

Maria da Penha Law: perceptions of the women in the context of domestic violence
Lei Maria da Penha: percepções de mulheres em contexto de violência intrafamiliar
Ley Maria da Penha: percepciones de mujeres en el contexto de la violencia intrafamiliar

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This is a qualitative study whose objective is to investigate the perceptions of women about Law 11,340 (Maria da Penha) and about the Specialized Police Offices for Women (DEAM, in Portuguese). It was carried out from February of 2015 to March of 2016 in the city of Jataí/GO, Brazil, with six women in situations of domestic violence that had denounced the aggressors. The data were obtained through semi-directed, individual and audio recorded interviews, that were later transcribed in full, with subsequent analysis of thematic content. Three categories emerged: "Knowledge about the Maria da Penha Law, disbelief on prevention and the work of the DEAM"; "Impunity for the perpetrator of aggression, the feeling of injustice and the consequences of violence"; and "Expectations regarding the other and the woman's conception". The results revealed a feeling of insecurity on the part of women, since the recorded case reports did not result in measures to punish the perpetrators or prevent them from continuing to threaten women, that is, the complaint did not inhibit the violence nor resulted in effective protection. When they sought the police station, although they had knowledge of the existence of the law, the participants were not aware of their rights, especially as regards restraining orders.

Descriptors: Domestic violence; Public policy; Family.

Este é um estudo qualitativo que tem por objetivo investigar as percepções de mulheres acerca da Lei nº 11.340 (Maria da Penha), bem como, sobre a Delegacias Especializadas de Atendimento às Mulheres; realizado de fevereiro de 2015 a março de 2016 na cidade de Jataí/GO, com seis mulheres em situação de violência intrafamiliar que denunciaram os agressores. Os dados foram obtidos por meio de entrevistas semidirigidas, individuais, audiogravadas e transcritas na íntegra, com posterior análise de conteúdo temática. Emergiram 3 categorias: "o conhecimento sobre a Lei Maria da Penha, a descrença na prevenção e o trabalho da DEAM"; "impunidade do autor de agressão, sentimento de injustiça e as consequências da violência"; e, "as expectativas em relação ao outro e a concepção de mulher". Os resultados revelaram o sentimento de insegurança por parte das mulheres, visto que os boletins de ocorrência registrados não resultaram em medidas que punissem os autores ou os impedisse de continuarem ameaçando-as, ou seja, a denúncia não inibiu as violências ou resultou em proteção efetiva. Ao procurarem a delegacia, embora tivessem conhecimentos acerca da existência da lei, as participantes não conheciam seus direitos, especialmente, no que se referia às medidas protetivas.

Descritores: Violência doméstica; Política pública; Família.

Este es un estudio cualitativo que tiene por objetivo investigar las percepciones de mujeres acerca de la Ley nº 11340 (Maria da Penha), así como, sobre Comisarías Especializadas de Atendimento a las Mujeres; realizado en febrero de 2015 a marzo de 2016 en la ciudad de Jataí/GO, Brasil, con seis mujeres en situación de violencia interfamiliar que denunciaron a los agresores. Los datos fueron obtenidos por medio de entrevistas semi dirigidas, individuales, audio-grabadas y transcritas en la íntegra, con posterior análisis de contenido temático. Surgieron 3 categorías: "el conocimiento sobre la Ley Maria da Penha, el descreimiento en la prevención y el trabajo de la DEAM"; "impunidad del autor de la agresión, sentimiento de injusticia y las consecuencias de la violencia"; y, "las expectativas en relación al otro y la concepción de la mujer". Los resultados revelaron el sentimiento de inseguridad por parte de las mujeres, dado que las denuncias registradas no resultaron en medidas que puniesen a los autores o les impidiese de continuar amenazándolas, o sea, la denuncia no inhibió las violencias o resultó en protección efectiva. Al buscar la comisaría, aunque tuviesen conocimientos acerca de la ley, las participantes no conocían sus derechos, especialmente, en lo que se refería a las medidas protectoras.

