

Motherhood experience for prisoners

Vivência da maternidade para presidiárias

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand the motherhood experience for prisoners. This is an exploratory-descriptive qualitative study conducted with 17 prisoner women in the Penitentiary System of Paraíba State, during the period of July to December of 2012. A sociodemographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Data were organized and categorized following content analysis, generating three categories: separation suffering; comfort during anguish; family fragmentation. Results pointed out that motherhood experience in the prison is permeated by suffering and limitations. However, the presence of their child creates comfort during anguish and minimize difficulties in prison, although temporarily. It is necessary to create inter sectoral actions to favor the mother-child relationship in the prison context.

Descriptors: Women's Health; Obstetric Nursing; Mother-Child Relations; Prisons; Prisoners.

RESUMO

O estudo teve como objetivo compreender a vivência da maternidade para presidiárias. Trata-se de um estudo exploratório-descritivo com abordagem qualitativa realizado com 17 mulheres reclusas no Sistema Penitenciário do Estado da Paraíba, no período de julho a dezembro de 2012. Para coleta de dados utilizou-se um questionário sociodemográfico e entrevista semiestruturada. Os dados foram organizados e categorizados segundo análise de conteúdo, gerando três categorias: sofrimento pela separação; consolo em meio à angústia; fragmentação familiar. Os resultados apontaram que a vivência da maternidade no ambiente prisional é permeada por sofrimentos e limitações. No entanto, a permanência da criança junto à mãe gera consolo em meio à angústia e minimiza, mesmo que temporariamente, as dificuldades no cárcere. É mister implantar ações intersetoriais que favoreçam a relação mãe e filho no contexto do aprisionamento.

Descritores: Saúde da Mulher; Enfermagem Obstétrica; Relações Mãe-Filho; Prisões; Prisioneiros.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of female imprisoned population in Brazil is approximately 12% per year. In accordance with data from the Integrated System of Penitentiary Information (InfoPen), in July of 2013, the Brazilian imprisoned population was 548.003 people. According with this same source, Paraíba state have 8.723 people in privation of freedom, being 8.149 men and 574 women⁽¹⁾. Although the number of women is significantly inferior to imprisoned men, due to the social function historically attributed to women, as wife, caregiver and, in many families, providing stability, the female imprisonment generates multiple implications, including for public health scope⁽²⁾.

Imprisoned women tend to be young, from low socioeconomic and educational status, single moms, Afro descendants, with history of prostitution and abusive use of drugs⁽³⁾. Because the majority is young, and therefore, in reproductive age, pregnancy and consequently motherhood are recurrent situations while serving the sentence⁽⁴⁾.

Attentive to health demands of prisoner women, the National Plan of Health in the Penitentiary System (PNSSP), instituted by the Inter Ministry Ordinance n.1777/2003⁽⁵⁾, as well as the National Pact for Reduction of Maternal and Neonatal Mortality released in 2004, brings guidelines emphasizing healthcare rights to imprisoned women, with emphasis on pregnancy-puerperal period, guaranteeing the right to breastfeed⁽⁶⁾.

However, under the recommendations and pacts to guarantee health to imprisoned women, the Brazilian penitentiary system is admittedly poor regarding healthcare for imprisoned population⁽⁷⁾. Besides that, prisons have not been initially thought and projected for women, but for men, considering a rational view that understood dangerousness as their inherent characteristic⁽⁸⁾. Although the growth with the twentieth century advent, women's prison are still inadequate to shelter/discipline prisoner women⁽⁹⁾.

Moreover, questions involving women's health during the route of public policies in Brazil and, in generally, worldwide, are about the guarantee of maternal and infant mortality reduction, with measures and services of healthcare for this binomial. However, difficulties for healthcare access is for imprisoned women is noted⁽³⁾. Thus, it presupposes that in the prison context, motherhood gains distinct characteristics from those experienced by free women.

About women's health in the prison context, it is observed scarce or little studied scientific production, addressing in priority aspects referring to the health-disease process of imprisoned women, due to aspects related to the subjectivity that permeates prisoning, which neglects the right of those women to be understood about their real needs⁽¹⁰⁾.

Facing the exposed, the question arose: how is motherhood experience in prisons? The justification and relevance of the present study is about the visibility of a masked and silenced situation by the general society, and by the regulation mechanisms and assistance promoted from the Unified Healthcare System. With those considerations, this research was developed aiming to understand the motherhood experience for prisoner women.

