of the father¹¹. Submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the General Hospital (CRE/GH) (CAAE: 40364615.3.0000.0096), this quantitative research. This type of research usually generates numerical results which can be statistically analyzed¹².

Com o intuito de alcançar os objetivos propostos foi realizado um estudo de natureza descritiva. It is important to highlight that this kind of research aims at describing the

phenomena of a certain reality by identifying the opinions shown by the target participant population¹³.

The population of this research is constituted by the mothers who had recently given birth, and were hospitalized in the Accommodation Annex. Among the inclusion criteria, were: being of the female gender; being older than 18 years of age and younger than 40; being able to read and write; being able to answer the questions asked by the researcher.

The instrument of data collection was a structured questionnaire, to be answered directly by the target population of the study. This questionnaire, created by the main researcher, is composed of 8 multiple choice questions, and it was applied to one hundred (100) mothers hospitalized in the AA during the period from March to June, 2015. This investigation technique is characterized by presenting written questions to the participants of the research, and its objective is to get to know the opinions, beliefs and past

situations lived through, regarding a specific subject¹⁴.

After data was obtained, it was tabulated and analyzed by means of statistical apartment, and through the identification of the opinions expressed by the participants, followed by an analysis that followed data already present in international and national literature.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the profile of the participants of this study regarding marital status, number of children and occupation (work activity). It should be noted that of the total of 100 interviewed women, 56% lived with their partners (but were not married), 25% were married, and 19% were single. Regarding the amount of children, 35% had only one child, and it was found that 24% of women had 4 children or more. Regarding the category "occupation", it was found that 65% of the interviewed women worked in a remunerated activity.

Table 1. Profile of women admitted in the Accommodation Annex of the General Hospital of the Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná. 2015.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS				
Marital Status		Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
		19%	56%	25%
Quantity of children	%	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
1 child	35%	37%	36%	32%
2 children	31%	21%	29%	44%
3 children	14%	16%	15%	12%
4 children or more	24%	26%	20%	24%
Occupation	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
Housewife	35%	10%	42%	32%
Works in a remunerated activity	65%	90%	58%	68%

Table 2 shows the position of the mothers when it comes to the participation of the father in the care for the children. It should be highlighted that 88% acknowledge that the father is as important as the woman to the development of their children. They also tend

to value their participation in activities of care (82%). Regarding the category "Single", it needs to be highlighted that 37% believe the mother to be more important than the father, and 31% do not incentivate the participation of the father.

Table 2. Opinions of women the Accommodation Annex of the General Hospital of the Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná, regarding paternal involvement. 2015.

MOTHER'S OPINIONS REGARDING PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT				
Who do you think is the most important person in your child's development?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
I am the most important person (mother)	12%	37%	5%	8%
The father is the most important person	-	-	-	-
Both are equally important	88%	63%	95%	92%
I don't know	-	-	-	-
Do you encourage the participation of the father in the care of the child?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
I encourage a lot	82%	63%	86%	88%
I do not encourage	16%	31%	14%	8%
I don't know	2%	6%	-	4%

Table three identifies the activities encouraged by women and practiced by men regarding the care for the children. Incentive rates have varied from 45%, regarding financial support activities, to 63% regarding school participation and caring and attention.

When it comes to activities of care taken on by men, it has presented a minimum rate of 62% regarding the activity "feeding" and a maximum of 75% in the activity of "financial support."

Table 3. Activities encouraged by women and practiced by men according to women admitted in the Accommodation Annex of the General Hospital of the Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná. 2015.

ACTIVITIES ENCOURAGED BY WOMEN AND PRACTICED BY MAN				
In what activities do you encourage parental participation?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
Financial support	45%	53%	37%	56%
Caring and attention	63%	42%	66%	72%
Participation in hygiene activities	47%	36%	48%	52%
Participation in feeding activities	51%	36%	51%	60%
Participation in school activities	63%	53%	62%	72%
Participation when playing	54%	36%	55%	64%
What activities does the father exercise?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
Financial support	75%	53%	75%	100%
Caring and attention	77%	42%	76%	96%
Participation in hygiene activities	63%	36%	62%	72%
Participation in feeding activities	62%	36%	60%	76%
Participation in school activities	66%	53%	67%	84%
Participation when playing	72%	36%	76%	80%

Table 4 shows the result of the social support required by women in the care activities with the children. It is observed that the assistance of the partner or husband appears as the main source of support for

married women, and for women who live with their partners but are not married, to a total between 58% and 64%. Regarding single women, the main source of support identified was the maternal grandmother (63%).

