



THE MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD FOR PRISONERS
O SIGNIFICADO DA MATERNIDADE PARA PRESIDIÁRIAS
EL SIGNIFICADO DE LA MATERNIDAD PARA LAS MUJERES EN PRISIÓN

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ABSTRACT

Objective: understanding the meaning of motherhood by prisoners. **Method:** a descriptive study with a qualitative approach, conducted from July to December 2012 with 17 women inmates in the Prison System of the State of Paraíba/Brazil. For the data production there were used a socio-demographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The analysis of the information was through the Technique of Content Analysis. The research had the project approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Protocol 01340133000-12. **Results:** from the lines there were extracted the categories << *Being woman* >>, << *Godsend* >> and << *Transformation process* >>. **Conclusion:** the meaning of motherhood was associated with the fulfillment of the social function imposed on women, so that the prisoner women being mother, they feel, in fact, women and although experienced in the prison environment, motherhood is configured in divine blessing, responsible for promoting changes in their lives. **Descriptors:** Mother-Child Relationship; Health-of-Woman; Prisons; Penitentiary.

RESUMO

Objetivo: compreender o significado da maternidade para presidiárias. **Método:** estudo descritivo com abordagem qualitativa, realizado entre julho a dezembro de 2012 com 17 mulheres reclusas no Sistema Penitenciário do Estado da Paraíba/Brasil. Para a produção de dados, utilizaram-se um questionário sócio-demográfico e uma entrevista semiestruturada. A análise das informações foi sob a Técnica da Análise de Conteúdo. O projeto de pesquisa aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, protocolo nº 01340133000-12. **Resultados:** das falas extraíram-se as categorias << *Ser mulher* >>, << *Dádiva de Deus* >> e << *Processo de transformação* >>. **Conclusão:** o significado da maternidade associou-se ao cumprimento da função social imposta ao feminino, de modo que sendo as presidiárias mães, sentem-se, de fato, mulheres e, apesar de vivenciada em ambiente prisional, a maternidade se configura em benção divina, responsável por favorecer transformações em suas vidas. **Descritores:** Relação Mãe-Filho; Saúde-da-Mulher; Prisões; Penitenciárias.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: comprender el significado de la maternidad para las mujeres en prisión. **Método:** estudio descriptivo con enfoque cualitativo, realizado entre julio y diciembre de 2012 con 17 mujeres internas en el Sistema Penitenciario del Estado de Paraíba/Brasil. Para la producción de los datos, se utilizó un cuestionario sociodemográfico y una entrevista semi-estructurada. El análisis de la información estaba en la Técnica de Análisis de Contenido. El proyecto de investigación fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en la Investigación, Protocolo 01340133000-12. **Resultados:** de las líneas se extraeron las categorías << *Ser mujer* >>, << *Regalo de Dios* >> y << *El proceso de transformación* >>. **Conclusión:** el significado de la maternidad se asoció al cumplimiento de la función social impuesta al femenino, por lo que las mujeres encarceladas son madres, se sienten, de hecho, las mujeres y, aunque con experiencia en el ámbito penitenciario, la maternidad se configura en la bendición divina responsable de promover cambios en sus vidas. **Descriptores:** Relación Madre-Hijo; Salud-de-mujer; Prisiones; Penitenciaria.

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INTRODUCTION

Motherhood, quality or condition of being a mother¹, constitutes, in the popular imagination, the greatest dream and confirmation, the fullness in the lives of women;² however, dispute the premise that maternal love is instinctive and innate to women, and the bond created between mother-child and even the desire for motherhood built and enhanced socio-culturally.³

The invention of motherhood is part of a set of influences that affected women from the end of the eighteenth century, such as: the emergence of the idea of romantic love; the creation of the home and the modification of parental relationships. At that time, the discourse of European doctors encouraging that women themselves take care and breastfeed their children and how such a task would be rewarding them was predominant in building the good mother's role.⁴

If the desire of motherhood is socially influenced, who is interested in occurring that event? Motherhood a state control strategy, it would be up to women not only play, but their children's education that would serve the future state, perpetuating the power relations between the sexes. The incentive motherhood was configured in a broad movement of construction of so-called disciplinary societies, for this reason it is reinforced in the social imaginary that women, in physical, biological and psychological constitution, could not deal with the policy or defend the nation and they shall have the sublime task of motherhood.⁴⁻⁶

Motherhood as an exclusively female vocation is a modern phenomenon, reinvented by ruling classes throughout the Century XX, in order to meeting the needs imposed by industrialization and urbanization.⁶

It should be noted that changes in conceptions related to motherhood and the social implications of that experience do not reach the same way all women, countries and cultures, although there is a major maternity model in contemporary Western Societies⁶. Undoubtedly, the mother brings with it a whole identity of sociocultural relations grown in their family environment, combined with the influence of the environment where they live, able to model the maternity relations.²