METHODS

An exploratory-descriptive qualitative study conducted between July and December of 2012 in four female prisons subordinated to the State Administration Secretary from Paraíba (SEAP): Female Recovery Institute Maria Júlia Maranhão; Female Prison of Campina Grande; Female Prison of Patos and Standard Prison of Cajazeiras, who sheltered, respectively, 420, 57, 61 and 24 women serving time in close regimen.

The Female Recovery Institute Maria Júlia Maranhão was the only one built to shelter women in legal prison situation and that have a Health Team in the Prison System following PNSSP recommendations. All other prisons are adapted spaces that in other times, were used

to shelter male prison population. Only the prisons in João Pessoa and Patos have a Maternal-Infant Unit.

The four research prison institutions were visited in different moments, with the objective to understand the institution routine and insertion in the research scenario. During initial visits, 21 women were identified who met the inclusion criteria of the research that were: to be serving time in closed regimen; to share the prison with their child or with a previous history of sharing. The research was concluded with 17 interviewed women, considering theoretical data saturation⁽¹¹⁾.

Data collection was conducted with previous scheduling in a convenient time, in a physical space indicated by the direction, under direct supervision of the prison agent, meeting institutional recommendations. As data collection instrument, a sociodemographic questionnaire was used, to characterize participants and the interviews had the audio recorded with questions referring to motherhood experience in prison.

Results were organized and characterized in the content analysis perspective, following the classification of constitutive elements, followed by regrouping, in accordance with the analogy. The identification of analysis units was done after fluctuating and exhaustive reading of interviews, and pooled by similarity of content⁽¹²⁾. Posteriorly, the speeches were broke down, and grouped in three categories.

This research was approved by the Ethics in Research Committee of Universidade Estadual da Paraíba, under number CAAE nº 01340133000-12. Participants signed an Informed Consent Term. To keep secrecy of research participants, as well as prison institutions, a system of identification by alphanumeric codes was adopted, and only the research knew it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interviewed women were predominantly young, between 18 and 25 years old (52,9%), single (47%), with an average of three children (70,5%), with a history of maternity during adolescence (70,6%), who did not

profess religion (52,9%), middle school incomplete (47%), with history of alcohol and/or other drugs before prison (70,5%), without a job, arrested due to drug dealing (76,4%), with re incidence (52,9%) and other provisional legal status (58,8%). They were with their children in the prison environment (64,7%), that followed them after maternal imprisonment (52,9%).

Separation suffering

Because of maternal imprisonment, separation suffering was found caused by separation from their children, as a characteristic of maternity experience for participants of this study.

Although it is recognized that conditions for maternity experience in prison are adverse⁽⁷⁾, the Brazilian Federal Constitution ensures the imprisoned women the right to stay with their children, during certain period of incarceration⁽¹³⁾.

About this right, the Criminal Law Enforcement (LEP), from 1984, preconize that prisons designed to women should contain nursery, where women can take care of their children, including breastfeeding, at least, until six months old. Currently, the Law nº 11.942, from May 28th of 2009, adds to the LEP the obligation for prisons to have a section for pregnant women, mothers and day care to shelter children older than six months and younger than seven years, with the goal of care for helpless children, while the person responsible is arrested⁽¹³⁾. Thus, the Statute for Children and Adolescent (ECA) foresee the permanence of the child with their mothers during breastfeeding, even if she is deprived of her freedom⁽¹⁴⁾.

After legal deadlines, children should be separated from their mothers and left under care of other guardians. The separation is pointed out by women, as one of the biggest source of suffering in their daily lives⁽⁴⁾. This suffering is caused by the abrupt separation of their children when the breastfeeding period is over, as well as in cases when separation is periodic, happening at the end of each family visit, in accordance with the following lines:

I've gone through three months of crying because of him (1-6).

It's too sad, right? Here the person should be arrested, but what hurts too much is the person that we like being far away from us, especially our children (1-y).

When we are in the visiting, we are very happy, but after they leave it gives us that "lock in the heart", the children cry, the mom cries, the colleagues that are here cry, who are also moms (4-Ω).

For knowing the time limitation to spend with their children, while deprived of freedom, some lines of study participants demonstrate sadness caused by the imminent separation, as it is demonstrated below:

It is a sorrow, it is a big sorrow us being here in the prison and in this situation, because there is only one limit to stay with the child that is up to six months (1- α).

