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RURAL WORKERS: WORK RELATIONSHIPS AND PERCEPTIONS ON VIOLENT EVENTS

TRABALHADORAS RURAIS: RELAÇÕES DE TRABALHO E PERCEPÇÕES SOBRE EVENTOS VIOLENTOS

TRABAJADORES RURALES: RELACIONES DE TRABAJO Y PERCEPCIONES SOBRE EVENTOS VIOLENTOS

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: to discuss the participation of rural workers in irrigated fruit production in the *Sub-Low São Francisco Valley*, and to verify the perception of rural women about the phenomenon of violence. **Method:** this is a descriptive study with a quantitative approach conducted through a semi-structured interview applied to 90 rural workers. The data were treated based on the descriptive statistics and presented through absolute and relative frequencies as well as illustrated through fragments of the participants' discourse. **Results:** the average age of the interviewees was 34.16 years old, 51.11% studied until incomplete elementary school, 81% were admitted from temporary contracts, 48.78% had another occupation to supplement the income. Most of them (42.22%) only consider violence, the events with body marks. **Conclusion:** fruticulture is a very important area of work for women in the region. The naturalization of violence emerges as a serious health problem for this population. **Descriptors:** Violence; Women Working; Violence Against Women.

RESUMO

Objetivos: discutir a participação de trabalhadoras rurais na fruticultura irrigada do Vale do Submédio São Francisco e verificar a percepção delas acerca do fenômeno da violência. **Método:** estudo descritivo, de abordagem quantitativa, realizado por meio de entrevista semiestruturada aplicada a 90 trabalhadoras rurais. Os dados foram tratados à luz da estatística descritiva e apresentados por meio de frequências absoluta e relativa, bem como ilustrados por meio de fragmentos do discurso das participantes. **Resultados:** a média de idade das entrevistadas foi de 34,16 anos, 51,11% estudaram até o ensino fundamental incompleto, 81% foram admitidas a partir de contratos temporários e 48,78% possuíam outra ocupação para complementar a renda. A maioria (42,22%) só considera como violência eventos que deixam marcas corporais. **Conclusão:** a fruticultura é um campo de trabalho muito importante para as mulheres da região. A naturalização da violência desponta como grave problema de saúde para essa população. **Descritores:** Trabalho Feminino; Violência; Violência Contra a Mulher.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: discutir la participación de trabajadoras rurales en la fruticultura irrigada del Valle de *Sub-medio São Francisco*, y verificar la percepción de las trabajadoras rurales acerca del fenómeno de la violencia. **Método:** estudio descriptivo, de enfoque cuantitativo, realizado por medio de entrevista semi-estructurada aplicada a 90 trabajadoras rurales. Los datos fueron tratados basados en la estadística descriptiva y presentados por medio de frecuencias absoluta y relativa así como ilustrados por medio de fragmentos del discurso de las participantes. **Resultados:** la media de edad de las entrevistadas fue de 34,16 años, 51,11% estudió hasta la enseñanza fundamental incompleta, 81% fueron admitidas a partir de contratos temporarios, 48,78% poseen otra ocupación para complementar la renta. La mayoría (42,22%) solamente considera como violencia eventos que dejan marcas corporales. **Conclusión:** la fruticultura es un campo de trabajo muy importante para las mujeres de la región. La naturalización de la violencia es vista como grave problema de salud para esta población. **Descriptor:** Violencia; Trabajo de Mujeres; Violencia Contra la Mujer.