Under these considerations wonders of motherhood for prisoners, and despite this theme raise several ideas within public policies and assistance to maternal and child health, is proposed in this study discuss this phenomenon from the perspective of

prisoners, learning the meanings that permeate this experience. For meaning means the interaction of thoughts and experiences responsible for structuring the everyday actions, ways of life, including motivating health care.⁷

The study is justified by recognizing the significant increase of women arrested in the country on average 12% per year in Brazil, mostly young women of reproductive age, which consequently makes motherhood a recurring situation in the prison.⁸

Based on these, the study aims to:

- Understanding the meaning of motherhood by women prisoners.

METHODOLOGICAL WAY

This is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach⁹, held between July and December 2012, in the four female prisons subordinate to the Department of Penitentiary Administration of Paraíba: Women's Recovery Institute Maria Julia Maranhão; Women's Penitentiary of Campina Grande; Female Prison of Patos and Penitentiary Standard of Cajazeiras, which housed, during the period of data collection, respectively, 420, 57, 61 and 24 women in closed regime.

The sample was flexible and closed with 17 women, according to recommendations of Theoretical Saturation Method.¹⁰ There were adopted as inclusion criteria: serving sentences in closed regime and share the jail with the child or with a previous history of sharing.

The surveyed prisons were visited at different times. Through these, it was possible to understand the routine of the institution, beginning, gradually, the inclusion in the research setting. Data were collected by appointment, at convenient times and in physical space indicated by the direction, under the direct supervision of the prison guard, serving institutional recommendation. As data collection instruments there were used a sociodemographic questionnaire aiming to characterizing the subjects and a semi-structured interview.

After transcribing the interviews, proceeded to exhaustive reading of the material, for the identification of categories drawn from the texts to answer the purpose of the study, so that it made a pre-exploitation of the collected material, the selection of units of analysis and, finally, the process of categorization and sub-categorization, as proposed by Content Analysis.¹¹

The ethical rules of Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (NSC) have been

strictly observed. To protect the anonymity of the research subjects, as well as prisons identification system there was adopted by alphanumeric codes, known only to the researcher. The collection was started after the project has been assessed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Paraíba, under the Certificate Presentation of Findings Ethics - CAAE No 01340133000-12 and the study participants signed an Informed Consent Form Free and Clarified (IC).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

♦ Characterization of the subjects

Regarding the characterization of participants the sample was mostly made up of women between 18-25 years old (52,9%). Studies report that the prey female population is predominantly made up of young adults.^{8,12}

Regarding marital status, most of them declared themselves single (47%), a condition which possibly stems from the family abandonment, because, contrary to what occurs in male imprisonment cases where the wives provide financial and emotional support throughout serving the sentence, women are often abandoned by their spouses after imprisonment.⁸

Most had 1-3 children (70,5%) and were first-time mothers, on average, at sixteen. Early pregnancy, and often unwanted can contribute to the disruption of studies and hamper the integration into the formal labor market.¹³ This assertion converges to the data elucidated in this study, which shows a majority of participants with incomplete primary education (47%) and who had no occupation (64,7%).

Declared professing no religion (52,9%). It is worth considering the importance of religion as emotional support, instrumental and informative¹⁴. Therefore, the lack of a support/religious belief may favor the transgression of social norms and rules, which in turn provides imprisonment.

Reported using alcohol and/or other drugs before imprisonment (70,5%), assertive confirmed in a study that shows significant association between incarceration and use of alcohol and/or drugs.¹⁵

The imprisonment, most women were arrested for involvement in drug trafficking (76,4%), considered the main cause of female incarceration globally.¹⁶ The study also reveals that prisoners were, mostly, repeat offenders (52,9%) and temporary legal status (58,8%). Recidivism is due, among other reasons,

because of the difficulty in implementing effective actions of rehabilitation for prisoners¹⁷. In turn, the slow pace of Brazilian justice, observed by the predominance of prisoners awaiting legal name, confirms the precariousness of the prison system Brazilian.¹⁸

It is inferred that the subjects of this research demonstrate loss of social and family ties, lack of prospects for the future, criminal recidivism, social stigma, underemployment, poverty and drugs, characteristics which, in turn, predisposes to incarceration.⁸

♦ Categories

The analysis of the speeches that emerged in the interviews from the perspective of Content Analysis Technique¹¹ enabled the organization of three categories: a woman, a gift from God and transformation process. The above categories deal with the meaning of motherhood for the research subjects, the first deals with motherhood as the fulfillment of social roles imposed on women, the second discusses the association between motherhood and divine blessings and, finally, the third category brings lines that are associated between motherhood and changes in life and be breast as follows provisions:

♦ Category 1- Being woman

In this category we present lines that transmit the association between motherhood and the fulfillment of women's social function, so that motherhood takes positive meaning, recovery and social recognition. As in the following statements:

It's a very special thing for me. It is a life that I'm putting in the world; that for me is very important. [Being a mother at the age of 14]. It is a good feeling to be a mother, but it was hard because it was my first child, but I love my son. (8-Ω)

It is very important right? Having a family, that even me, I do not have children for me is all (1-a)

Being a mother is to be everything, I guess. It is a super woman. (9 Ω)

In patriarchal societies, is valued by a submissive woman to knowledge and male decisions, pleasant, sleepy and asexual, being responsible female body merely for the generation, maintenance of life and perpetuation of socially pre-established customs⁴.

Fell on women, a strong load pressures on the personal and family behavior desired⁴ and, also that women have excelled in many areas in recent decades, the female definition remains traditionally related to the family sphere and maternity.¹⁹

Some aspects are elucidated in the statements of the participants in this study, as the manifestation of pride for their fertility, to the detriment of those women who cannot bear children. Fertility in turn, enables family construction, other socio-cultural merit attributed to women⁶ and the perception of such construction from the maternity is cause for satisfaction, as evidenced in the speech:

I liked it. It's good. I do not know, being a mother is a very good thing right? There are people out there want to be a mother and cannot. (1-B)

Motherhood is socially imposed on the woman for the same be considered normal⁴. And even if they are observed changes in the concepts and practices related to infertility, mainly based on medical knowledge forward, historic and culturally, the infertile condition has been established in a suffering to women, through centuries of history and breaking geographical boundaries and cultural²⁰. Perhaps for these reasons, the mothers interviewed expressed satisfaction by the ability to have children generated and thus build a family, fulfilling the main role of women: being a mother.

Another aspect highlighted in the reports is the adolescent motherhood, as follows:

For me I think it's the best thing in the life of a woman, you have no way to explain ... I was terrified of not being able to have children, although I have become pregnant early and not be planned, was the greatest happiness of my lifetime. I was so afraid of not being able to be a mother, I think is the worst punishment for a woman is unable to have a child, say so is mine, came out from me. (5-Ω)

I was mother at 14 years old. It is a good feeling to be a mother, but it was hard because it was my first child, but I love my son. (8-Ω)

For the women interviewed, although early pregnancy imply some difficulties, motherhood permeates itself with positive meanings, associated with a social birth.

It is considered adolescent pregnancy a public health problem and is commonly associated with risks to the health of mother and child, but studies show that maternity repercussions for adolescents are not always negative and limiting²¹, by contrast, mainly in the popular sectors, motherhood is conceived and designed as a qualitative leap in women's lives working as a way of re-mean life²².

Moreover, it is clarified that such meanings of motherhood result from a study conducted in the prison environment, this in turn brings a built-punitive/religious character, which associates the woman of rehabilitation for

expressions of housewives, highlighting the maternal devotion.²³ Perhaps for this reason, even if the woman has not wanted to be a mother avoids express this idea into words for fear of guilt and/or recognition desunaminadade.

Therefore, one must consider that the occurrence of motherhood in a restricted opportunities punctuated by environment, can become central, often imposing itself as one (among a few) life alternative for women.²²

♦ Category 2 - Godsend

Religiosity has been highlighted as one of the ways most commonly used by the people to express and develop the integration of rational, emotional, sensitive and intuitive dimensions usually applied to explain the blessings and lived frustrations²⁴. And, while most of the participants in this study have declared themselves non-religious, attributed to motherhood a divine meaning. As suggested by the following statements:

Being a mother for me is a very important thing because it is a God thing, to me only the one who can take from us is God. Both He gives as He takes is great being a mother. It is happiness, is very sensational, but it's great to be a mother. (2-a)

A Godsend. There is no similar sentiment, motherhood is unique. Each child of mine is a treasure. It is all I have and it really paid off. My children, my reason for living. (4-γ)

It is to be so, is to make a gift of God, not everyone can be a mother, being a mother is to be privileged by God, it's all good. (9 Ω)

The non-maternity assumes different meanings, particular to different women and also emotionally mobilizes each one of them, since they do not have children implies not hold a potential, deviate from a social and cultural norm, and establish a significant (and uncomfortable) difference of those women-mothers². It delegates, therefore, the wife of maternity as something necessary to achieve true happiness⁴.

Infertility is considered by many women as punishment and forgiveness of sins; in turn, motherhood is understood as a gift from God²⁵. Therefore, it is understandable why the women interviewed consider themselves blessed for the privilege of becoming mothers.