Descriptores: Violencia doméstica; Política pública; Familia.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic and intra-family violence is a phenomenon originated in the inequalities of gender and power. Gender, as an analytical category, refers to the historical and social constructions about the way of being male and female, whose roles develop from the learning in the culture in which they are inserted¹.

Historically, characteristics such as docility, maternity and fidelity have been assigned to women, as well as activities that have closed them in the private sphere. In contrast, men have been appointed for functions of rationality, strength and position of domination in the family environment; dynamics that until today feeds the patriarchal logic².

The definition of the feminine gender is allied to motherhood and family care, whereas the masculine, to work, activities in the public sphere and the provision of the family. In this way, men, in their patriarchal exercise, have the power to control or determine the conduct of women, and may even punish them, even if they do not disagree with social norms³.

In patriarchal, sexist and misogynist society, such as the Brazilian one, it is permissible to use violence for male supremacy and domination and to reaffirm women's submission. Although society is in constant transformation, it still promotes and supports androcentric behaviors that reinforce the asymmetry of relationships between men and women, leading to serious problems such as violence within the family context⁴.

Domestic violence refers to any act of violence based on gender difference that results in suffering, physical, sexual or psychological harm to women, including threats, coercion and deprivation of liberty^{5,6}; which has become a social phenomenon with major influence in the way women live, get sick and die.

Domestic or intra-family violence refers to the violations and assaults that occur within the home and the perpetrator of the aggression is generally someone who has maintained or still maintains an intimate relationship of affection with the victim. It is

characterized in many ways, from visible marks on the body (physical violence) to subtler but not less important forms, such as psychological violence, which brings significant damage to the emotional dynamics of women^{5,6}.

Domestic violence can also happen to children, adolescents or other family members. The term will be used here to refer to the violence perpetrated by an intimate partner to the woman, since historically men have taken the place of perpetrators and the women of victims of such aggressions. The term domestic and intra-family violence is also used in line with the nomenclature adopted in the Maria da Penha Law^{7,8}.

Aiming at fighting amounts the high levels of domestic and intra-family violence, the Brazilian government has integrated actions such as the creation of norms and standards of care, improved legislation, support for educational and cultural projects to prevent domestic violence, and increased access of women to justice and public security services. In this field, the National Plans of Policies for Women, the Maria da Penha Law, the National Policy and Pact for Combating Violence against Women, the Technical Standard of the Center for Assistance to Women in Situation of Violence and the Specialized Police Offices for Women stood out⁶.

The elaboration of specific measures by the State to combat and cope with domestic and intra-family violence was the result of the demands and mobilizations of the feminist movements. Among the public policies sanctioned in the Brazilian scenario, Law 11,340, known as the Maria da Penha Law, is highlighted, which came into effect in 2006 and aims to prevent, restrain, punish and eradicate domestic and intra-family violence against women. It also establishes the creation of Courts for Domestic and Family Violence against Women and the application of urgent restraining orders, which are judicial determinations aimed to offer protection against the possibility of new violent acts, under penalty of the perpetrators suffering sanctions in case of noncompliance⁵.

After twelve years of its implementation, the Maria da Penha Law has become a popular instrument in the country and the number of denunciations of threats and aggressions has increased considerably in recent years. However, the actions for the achievement of comprehensive care to women, as well as the prevention of the occurrence of new episodes, have been insufficient. The noncompliance with the restraining orders by perpetrators are recurrent and there are still difficulties regarding the offer of protection to women by public security services⁹.

The understanding that domestic and intra-family violence is not a natural phenomenon has required efforts for the guidance to public services and training of professionals so that they can identify violence and promote actions that are based on the recognition of aggressive behavior as a socio-cultural problem. Underreporting is also an element that directly interferes with the identification of domestic violence rates, resulting in the invisibility of the issue and scarcity of investments for the creation of protocols and the expansion of specialized services¹⁰.