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INTRODUCTION

São Francisco Valley is a denomination of a Brazilian geographic area that permeates the States of Minas Gerais, Bahia, Pernambuco, Paraíba, Sergipe and Alagoas, and most of its extension accompanies the São Francisco River with an area of approximately 640 thousand km², comprising 900 municipalities and a population of 17 million people. Its vast extension was divided into sub-regions denominated high, medium, sub-low and low of the São Francisco river, to delimit also productive areas of irrigated agriculture.¹

The Sub-low São Francisco represents the territory in which irrigation works had the greatest impact on local economies. In this region, the municipality of Petrolina-PE is located and a set of 9 more municipalities to its surroundings, possessing about 120 thousand irrigated hectares being one of the main areas of exploration and export of the horticultural agriculture of the country, having more than 51% of its economically active population employed in agriculture. In the region, there is also a culture of planting in rainfed where farmers grow plants typical of the semi-arid or perfectly adapted to this climatic and geographical condition with the parsimonious use of water associated with goat breeding.²

Fruticulture is the economic activity based on the production of fruit, with the purpose of supplying the internal, external or subsistence market. Fruit trees are demanding in climatic, pedological and irrigation conditions. The São Francisco Valley presents favorable conditions for the development of these cultures. Nevertheless the main impediment to the success was the lack of constant water. This problem was solved with the implantation of poles irrigated by the governmental organs altering the situation that lasted for several decades.³

Since the 1990s, the foreign market has become the most coveted target of producers. The economic evolution of the Sub-low São Francisco, associated with the context of agriculture, influenced the whole behavioral picture of the social groups of this region, a situation directly related to the contracting for the jobs that were generated. Faced with the possibility of expanded occupation, especially in the production of table grapes, women gain space for their empowerment as a category of workers, causing significant changes in the way they related inside and outside the domestic space.⁴

Violence against women is a social and public health problem, not respecting borders

of social class, race/ethnicity, religion, and age, all women are at risk of violence. However, some groups seem to be more vulnerable, and women in rural settings are among the most at risk.⁵

The insertion of women in the context of irrigated fruticulture, in essentially manual work, raises the question about the living conditions and patterns of violence suffered by them during their trajectories, and violence against women is a complex phenomenon with life repercussions, directly or indirectly in all areas.⁶

Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- To discuss the participation of rural workers in irrigated fruit production in the Sub-low São Francisco Valley.
- To check the perception of rural women about the phenomenon of violence.

METHOD

This is a descriptive study with a quantitative approach, carried out through a semi-structured interview applied to 90 workers living in the city of Petrolina (PE), Brazil, members of the State Government Program - Chapéu de Palha, during the off-season (between July to August 2013) as well as working women from a large export farm in the city (September to November 2013). All interviews were recorded in audio with prior consent, then coded from 01 to 90 according to chronological disposition.

The sample size was calculated with the objective of estimating the prevalence of violence against rural workers, accepting an error of estimation of 5% and a confidence level of 95%. According to the specialized literature, the expected prevalence of gender-based violence may reach 40%, with 90 women as the sample size.

The quantitative data obtained by questionnaires were tabulated and analyzed based on the descriptive statistics through the free statistical software Epi Info version 3.5.2, 2009. Finally, the results produced were presented through absolute and relative frequencies. Excerpts from the interviews were selected to compose the final presentation of the data.

The project was approved by the Committee of Ethics and Deontology in Studies and Research - (CEDEP) of the Federal University of the Valley of São Francisco on June 4, 2013, under protocol number 0018/040613 CEDEP/UNIVASF.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean age among the interviewees was 34.16 years old, with a variation between 18 and 63 years old. Most of them (51.11%) studied until incomplete elementary school; 60% declared to be brown, and 72.2% were Catholic. There were 38.88% of the women with a stable union, and 80% of them reported having an intimate partner. This profile is compatible with data published by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

According to the IBGE census of 2010, the city of Petrolina had a population of 293,962 inhabitants where 150,710 were women, 30% are between 15 and 49 years old. According to these data of 2011, 63.9% of employed women were between 25 and 49 years old.⁷

In the case of employment, 81% of rural women interviewed were admitted from temporary contracts only during the period of harvesting of fruits known as the harvest, where the demand for workers is very large and extends to the standstill of the fruit.

During the off-season period, some farms reduce the number of workers by up to 80%. This period, which usually includes April and May, is critical for many women who are without formal employment.⁴

Thus, when questioned about the off-season, 48.78% of the participants said they had another occupation to complement their income, and most of them are involved in domestic work such as cleaning, washing clothes, child care, and the elderly, among others.

