

CHANGING THE FOCUS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DRUG USE AND WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN OF POPULAR CLASSES IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL¹

Helena Maria Scherlowski Leal David²
Catherine Caufield³

This exploratory study aimed to investigate factors related to the use of illicit and licit drugs and workplace violence in a group of women from popular classes in the city of Rio de Janeiro. We used a descriptive and analytic quantitative approach as well as a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with women who suffered or were suffering workplace violence, using the collective subject discourse analysis methodology. The results showed sociodemographic and work situations that can be considered as possible risk factors for drug consumption and workplace violence. The qualitative analysis shows how this group perceives the phenomena of drug use and workplace violence, expanding the comprehension about these issues and providing conceptual and methodological elements for additional studies on this subject.

DESCRIPTORS: women; women, working; violence; substance-related disorders

CAMBIANDO EL FOCO: UN ESTUDIO EXPLORATORIO ACERCA DEL USO DE DROGAS Y VIOLENCIA EN EL TRABAJO DE MUJERES DE LAS CLASES POPULARES DE RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL

La finalidad de este estudio exploratorio fue conocer los factores relacionados con el uso de drogas lícitas e ilícitas y la violencia en el trabajo en un grupo de mujeres de clases populares en la ciudad de Rio de Janeiro. Para este estudio se utilizó una aproximación cuantitativa descriptiva y analítica, además de una aproximación cualitativa a partir de entrevistas en profundidad con mujeres que sufren o habían sufrido situaciones de violencia en el trabajo. Se utilizó la metodología de análisis del discurso del sujeto colectivo. Los resultados evidencian situaciones sociodemográficas y de trabajo que pueden ser consideradas como posibles factores de riesgo para el consumo de drogas y violencia en el trabajo. El análisis cualitativo muestra como este grupo de mujeres percibe el fenómeno del uso de drogas y de violencia en el trabajo, ampliando la comprensión sobre estas cuestiones y dando aportes conceptuales y metodológicos para estudios adicionales sobre el tema.

DESCRIPTORES: mujeres; trabajo de mujeres; violencia; trastornos relacionados con sustancias

MUDANDO O FOCO: UM ESTUDO EXPLORATÓRIO SOBRE USO DE DROGAS E VIOLENCIA NO TRABALHO ENTRE MULHERES DAS CLASSES POPULARES DA CIDADE DO RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL

Este é um estudo exploratório para o mapeamento de fatores envolvidos na relação entre uso de drogas lícitas e ilícitas e violência no trabalho, em um grupo de mulheres das classes populares da cidade do Rio de Janeiro. Para este estudo foi utilizada uma abordagem quantitativa descritiva e analítica, e também abordagem qualitativa a partir de entrevistas aprofundadas com mulheres que sofrem ou haviam sofrido situações de violência no trabalho, utilizando a metodologia do Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo. Os resultados evidenciam situações sócio-demográficas e de trabalho que podem ser consideradas como possíveis fatores de risco para o consumo de drogas e violência no trabalho. A análise qualitativa mostrou a forma como este grupo de mulheres vê o fenômeno do uso de drogas e da violência no trabalho, ampliando a compreensão sobre estas questões e fornecendo subsídios conceituais e metodológicos para estudos adicionais sobre o tema.

DESCRIPTORES: mulheres; trabalho feminino; violência; transtornos relacionados ao uso de substâncias

¹ The opinions expressed in this article are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not in any way represent the position of the organization they work at or its administration; ² Doctor in Public Health, associate teacher of the Department of Nursing in Public Health of the College of Nursing of the University of the State of Rio De Janeiro, e-mail: helenad@uerj.br; ³ PhD (University of Toronto), Assistant Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta, Canada, e-mail: c.caufield@ualberta.ca

INTRODUCTION

The globalization process must not be examined only from an economic perspective. The reorientation of market relations between countries was accompanied by social changes, especially in the poor countries. These changes are created mainly because of the increasing concentration of power and capital in the hands of a few actors, leading to increased inequality between the rich and the poor. In Latin American countries the inability to control their own capital, now submitted to international capital, means that their political and social issues become subordinate in order for them to meet the requirements of the international banks which subsize their economies. Macroeconomic adjustment, or structural adjustment, created a significant impact in welfare state politics, such as the regulation of work relations. Flexibility, outsourcing, precarious work relations and increasing unemployment are problems that widely affect the Latin countries⁽¹⁾.

In relation to the feminine work force, increasing participation in the national economy is remarkable: between 1985 and 1995, the feminine work force grew 63%, with an addition of 12 million woman workers⁽²⁾. The changes in feminine work are not just numerical: The profile of the woman worker changed from young, single and without children to the increasing incorporation of older women, wives and mothers. In a patriarchal society such as the Brazilian, this did not imply increased sharing of domestic tasks with men. The necessity of combining family and professional work, and thus the double hours of working is the other face of the feminine work. Changes in feminine identity, related to increased education and a reduction in the number of children, also brought changes to the profile of the woman worker. However, these changes do not benefit all Brazilian women in an equal way. Those who are poor, with little formal education and without professional qualifications, and those with children to raise and still needing to work; have not benefitted from the feminist victories of the last decades.

The precarious work relations caused by underemployment, freelance work, or irregular work, affects Brazilian women more than Brazilian men. Women's salaries also are lower than for men in the same job. In relation to unemployment tax, between 1990 and 2002 this was in 8.0 percentile points for Brazil⁽³⁾. We have, thus, a scene that significantly

affects the life of the Brazilian woman worker. We must remember that, according to the census of the IBGE in the year 2000, about 25% of Brazilian families are financially supported by women.