Even though the government has initiatives to create proposals that aim at equality between the subjects, as well as advances in the creation of institutions focused on attention and protection to women in situation of violence, the actions do not cover all the existent demand. The Maria da Penha Law has not yet reached the status of priority policy in government planning. Specialized services provided by law, such as the creation of shelters, police stations, public defender centers, health services and others are not yet in force throughout the country, concentrating in large cities and in the South and Southeast regions¹¹.

Because it is a topic that involves many dimensions, namely legal, economic, emotional, social, historical, political, assistance and health dimensions, experienced in a unique way in each context and interpersonal relationship, it is crucial that a great amount of knowledge is available to discuss and to theorize about motivations, coercion strategies and practices aimed at the

eradication of violent behavior. Based on this, when integrating multiprofessional teams, psychologists and other professionals should be strongly committed to transform the reality, breaking with the idea of social control and maintenance of stereotypes, critically analyzing their theoretical and methodological contributions not to make their interventions spreaders for the perpetuation of machismo and patriarchy¹².

In this context, professionals should understand that domestic violence is characterized primarily as a violation of human rights, permeated by inequalities in gender relations. In this way, actions must be guided by the offer of subsidies to promote women's protagonism, promoting reflections, facilitating the process of awareness and emancipation so that they can identify abusive situations, seek support networks and strengthen ties with the community, building nonviolent interpersonal relationships¹³.

Thus, knowing the perceptions of women in situations of violence on the Maria da Penha Law and on the service provided in the Specialized Police Offices for Women (DEAM) is important to propose improvements in public policies and in the existing services. Bibliographical survey on the subject revealed that the service provided at police stations has perpetuated social injustice, given the low resolution of the police action¹⁴.

Although there may be welcome in the police stations, there is no speed in granting restraining orders and there is excessive bureaucracy; also, the language of the operators is too technical, compromising the understanding of the institutional functioning on the part of the women¹⁵. The lack of preparation of the police officers in the reception of women indicates the importance of promoting training actions with these workers¹⁶. In view of the above, the present study aims to investigate the perceptions of women about Law 11,340 (Maria da Penha), as well as about the Specialized Police Offices for Women.

METHOD

Guided by the qualitative methodology, an exploratory study¹⁸ was conducted in a southwestern city of Goiás state, Brazil. This is part of the integrated project "Violence, gender and family: implications in psychology and society".

It was developed from February 2015 to March 2016. The convenience sample was composed of six participants, all indicated by the DEAM team. The inclusion criteria were being a female, aged 18 years or more, living in situation of domestic and intra-family violence and who had issued a police report at the Specialized Department of Assistance to Women in the city of Jataí/GO, Brazil, with a view to denouncing the perpetrator of aggression. The exclusion criteria were being under 18 years of age, having experienced gender-based violence whose author was not related to nor had intimate bond with them and not having reported the incident to the authorities.

The data were obtained through semi-structured and individual interviews, which were audio recorded and later transcribed in full. The interviews were conducted by psychology students and took place in the participants' homes. The questions concerned sociodemographic data, such as age, marital status, schooling, profession, number of

children; perceptions about the Maria da Penha Law; expectations when seeking the police office; and restraining orders achieved.

About data analysis, thematic content analysis was used, which consists of a way to investigate qualitative data by organizing topics with subjects that appear more frequently^{17,18}. The categories were formed, *a posteriori*, from the analysis of the interviews and the data were interpreted in the light of the gender theories. Also, pseudonyms were used in order to protect the identities.

The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Goiás under number 1,919,1805.

RESULTS

Participants were between 27 and 72 years of age and had been involved in situations of violence perpetrated by the partner, son or brother, that is, the aggressions had been perpetrated by people with intimate relations of affection. On the level of schooling, they had between incomplete elementary school and complete high school. Only one participant did not have children, while the others had between four and nine children. In relation to the professions, there were two general helpers, two artisans, one housewife and one was unemployed, as information arranged in Table 1.

Table 1. Caraterização das participantes. Jataí/GO, agosto de 2015.