Emphasizing the sexual division of labor, the activities of men and women are divided by a gender bias, according to the requirement of greater or lesser expenditure of physical energy. In this context, representations of masculinity and femininity where according to the consensus women require "light" tasks such as thinning, and others at harvest and post-harvest. To the men, there is the implantation of the vine arbor, pulverization, pruning, post-pruning and mechanized services, in general.⁴

From such a conception, the predilection for the female labor for the harvest and thinning of the grape arises as well as for the fruit packing in the Packing House because they are considered more careful and delicate in the handling of the fruit destined for the export.⁴

As the main reason for entering the rural work, 40% of the women interviewed claimed lack of opportunities in other areas and 36.66% of the financial need, 10% indicated

reasons for financial independence and the remaining 13.34% reported to get jobs in this sector, as well as familiarization with the service, since they have always worked in this environment and do not intend to look for something else because they like what they do, as evidenced by the fragments of the interviews highlighted below:

The first job with a formal contract and I got used to it. (Interviewed 05)

I never found anything else even in high school. (Interviewed 17).

I joined very young and separated early; I had to work to support my children (Interview 22).

I was born and raised in the countryside; I like it here. I even tried another one, but I like it here. (Interviewed 34).

When asked about what violence is, most women in their report only mentioned physical violence (42.22%) as a response; 38.88% physical and psychological violence; 11.11% only psychological and 7.78% other manifestations, a situation that is evident in the fragments of the speech of some transcribed interviewees:

Violence is beating people, beating. (Interviewed 07)

Violence for me is a disaster, man beating wife, a son killing his father, mugging. (Interviewed 12)

Violence is everything, right? Take the life of others, husband beating the woman, not respecting, cheating. (Interviewed 21)

Most women interviewed (42.22%) only consider as physical events the events causing physical pain, which mark the body. In this way, when asked if they had suffered some violence during their lives, 43.33% answered yes. However, this prevalence increases frighteningly with the course of the interview since, faced with questions directed at specific violent events such as punishment during childhood, humiliations and name-calling during adulthood or even having sexual intercourse against the will, women tell stories that put them as victims of these situations raising to 78.88% the prevalence when considering all life and 60% considering only adulthood.

For example, when asked if she had suffered violence during her life, one of the participants answered "no, no one ever hit me", but during the interview she revealed that during her childhood, her mother cursed her and humiliated her constantly and that at 9 she witnessed the mother of a schoolmate being raped and murdered in her home.

My mother sometimes, when she asked for some things, she said, 'Go to prostitute,' that was always the case when she was

angry until I left home at the age of 13. (Interviewed 26).

As for the perception by women of violent phenomena at some point in their lives, the prevalence initially is 56.67%, but when in targeted situations, this number rises to 78.88%. A study carried out with the objective of knowing the magnitude of gender violence practiced against female college students in São Paulo (SP), Brazil, revealed that 70% of the women interviewed had suffered some violence.⁸

There are women who only consider violence as acts that leave physical sequels such as fractures, bruises, injuries, burns, slowing violent acts that do not leave body marks.⁸⁻⁹ This type of conception ends up making them more vulnerable to the types of violence they damage morale, mental health, and soul. The very fact of not having knowledge about the subject is already configured as violence, since it deprives the woman of the right to defend herself against what is bad for her.

CONCLUSION

The rural workers of the Sub-low Valley of the São Francisco are configured as a group full of peculiarities and nuances since they are concomitantly inserted in urban and rural spaces. Exposure to violence is extremely blatant, and events cannot be considered isolated as these women participate in a cycle of violence that extends from childhood to marital relationships and labor relationships. This characteristic shows that violence ends up being naturalized by them, increasing, even more, the risk to victimization, illustrating the vulnerability situation of this group.

Exposing the problem has its value as the phenomenon comes to be known, commented and debated to generate possible methods to remedy or at least minimize the problem. In this way, it is expected that the knowledge contained herein will be translated into benefits for the community, the possibility of giving voice to women so little heard already brings enough merit to the effort made.

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