Because they know the suffering caused by the bond interruption, when the child is removed from prison, some imprisoned mothers opt for not strengthening affective bonds with their children, aiming to avoid the pain from future losses, as mentioned below:

If I take too long leave, I will ask them to take the girl away, because the fastest it is, the least suffering (3- α).

Thus, we observe that besides the imposed load from serving the sentence, the separation from their child is pointed out as one of the biggest suffering within arrested mothers, manifesting not only how much there are missed, but also the lack of news, worries from not being able to follow them during their development, by the fear of being forgotten by their children or for representing a bad example for those, and even that the mother-child love is going to be relocated to the person who is now the guardian during their time serving the sentence⁽⁴⁾.

Another aspect, responsible for this suffering, is referred to the acknowledgement of the prisoner about her incapacity to perform maternal functions in prison, considering that in different societies, including the Brazilian, the female gender is traditionally related to the familiar sphere and motherhood⁽¹⁵⁾. Thus, the woman is socially indoctrinated, since childhood, to demonstrate desire for motherhood, as well as to skillfully perform feeding, hygiene, and care actions for their future children⁽¹⁶⁾, probably, because of that, women feel indispensable and irreplaceable in the care for their children⁽¹⁷⁾.

While in prison, mothers, who are historically the main guardians, are affected by negative and stigmatized images, once they hurt the myth of a good mother. Thus, because they assimilate the social function that is amputated from them, and for perceiving incapacity in fully performing maternal attributions, participant manifest suffering in their lines:

Ah it's too hard...my boy passes the dates from taking his vaccines and I can't leave here to take my boy to take the vaccines, right? (2-α).

Here [...] when the child is sick, we cannot take them to the hospital, who take them are the agents, to take for vaccines are the agents, those things that are for the mother to be doing, we stay limited here (9-Ω).

It is worthy to note that in situations when, although suffering caused by separation, some women renounce the possibility to keep in touch with their children, from the perspective as to avoid harm, for knowing in advance that children in freedom privation situation will be in unhealthy environments, including freedom restriction inherent from prison⁽²⁾, as it is demonstrated in the following line cut:

It is a very bad thing, because he did not have the freedom to play, he was locked in the cell with me, better for him to be home, right? (3-y).

Beforehand, the lack of physical structure in prisons is known, implicates difficulties in maintenance of the child with the mother, because the lack of nurseries in prison units, implicates in the need for the child to stay in the cell with their mom and other women⁽⁹⁾.

The exemplary maternal behavior can also occur from the guilt feeling for keeping their children with them in prison, in recognizable unfavorable conditions, causing intentional emotional reactions of zeal and care in the arrested mothers. In this sense, those sensations of guilt are similar to those experienced by HIV positive mothers who exposed their children to infection⁽¹⁸⁾.

Another motive listed by women who choose to not live with their children during their time serving is related to the rigor of security checking preceding family visits, once the child have to be undressed, a fact considered humiliating and compelling:

I miss her, but I prefer that she doesn't come because the security checking is too rigorous [...] it wouldn't be necessary to take all clothes off from the child (5-Ω).

When mothers renounce the presence of their children while arrested, they probably do that to save them from negative emotions and feelings inside and outside prison, considering that stigmas and social vulnerability are noted and follow those children⁽¹⁴⁾.

Opinions diverge regarding the permanence of children with their mothers in prison. If by one side they emphasize that it is mutually benefic the maintenance of a mother-son relationship, even in prison conditions, by the other, they reinforce the need to push their children away from the poor, unhealthy and hostile environment, which constitutes prisons.

Poor structure of female prison institutions is caused, within other reasons, by low levels of criminality and women detention that mistakenly induced prison reformers and criminologists, to not worry with female

prison institutions, not meeting women singularities, especially those referred to motherhood⁽¹⁹⁾.

Console during anguish

There is a compensation flux inside female prison for women, that is, although prison units are considered an inadequate environment for children, their presence favors the withdraw of women from prison galleries and corroborates with containment of violent manifestations of prisoners, besides the reduction of criminal re-incidence cases⁽²⁰⁾. In a way that, some mothers relate the presence of their children as courage during serving time.

I think it is ten thousand times better to be here with him than without him, maybe I would have lost my mind, I would be in in trouble, I would have caused lots of trouble, with a child you think twice, three times before you give a slap (9-Ω).

According to the lines, we observe that the presence of child decrease idleness and serves as courage, while waiting for freedom, as well as the presence of a child serves as a family bond, an estimated and prioritized relationship by women.