Name	Schooling	Profession	Children	Age
Anne	Complete high school	General helper	04	45
Diana	Complete elementary school	Housewife	-	26
Jaina	Incomplete elementary school	Artisan	07	47
Leona	Incomplete elementary school	Unemployed	04	30
Maria	Complete elementary school	Artisan	06	72
Vania	Incomplete elementary school	General helper	09	49

Three categories emerged: (1) Knowledge about the Maria da Penha Law, disbelief on prevention and the work of DEAM; (2) Impunity for the perpetrator of aggression, feelings of injustice and the consequences of violence; and (3) Expectations regarding the other and the woman's conception.

Knowledge about the Maria da Penha Law, disbelief on prevention and the work of DEAM

This category revealed that the women were unaware of the help provided by the Maria da

Penha Law, as well as of the rights it covers, defends and guarantees; that is, they did not have access to public policies to combat domestic violence:

What I know about Maria da Penha law is the story of that woman who was injured, but I do not know the story in depth. I know it is aimed to protect us women after what happened, right? So, I have never gone deep into the story, because I was not used to this thing that happened to us [...] (Vânia).

To speak the truth? Nothing. I've heard many things, a protection in favor of the woman's case, right? (Leona). Oh, I have little understanding of these things [...] These days I was watching a documentary on television that

told that when a person is mistreated at home, she should denounce it, [...] (Jaina)

Also, the insecurity regarding the granting of restraining orders and their maintenance was evidenced. This is due to the fear that the restraining orders are not fulfilled by the perpetrator of violence, as well as of the non-effectiveness of the instruments provided for in the current legislation:

No. I will not lie, I'm afraid (referring to the restraining order) (Leona).

It was only these thirty days that he could not get close to me, and after thirty days he had to do it again (referring to having to go to the police office to renew the restraining order of distancing). We do not have the emotional structure to keep doing that (Vânia).

It was also verified the noncompliance of Law 11.340/06 by the ex-partners and the recidivism of the violence. These assaults were fraught with disrepute as to the possibility of protection offered by the Maria da Penha Law:

He already knew he was going to do this to me, he already knew the consequences he was going to suffer, right? So, he was not afraid (Leona).

He arrived drunk here and wanted to hurt my little grandchild and, this, I do not accept it [...] I put myself in the middle of them and he wanted to stick a... screwdriver, he said he was going to kill me and he was going to kill (fact occurred after the subject had been taken to the police office due to an interviewee's denunciation) (Jaina).

In addition, even with the weather highlighted in the speeches, women were satisfied with the service - performed by a woman - in the DEAM. However, the interviewees were uncomfortable with the police approach to the situation of violence:

Great, the day before I went there earlier (in the police station), I talked to the police officer, she received me very well, she was very kind to me [...] I talked to a female marshal and she received me very well (Jaina).

It was very good, as some say, I have nothing to complain about it, right? I think at that moment, what they had to do is what they were doing (about the service at the police station) (Leona).

It was good [...] They made the report (Anne).

I was talking to the police officer who came here, we needed him, he said, "You grab him and beat him and then you call us." I did not find that right (Vânia).

They came, (police officers) we've even tried to look for him, but we did not find him (Leona).

Impunity of the perpetrator of aggression, feeling of injustice and the consequences of violence

There were emotional, social and structural consequences in the lives of women arising from the lack of punishment for the perpetrators of violence, which distance them from the guarantee of their rights:

While he lives in freedom, I live in fear, a fear that unfortunately I will always feel (Leona).

I want the justice system to act with rigor because it is already disrupting my family; I want something more to be done (Vânia).

Oh, I thought it would happen the same things that happened the other times. He would come in one day (referring to prison) and with 3 or 4 days, he was already on the streets, or sometimes not even that (Jaina).

In this issue of the texts (the aggressor used to send text messages trying to contact the victim) I am afraid to go there (at the police station) to say something and nothing be done, because until then, he had asked me to drop the charges, you know? Then he spoke through texts that I had destroyed his life, you know? He says that I have destroyed [...] So, what if I go there and show these texts? Will it solve the problem? Or will it get worse? (Leona).