Motherhood as divinely conceived blessing anchors on the significance of pregnancy as something good, associated with women's satisfaction with the possibility of getting pregnant²⁵. It should be added that in general, in the Christian view, motherhood is understood as a kind of redemption and is associated with holiness, altruism and selflessness, including sexual context;³

therefore it cannot dissociate the meaning of motherhood as divine blessing to maternity as a social function, since it considers motherhood a blessing, because society respects and deals with zeal those who are mothers. Perhaps for this reason many studies in different social contexts, for mothers in freedom or prisoners, demonstrate that motherhood, for most women, is associated with a divine gift and a social obligation⁶.

♦ Category 3- Transformation process

Becoming a mother is not always an act of truly conscious choice, not being rare cases where motherhood is by lack of planning²⁶. However, scholars say maternity is one of the most eloquent transformation processes in women's lives.²¹⁻² Similarly to the above studies, the participants in this study, motherhood is in a process of transformation, as shown in the statements that follow:

Being a mother is the best thing we have in the world, the person having the children of the person, taking account, is good, one has more responsibility, because when I was not a mother I had no responsibility with nothing, I changed because motherhood (3-a)

Being a mother is very good. It is when you purchase liability, everything you do, think of the child first, no selfishness for a mother, I became another person when I was mother, much better, and even though I stay here[...] I feel like I'm important to someone when I think of my daughter and when I look at my son, they need me. The birth of my son rescued me from the life I had [...] (3-Ω)

These statements emphasize that the implementation of child care, job historically attributed mothers²⁷, provided the development of responsibilities and consequently the breast maturation. In addition to the acquired with motherhood responsibility, the lines indicate that the experience of motherhood turned them into better people, concern for the children corroborates the development of an altruistic character, a result which is similar to other studies.²⁸⁻⁹

We also emphasize the capacity that motherhood has to offer a ransom to the lives of mothers, particularly when placed in an environment permeated by violence, delinquency, drug abuse and sometimes prostitution, as that usually found in prisons.⁸ Motherhood, in this case, may favor reflection regarding the need for change. Even for imprisoned mothers express concern about the example that might represent for their children.²³

It should be noted that neither the maternal love or maternal indifference are universal attitudes, because at all times there were dedicated mothers and negligent mothers to their children, being neither one nor the other attitude, innate, but built.³⁰ Thus the process of change that the maternity and evidenced in the words of the interviewees, is probably influenced by the experience of this motherhood in prison settings.

It is known that women's prisons reveal the historical link of moral and religious discourse with forms of imprisonment of women, excluding and marginalizing those that contradicted the acceptable social assumptions. I would add also, that the feeling of maternal guilt, to impose his son to remain in prison-admittedly unhealthy environment can influence the mother's effort to become positively.²³

Motherhood can be a moment of redefinition of roles for women, I would add that when experienced in the prison environment, functions as the rescue of identity, the goodness and the good of mother posture favors the acquisition, albeit temporary, perks.²³

Moreover, even in adverse conditions, motherhood can provide a new meaning in the lives of women who are mothers, as they realize the children a way to meet their own needs. For women prisoners, those needs are many, but there is the need for affection and family bond maintenance, and the presence of children factors that promote, in some situations, maintaining the link with other relatives.²³

FINAL REMARKS

Seized that the meaning of motherhood for prisoners is associated with the fulfillment of the social function imposed on the female, thus becoming mothers, are perceived in fact, women. And though experienced under unfavorable conditions, motherhood is configured in divine blessing, responsible for promoting positive changes in their lives, as follows: maturity and acquisition responsibilities.

For the study participants motherhood has meanings similar to other studies in the literature in general, conducted with women in freedom, with connotations of personal satisfaction, personal redemption and blessings. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting that in prisons, the collective activities are very common, making the private, unique, intimate and particular is almost non-existent, perhaps for this reason the statements made

by the participants of this study were presented as homogeneous.

Also adds up the socio-cultural influence in the prison context, where there is close relationship between individuals who show good mother characteristics and the possibility of rehabilitation, which in turn guarantees, even temporarily, benefits to prisoners.

The lack of studies on the theme addressed here, in the literature of Health Sciences consisted limitation of this research. Although the data provide a rich meaning of motherhood description for these 17 women, generalizations are totally limited. Further studies addressing the issue need to be carried out, including further development of the health care provided to both the mother / son in the prison environment, with emphasis on research about the role of nursing in care for this population. The aim is to raise the knowledge produced improvements in assistance to prisoners serving their real needs, considering the social and cultural universe of prisons as a real scenario of coping with various issues of their life cycle.

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Submission: 2014/07/23

Accepted: 2015/01/24

Publishing: 2015/02/15

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