In relation to the little one that is here with me, at the moment she is my comfort, her presence in my arms comforts me and I can take care of her, see her, etc... (4-γ).

I don't even like to think, I'm here and my kids away, I'm just not more mad, because, at least, there is one here to make me calm (1-Ω).

Suffering is smaller, with the little baby I have distraction, keeps playing, talking, give a bath, make some food, give it to him, change diaper, and then there is a way for us to support a little (6-Ω).

When favoring decrease of anxiety, loneliness feelings and, consequently, decreasing risks of

depression, the child's presence is able to provide a better personality and identity structure to the woman, once, in most of time, imprisoned mothers make efforts to keep good behavior for their children, and then the "improved" behavior contributes for the maintenance of harmony inside prison⁽²⁰⁾.

On the other hand, imprisonment propitiates approximation between mothers and children, once outside prison, childcare is designed to another person, while in prison, full care with hygiene, diaper changes, breastfeeding is exclusively under the mother's responsibility, and this contact makes them feel mothers⁽⁷⁾, and they give meaning to the presence of their child with them in a positive way. From the other side, regarding privileges conceded to them while they are with their children in prison and the fear of losing them:

The prison food is not good, but here they let in some food, a fruit for us, for the child, here they still use their conscience (1-α).

Having a child we come here, having a child that can't stay here we go to the corridor, that is "super" full (6-Ω).

I just keep thinking, if I have to take mine and go back to the corridor (5-Ω).

Women recognize difficulties of Brazilian prison functioning, and they give clear signs of exhaustion⁽³⁾ and, in this environment, maternity can work as an identity and goodness rescue, and the good mother posture can favor acquisition of privileges.

Maybe for this reason, even if the woman did not wish to be a mother in a certain moment, she avoids to manifest this idea in words due to fear of guilt and/or inhumanity recognition, similar to what makes women provoke abortions, which in many occasions, they omit feelings contrary to pregnancy⁽²¹⁾, as it is shown here:

Many of them take care, and others I think they don't do it because they are here and they know that if they hit they will have bigger trouble (9-Ω). [Reference to punishments

possible to happen to prisoners and to the institution, in case of negligence with the children].

In this context, it is observed that imprisoned mothers can be judged and/or judge themselves in moral values, which possibly accentuate difficulties to experience motherhood in prison.

Family fragmentation

Family fragmentation caused by imprisonment is present in the daily lives of those mothers and negatively implicates in the motherhood experience from these study participants.

The first and fundamental transformation in their life, not attributed to criminal or illegal actions, respects to the separation from their family, affective or acquaintanceship group, however, becomes relevant to discuss implications of the motherhood experience deprived of freedom can generate on the loss or fragmentation of family relationships, specially, leaving their children vulnerable⁽⁴⁾.

The contact between parents and children is normally characterized as irregular or inexistent after prison, corroborating with the idea that one of many adverse effects from imprisonment is the breakage of family bonds^(2,14).

Family is configured in the primary social category and works as classification and introductory system in the building of a social world, as well as a protection to its members⁽²³⁾, and it is attributed to women in most distinct societies, the responsibility to keep family unit cohesion⁽¹⁶⁾.

In the imprisonment context, the prisoner tends to lose their role as a woman, spouse, mother and daughter, and as consequence, favors the breakage of family bonds⁽³⁾. In the following line, we note family fragmentation and distance between mothers/children caused by imprisonment:

To be a mom here? It's hard, because you are always separated from someone, if I'm with my son here, he is separated from his grandmother, his sister, if he is outside, I'm with nobody. It's painful, it's never having the family together (3-Ω).

Thus, imprisonment ends up negatively impacting paternity/motherhood relationships and filiation. A burden whose sequel is, sometimes irreparable. The following part also points out that family fragmentation can be accentuated during serving time:

Right on the beginning, when I got here, they cried, but nowadays, they don't cry anymore, they get "crazy" to leave (3-α).

Family fragmentation is favored and enhanced by subsequent family abandonment caused by imprisonment. Regarding family abandonment, studies demonstrate that, in contrast to what happens to men, when women are arrested, in most situations, they are abandoned by their family members⁽³⁾.

Family abandonment can have many causes, as the distance to female prisons, socioeconomic difficulties experienced by the prisoner's family, the discontentment caused to families due to their involvement with crime, the way how visitors are received in prisons and stigma caused for those who are in prison doors⁽⁷⁾. This abandonment creates destitution feelings in women, and when those are mothers, suffering and insecurity are enhanced by inexistence of family support to care for their children while serving their sentence, as emphasized in the lines:

I keep asking the agents for the love of God to find someone to be with my son until I leave (2-α).