Suffering of the participants was caused by the violence experienced and the insecurity in relation to the instruments offered by Law 11.340/06, which leads them to become confined for fear of recurrence:

I do not go out alone either, when I go out I always go with someone [...] I stay here at home, I stay alone, I always stay with the door closed, I do not open the door for everyone [...] I have a trauma of even my boyfriend talking to me. To tell you the truth, sometimes I feel like breaking up with my boyfriend, but I do not have the guts. I am afraid that this will happen again [...] Sometimes I get very nervous, I do not know if it is because of the trauma. I am going to do a tomography examination, sometimes I say things I do not even remember. Sometimes I say something to you here, now, but tomorrow... Sometimes even at the same time, everyone says "Do not you remember saying that?" And I say "no" (Leona).

The situation of violence has gone beyond the relationship of the couple, affecting the whole family context, the relationships between the members, the relationship with the children and the family dynamics:

It is a very complicated situation that affects our family, children; it is a total disorganization of the family (Vânia).

The girls do not want, my other two girls do not want him here in the house anymore [...] The younger (daughter) does not like him, he hit her [...] (Jaina).

Expectations regarding the other and the woman's conception

Verificou-se que as violências acarretaram impacto financeiro e interpessoal, fazendo com que as participantes se responsabilizassem pela criação dos filhos e pela manutenção da casa. Ao mesmo tempo que assumiram esse ônus, essa experiência permitiu o enfrentamento da violência:

I have raised six children by myself, and I am raising until today. This here, everything, every little thing you see here (referring to the house under construction) is from my work, my efforts (Vânia).

I pay the expenses all alone, I pay electricity bill alone, pay the rent alone [...] (Maria).

Participants emphasized that the relationship between father and child was a significant factor for marital reconciliation and maintenance of the marriage/stable union. Thus, expectations about maintaining a family in the bourgeois and nuclear patterns have contributed to the affective-sexual permanence with the perpetrator of violence and, in some cases, of the violence within the family itself:

Because the father of my children, we had been separated for more than a year, but there is a room in the back of the house and I gave him to live there, as he was arrested because of Maria da Penha law, but he was release very fast, it did not stay in jail at all. Then he asked to live here, that he would get better and change, and asked to live here, to go back (Jaina).

I thought: one more, right? (referring to the youngest daughter who would grow away from her father). Then, he approached her, with kindness, he talked to my eldest daughter that it should not be like that, that he was regretful, that this was not the role of a real man [...] Because I think if you go wrong once you have the right, just as it happened here at home, to have an opportunity so that the person ... we look and think that the person's heart has changed [...] (referring to having given a chance to the aggressor) (Vânia).

DISCUSSION

Understanding the specific aspects of domestic violence, knowing the types of aggression, the cycle that maintains it, and the public policies available to address the problem can help women to appropriate their rights, expanding the exercise of citizenship.

In this sense, we verified that the participants had generic and superficial information about the Maria da Penha Law, ignoring, in particular, the determinations stipulated by the restraining orders and their

purposes. As seen in other studies^{15,19}, they knew of the existence of the law, but did not know their rights.

They had also difficulty to discriminate the environment where the service is offered (DEAM) and the legal deliberations that regulate sanctions against the occurrence of domestic violence committed against women (the law itself).

The Maria da Penha Law modified the way of understanding cases of domestic violence in Brazil, causing the conduct of perpetrators to be investigated and women to be protected by specific instruments, formerly described as a crime of lesser offensive potential, with insignificant sanctions²⁰.

Regarding the participants who had the restraining orders granted, they stated they did not feel safe and reported the fear that the men would commit other aggressions. It is true that restraining determinations are not capable of reducing the rates of domestic and intra-family violence, since it is necessary to enable educational and preventive actions that allow other meanings to masculinities and femininities, resulting in nonviolent relationships²¹.

When questioned about the ability of the Maria da Penha Law to prevent domestic violence, the participants responded positively; however, there was a contradiction in their arguments given the fear of recidivism of aggression, as well as the emotional exhaustion resulting from the bureaucracy to achieving long-term legal support. Similar studies pointed out that women believe in the effectiveness of this law, but considered that is motivates false expectations to the victims, given the slowness of the legal process^{14,22}.