Table 4. Social support required by women with children according to women admitted in the Accommodation Annex of General Hospital of the Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná. 2015.

SOCIAL SUPPORT REQUIRED BY WOMEN WITH CHILDREN				
When you need help with the child, who do you turn to?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
The child's father	57%	42%	58%	64%
Maternal grandmother	41%	63%	39%	36%
My sister	11%	26%	5%	12%
Other children	-	10%	4%	12%
Mother-in-law	11%	-	10%	16%
Sister-in-law	1%	-	2%	-
Female Partner	-	-	2%	-

The role of health professionals in facilitating the process of sharing the care between father and mother is in table 5. From

the participants, 68% state not to have been incentivated to share the care with the father of the child.

Table 5. The role of health professionals in the Accommodation Annex of the General Hospital of the Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Paraná. 2015.

THE ROLE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS				
Do health professionals encourage the woman to share the care needs with the father?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
Yes, during prenatal care	17%	10%	16%	24%
Yes, in the prenatal and puerperal	9%	-	14%	4%
Yes, in the puerperium period	6%	5%	4%	12%
They do not encourage	68%	84%	66%	60%
What practices were used to encourage the women?	Overall Result	Single	Not married, but lives with partner	Married
Educational pamphlets	6%	5%	5%	8%
Health education groups	7%	5%	5%	12%
During consultations	7%	5%	9%	4%
Individual conversations	18%	-	21%	20%

DISCUSSION

The incidence of cohabitation relationships (woman who are not married but live with their partners) and single mothers made up 75% of the participants. That highlights, thus, the diverse new familial structures which resulted from the process of demographic evolution of the family, as it relates to the current life dynamic of the adults¹⁵. The adhesion to informal cohabitation relationships, which are frequently temporary, is expressed through high birth rates among single women and couples who live together but are not married, and have a greater chance of splitting up. That is still intensified by the high divorce rates among couples who have formal relationships¹⁵.

From the interviewed women, 15% were single. In the last four decades, it is possible to note an increase in the percentage of children who live without the presence of their biological father¹⁵. The concept of "fatherly absence" indicates a situation in which the biological or adoptive father does not live in the same house as his children. However, the fathers can be completely or partially absent from the lives of their children, depending on the degree of contact and the sharing of the care for the child¹⁵.

It is important to highlight that children who come from familial cores where there is not a father are less likely to develop a relationship with them, having as a consequence weaker relationships with their fathers, not to mention anger and resentment¹⁵. It can also be highlighted that factors such as low academic achievements, behavioral problems and higher rates of divorce among adults also influence that relationship¹⁵.

Regarding the occupation of the participant women, it was possible to observe high levels of engagement in working activities by women who are the head of the family. The job market also pays different salaries for men and women, and considers the revenue generated by females as a supplement to the domestic budget⁴. However, the women's

income is essential for the maintenance of the house. Also, this research also concluded that 26% of single women have four or more children, which increases their financial and caring overload. The absence of the father in the familial core contributes for the establishment of low economic familial conditions¹⁵.

The present research has shown women who are married or live with their partners and are not married tend to engage in working activities, but in lower levels than single women. It can be noted, therefore, that the current tendency is for women to work outside and perform new roles, opening new spaces for paternal care¹⁶. The father's participation in the care with the child has a positive effect to the core of the family. In addition to the benefits for the development of the child, the overload of caring demands that used to be exclusive to the mother starts to be shared. It should also be noted that a direct connection is growing between a greater engagements of the man with the care the child needs, and the lesser involvement of that child with violence and psychoactive substances¹⁶.

From the analysis of the position taken by the interviewed women regarding paternal participation, it was noted that the mothers who live in a stable union and the married ones allege to recognize and encourage the involvement of the fathers in the care for the children. However, the integrity of the care that men provide to the child is not shared with the women with equal accountability, especially in practical activities such as the care for hygiene and nutrition. The results found in this research were, therefore, in accordance to national literature; even though these researches point to the importance of the father in the familial life, that presence is still subject to several obstacles¹⁷. Women demand that men participate in the domestic activities and in the care of their children, but still do not accept their participation completely. That is explained by the possibility that females fear losing their role as the main responsible for the

care of children, a role instituted thousands of years ago, and known as motherhood¹⁷.