It's sad to know, as there is a case here from a friend who has a child, she keeps saying all the time, mourning that her child is close to six months and she doesn't have anybody to take care of her outside (1-α).

The same cultural assumptions that associate women to motherhood, making them responsible for family cohesion and education of their children, also reinforce family fragmentation in the case of female imprisonment, considering that, being a prisoner women, their image is associated to negative characteristics that "prevent" them from adequately exercising motherhood⁽¹⁴⁾. For this reason, family abandonment and breakage of bonds between mothers and children are very common, and many times, it surpasses the serving time.

Solidarity emerges in the female prison context considering the lack of external support, worsened by family abandonment, thus, imprisoned mothers count with the help from other prisoners in many situations:

In the place where I am, although I can't give to her what every child needs, she is being really well treated, everyone helps to care for her, they worry, they help as they can (4-γ).

However, if motherhood is not easy for women who share this moment with their husbands/partners, family and friends, certainly it will not be easy for imprisoned women that are locked in a closed environment, with other unknown women, who can be helpful, but incapable to supplement the family absence⁽²⁾. Thus, it becomes pertinent to consider situations where family fragmentation precede imprisonment, for example, cases where there is maternal use of alcohol and/or other drugs, which can propitiate violence situations between mothers and children⁽²²⁾.

Paradoxically to family abandonment, maternal imprisonment provokes another phenomenon: overload on grandmothers caused due to caregiving for the women's children. Not rarely, grandmothers are responsible for their grandchildren, as identified in these participant's lines:

My mother is who takes care of grandchildren, and she cares really well, but I want to get out and care for them,

because she already cares for mine [children] and my sister's (3-Ω).

My mother is with my other children she is also busy, my dad passed away and she is going after INSS (Social Security) (9-Ω).

In cases where grandmothers, especially maternal, participate in caregiving and education of their grandchildren is frequent, due to the growing participation of women in the job market, or in cases of adolescence pregnancy, divorce, use of drugs or, still, in cases of paternal/maternal death⁽²³⁾. In addition, imprisonment cases, where childcare is commonly transferred to family members.

However, although studies demonstrate that grandmothers appreciate contact with their grandchildren and enjoying participating in their life and upbringing, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that elevated levels of stress with their families in social vulnerability, childcare attribute to grandmothers can constitute overload to them, financial overload or while executing primary care activities in a period of life, when physiologically, they need more rest⁽²⁴⁻²⁵⁾.

As childcare is many times transferred to maternal grandmothers, it is important to consider two antagonistic situations that can happen even after imprisoned mothers are free, permanent abnegation of their children, leaving them under permanent care of their grandmothers or dispute of their guard and love. Both situations are capable to perpetuate family fragmentation, caused by maternal imprisonment.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

For our study participants, motherhood experience gain distinguished outlines in comparison to the experience of free women, for example, the suffering caused by separation from their children. Situations where prison mothers opt for not using their rights to live with their children in prison are common, considering that women identify the prison environment as

inadequate for their stay, even if their presence propitiates comfort in a context full of privations.

Imprisonment cause family fragmentation and, consequently, ruptures the bond between mothers and children, an overall fact occurred due to family abandonment experienced by many women.

Many studies that involve the binomial mother and son in prison addresses epidemiological aspects, thus, we believe in the contribution of the present study allowing the approximation between technical scientific and cultural fields from prisons, and the comprehension of motherhood experienced in this environment, which can subsidize direction of public health policies capable of benefiting the binomial mother-child in the prison context. For that, starting from data elucidated in this study, we suggest the inclusion of penitentiary health in curriculum components and internship activities of health students, aiming to guarantee improvement of skills and competencies for an integral professional and human approach.

Moreover, it is up to managers to program continuing training actions for health professionals, responsible for the assistance to prison population, inside the prison, as well as in off-walls environments. We conclude that it is necessary to implement inter-sectorial actions favoring the relationship mother and child in the imprisonment context.

During the execution of the present research, we noted the importance to apprehend perceptions of other subjects indirectly involved in the motherhood process of prison women. This, associated to conflicting situations in prison and the presence of penitentiary agents during interviews constituted the limitations of this research, as well as it constitutes gaps for future research, especially, the exploring of motherhood relationships/experiences of prisoners with partners, family members, health professionals and penitentiary agents.

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