The effectiveness of actions to prevent and reduce domestic and gender violence depend on multidisciplinary and multiprofessional initiatives, given the complexity of the phenomenon and its repercussions¹². This affirmation allude to the importance of intersectoriality, aiming not only to combat violence through punitive initiatives, but also through prevention and awareness-raising actions, subsidizing social changes aimed at guaranteeing and expanding women's rights.

In addition, there is a need for discussions that promote the fight against gender inequality and discrimination, as well as the qualified and humanized care to those who are in a situation of violence²³.

The interviewees' speeches revealed, on the one hand, the satisfaction with the service received when requesting aid in the DEAM, and on the other hand, dissatisfaction with the approach of the police officers who went to their homes to respond a call. Regarding the reception at the police office, they referred to a satisfactory reception and a respectful treatment, attributing it to the fact that the offer of the service and the care was carried out by female professionals.

Regarding home attendance, participants complained about the treatment of police officers after they reported the episode of violence, stressing their unpreparedness in listening to them and treating them well. In this respect, the lack of capacity to embrace women in situations of violence can lead to an approach based on prejudices and sexist conceptions, resulting in a re-victimization of women that are already suffering, and discouraging them to continue with procedures, such as the reporting of the complaint^{15,16,24}.

The interviewees' reports revealed the importance of training and qualifying professionals to deal with situations of domestic and intra-family violence, seeking to eradicate moralizing and sexist judgments, which corroborate the reduction of denunciations, also being a violent practice to the detriment of women. In this way, they should be viewed as subjects with rights, deserving to receive attentive, qualified and embracing listening by the public service professionals, in order to provide a break with the silence, isolation and acts of violence to which they are submitted²⁵.

Domestic violence, when neglected, can cause constant suffering for the woman. According to the participants, the lack of protection provided by the law and by the assistance received at DEAM increased feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Added to this, they pointed out that the perpetrators were not punished, even after the

denunciation was effected, and that the threats did not cease. Also, the number of perpetrators responsible for domestic and intra-family violence is pitiful; in more than half of the reported cases, the incidents are not introduced and therefore do not result in investigation²⁰. In this way, the uncertainty of punishment causes that 10% of the assaulted women choose not to look for legal institutions to record the incident¹⁹.

In addition to the uncertainty about the punishment, the speeches revealed that the perpetrators continued to make threats, demanding that women drop the complaint and/or do not denounce the noncompliance with the restraining orders, showing the fragility and inefficiency of such determinations with regard to the eradication of violence.

Thus, the application of the law in the form of a restraining order is not enough to cease violence. The more rigorous punishment and the greater likelihood of conviction through the Maria da Penha Law may decrease the chances of the aggressor perpetrating the crime²⁶. On the other hand, over time, we can imagine that there will be a decrease in the beliefs of potential offenders due to greater punishment. With this, perhaps the Maria da Penha Law has not been effected in a way to prevent the incidence or recurrence of violence.

The interviewees indicated the fear of accessing the police office to report the attempt of contact by the author, as well as the confinement to which they were submitted, since they ended up restricted to the domestic space for fear that the former partner would commit a new violent act. The Maria da Penha Law is seen as an advance to guarantee women's rights, but restraining orders have symbolic value, not guaranteeing, alone, the non-recurrence of violence⁹. In addition, the indiscriminate deferral of this measure culminates in its trivialization, putting in question the possible risks suffered by women.

The consequences of the incidents of violence are not restricted to the relationship between the woman and the perpetrator of the aggression, but results in the involvement

of other subjects inserted in the context in which the episodes occur. Thus, family assistance in situations of domestic violence becomes essential, since women often need support networks to perceive and confront the violent context in which they are inserted²⁵. The authors also pointed out that part of the recorded incidents had been driven by the family's insistence and the registration of the police report was a way of starting the rupture of the abusive relationship.