Regarding the activities of care performed by the men, it was possible to notice that they have a greater involvement in the financial aspect and in demonstrations of affection, and not so much in everyday activities such as: bathing, teeth brushing, meal preparation and feeding. Men tend to prioritize livelihood and spend a big part of their day engaged in working activities. Therefore, they do not have much time to stay with their families⁵. This stereotype is even encouraged by Brazilian law, as we can see in examples such as that of the paternity leave, which does not correspond to the real demands a father has regarding the participation in his children's lives. That is, he is considered unnecessary for that purpose thanks to gender stereotypes⁵.

Regarding the single women, it was noted that few of them stimulate paternal participation and, at the same time, the percentage of men engaged in activities of care for their children is low. From separation on, the responsibilities of men become unclear. This is intensified when the progenitors of a child become more distant and communicate less, which directly implicates in a loss of space for the father in his child's life⁸.

Regarding families who go through a marital separation, several aspects are alleged to have been highlighted. Among them, the reduction in the contact of children with their fathers, who do not have the tutelage of them, being that in these cases the fathers are frequently accused of being absent and of not fulfilling their role¹⁸. Women who are heads of the family tend to assimilate the male role and admit its importance only regarding certain tasks usually attributed to men by society¹⁹. Therefore, women prevent men from developing their ability to care for their children¹⁶.

It is understood, thus, that even though men are more involved and closer to their children and to domestic life than in previous generations, this involvement is still less than

ideal, and the women are still responsible for taking care of the children, while men are charged with an auxiliary role in specific activities. The role of the man in the life of his children becomes that of a helper or assistant of the mother, a position that indicates that they are less important in the lives of their children. Men have a hard time taking the initiative to engage in the life of their children, and therefore, it is important for the women and for other family members to make it easier for him to develop the ability to care²⁰.

This process is frequently unconscious, and it is shared even by the women and the families themselves, since features stereotypically attributed to men are closely connected to their masculinity and authority. In addition, a great part of the male population believes that the woman is more relevant for the lives of their children, and that they are more apt to perform activities of care²¹. Also, the activities of care performed by men are frequently supervised by other members of the family, generally female figures, which impairs their attempt at fatherhood⁵.

One of the greatest challenges of health services is the insertion of the father in the process of monitoring the children and the pregnant women, since the health routines are often aimed at women. For that to happen, it is important for the health team to be aware of the importance of the presence of the father, and its impact in the health of children, so they can understand issues pertaining to social transformations and gender stereotypes¹⁶.

Encouraging the participation of the father in prenatal consultations is paramount to generate confidence, self-esteem, and fight the doubts and insecurities which end up preventing the development of an affective connection of the father with his wife and the neonate during the pregnancy²². And, if men do not participate in this stage, that can reflect in the sharing of posterior care to the children¹⁰. Hence the importance for health services to adopt humanized actions that allow for the father to develop his ability of care with the

child, becoming more secure and autonomous in order to develop these practices²⁰.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study point out that women recognize the importance of the father, but tend to restrict his participation and give to paternity the status of an assistance offered to women.

The fathers, besides being important for the development of their children and the construction of their emotions, are also considered capable of providing all the care usually attributed to maternity. The work of health professionals with the female public, in order to overcome the cultural characteristics usually attributed to men, is important for them to develop the diverse abilities that can completely answer the needs of a child.

It is important for fatherhood to be lived as much as motherhood, not only regarding the participation of the father, but in order to allow for the rethinking of tasks, and the creation of new habits. Regarding single women, it can be observed that they compose a risk group regarding social vulnerability, thanks to their task overload, financial risk and the roles they perform, which directly compromise the quality of life of their familial core. Thus, it is necessary to take a closer look at this population, with the objective of building their independence and constructing a social network of support to these women.

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Aline Costa de Sousa Kawamura e Maria José Gugelmin de Camargo contributed equally in the different parts of the study, as well as in the final writing and review of the article.

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