The Maria da Penha Law foresees that women in situations of violence should be referred to social protection programs and services, including psychological care and insertion in federal government assistance programs, when necessary, especially due to the suffering generated by the aggressions and the existence of various vulnerabilities experienced by families²⁰.

The interviewees' speeches allowed realizing that referrals to public services and insertion into programs have not been performed. The insufficiency of public policies that prioritize psychological care causes enormous damage to women's lives, since the specialized monitoring could significantly reduce the emotional consequences of the violent incidents.

Although the participants pointed out that they did not have the resources to face the violent context in which they were inserted, they affirmed that they were responsible alone for the costing of the home expenses and the care with the children.

This fact demonstrates a possible change in relation to the old patriarchal patterns of society, referring to the matriarchal family constitution, in which there is no male provider and the female figure occupies a position of protagonist in the construction and maintenance of the context where they live; here, the domestic environment²⁷.

The spaces assigned to women have undergone numerous changes over the years. Combined to the economic transformations, a new conception of the female role in society has been constituted, although with resistances, in which the women have been gaining greater social representativeness.

The relational dynamics is constituted in each historical-cultural moment and the discourses are constructed and modified in their historicity, moving, although gradually, towards the deconstruction of places traditionally destined for women and towards gender equality, of which the insertion of women in the labor market is an example^{28,29}.

With regard to the participants who had suffered aggression perpetrated by the partner, the definitive separation resulted from the recidivism of the violence, with emphasis to the noncompliance with the promises of behavior change by the man, which exemplifies the so-called cycle of violence.

The system that theorizes the maintenance of abusive relationships is divided into three phases, namely stress, which includes psychological violence, disrespect, intimidation, verbal abuses, destruction of documents, public constraint, blaming of women for family conflicts; explosion, in which physical violence itself occurs, followed by promises on the part of the aggressor that such episode will no longer occur; and, after that, reconciliation, when the so-called honeymoon happens, when the relationship is stable, until new aggressive behaviors occur¹³.

Cultural and gender factors are characteristics associated with domestic violence and can favor the permanence of women in the aggressive relationship²⁵. Persisting in a relationship after continuous episodes of violence, or returning to the relationship after separation, is common in the lives of women experiencing domestic violence³⁰.

Thus, alleviating the conduct of perpetrators and making women believe in the importance of the traditional family, provoking the feeling of guilty about the alleged separation between the father and his dependents are recurrent behaviors in families experiencing violence.

CONCLUSION

Domestic and intra-family violence is the result of historical construction; therefore, deconstruction is possible. It is important and

necessary that, from childhood, individuals be educated through educational and informative strategies so that the relationships between men and women are not permeated by sexist behaviors and acts of violence. Above all, individuals should experience egalitarian power relations. In Brazil, the enactment of the Maria da Penha Law was a major step towards confronting violence.

Even with the progress made by the law, women continue to be threatened by the perpetrators of violence after having recorded the complaint and after restraining orders have been issued. This situation corroborates that women have their lives permeated by constant feelings of insecurity and discredit public policies.

Thus, the studied women do not believe that the violence could be prevented only by the existence of the law, since this did not prevent the ex-partner from committing new episodes of violence. In addition, restraining orders have not been sufficient for guaranteeing their safety.

Another important point to highlight was the scarcity of structured tools and institutions to support women in a context of violence - such as the Court for Domestic and Family Violence against Women, Shelter and Passage Houses, Reference Centers and others, and especially psychological or social assistance services, as provided for in the Maria da Penha Law.

The creation of the Maria da Penha Law has given visibility to domestic and intra-family violence against women, but much still needs to be done in order for the phenomenon to be effectively eradicated.

Broad dissemination is necessary so that the population knows their rights and duties, and can fight for fair trials, adequate punishments and, crucially, for gender equality. By having its proposals actually fulfilled, the said law may act in a preventive way and women may have their rights preserved.

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CONTRIBUTIONS

Tatiana Machiavelli Carmo Souza and **Camila Vargas Xavier** contributed equally in all stages of the study. **Nayra Daniane de Mendonça** and **Shara Freitas de Sá** helped in the data analysis and writing phase.

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