Use of drugs by women and violence

This economic and socio-political context provides the to support the statement that the use and abuse of licit and illicit drugs in Brazilian women is a question that deserves attention. In Brazil, the consumption of drugs by women tripled between 1993 and 1998. The relationship between drug use and violence is a complex phenomenon, involving social, ethnic, political and cultural variables⁽⁴⁾.

Illicit drug and use and excessive alcohol consumption are frequent in non-violent people. However, these substances are also common in many situations of violence - including aggressors and victims. The connection between the use of substances and violence is complex, and more suggestive than conclusive⁽⁵⁻⁶⁾.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of an increasing prevalence of violence associated with the abuse of drugs in Latin America. Here, globalization of the market aggravates the problem because it facilitates the drug market, the diversification of the production sources, and the increase of the demand in diverse population groups, including women. Beyond these, other factors contribute, such as changes in the family structure, in the role of the woman, and in lifestyle and values^(5,7-8).

The use of drugs occurs in an economic, social, legal, situational and cultural environment that influences potential violent behaviors^(5,8). Different drugs affect individuals in different ways, depending on personal characteristics, culture, age, sex, history and factors such as the ingestion of alcohol together with amphetamines and cocaine⁽⁹⁾.

Goldstein⁽¹⁰⁻¹¹⁾ developed a tripartite conceptual model to classify possible factors implicit in drug-related violence. Beyond the violence directly associated with the effect of drugs in the central nervous system (pharmacological violence), this model includes social violence produced in processes such as the commercialization of illicit drugs (systemic violence), and the violence used to obtain money to purchase drugs (compulsory economic violence). According to this research, systemic violence and violence related directly to the effect of substances

are reported almost entirely by men and rarely by women. Cocaine and heroine are the substances most closely associated with systemic violence. Alcohol is the substance most frequently associated with pharmacological violence in both men and women.

Violence in the workplace

The Center for Disease Control in the USA affirms that violence in the workplace has increased 300% in the last decade. Risk factors associated with non-fatal aggressions have been registered. However, some studies have demonstrated that factors such as gender, ethnic origin, occupation and excessive alcoholic consumption seem to be strongly associated with aggression in the workplace⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾. In Latin America, little information exists about this situation.

The declaration made for the General Meeting of the United Nations in 1993 and adopted by the World Health Organization (OMS) in 1996 identifies violence against women as being any aggression on the basis of gender that results in physical, moral, sexual or psychological damage.

Domestic violence has been the type of violence most studied in its determinative and conditioning aspects. There is little work done in the area of women's health and violence in the workplace⁽¹⁴⁾.

There are a few specific research studies about women and workplace violence in Brazil, however, the focus is different from that in North American studies: In the North American countries the focus is on classifying situations, environments and behaviors of risk and to define informative instruments for the direct prevention of accidents and violence in the workplace. The worker is the one seen as the main aggressor, especially the young with family problems, in possession of firearms and with problems of consumption of alcohol. There is a trend in focusing the subject from the point of view of the victimization of the employer or master, and not the worker.

This simplification of the risk of violence in the workplace does not reveal the complexity of the phenomenon. The discussion of psychological violence, which in Brazil has also been called moral harassment in the workplace, has gained increasing space in forums of working debates but not in the health care arena. Considering the vulnerability of women to violence and their generally lower position in the world of work in relation to men, it is of utmost importance

to better understand this issue and to identify nuances related to the diverse forms and situations of work of women of popular classes.

METHODOLOGY

An exploratory quantitative study was carried out with a non-probabilistic sample of 109 resident women in communities and popular neighborhoods of Rio De Janeiro between the months of February and May of 2004. 10 of these 109 women were interviewed in-depth using the Methodology of Collective Subject Discourse Analysis. Inclusion criterion were:

- being a worker woman;
- between 18 and 60 years old;
- an income up to four regional minimum salaries;
- voluntary agreement to participate in the study.

A convenience sample is the result of the difficulty in completing the random probabilistic sample planned, due to the difficulties of doing the interviews at night after the return of the women of their work and because of the social tension suffered by the population of the city of Rio de Janeiro due to urban violence. The situation of violence and related social tension is more evident in the communities and popular neighborhoods. This also occurs in other Latin American cities where the generalized feeling of fear is present in the populations of many urban centers.

In exploratory studies, where the necessary information for the construction of the research are being sought, a convenience sample can be more useful than a random one because there is not, at this moment, the intention of making inferences that can be considered as representative of the population as a whole. The exploratory study aims to create some hypotheses and to suggest variables that might better explain the studied phenomenon.

A questionnaire was used for the collection of quantitative data related to socio-demographic and work situation. A further questionnaire was used to assess violence in the workplace. This second questionnaire was adapted from the bibliography of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Finally, a third questionnaire, the TWEAK, was adapted to evaluate the consumption of alcohol, illicit drugs and cigarettes. Participants were asked to note relevant behaviours for only the year previous to the completion of the questionnaire.

The in-depth interviews were carried out in the homes of the women, with their previous agreement. Prior contacts with the community leaders had also been made.

Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of the frequencies and ratio of the use of alcohol, cigarettes and illicit drugs. Descriptive statistics were also used for analyzing the reported situations of physical and psychological violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. Bivariate analysis was used to analyze the relationship between the socio-demographic variables and of violence and the use of drugs in order to identify risk factors and protective factors. The verification of the association between variables that can be considered risk factors was carried through by the calculation of odds ratios.

The methodology of Collective Subject Discourse Analysis was used to analyze the in-depth interviews, allowing for the construction of a "collective speech" capable of expressing some important social representations for the understanding of the way these women see and think about the use of drugs and violence in the workplace.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Alcohol was the most used substance - 45% of the women of the sample consume alcohol. Scores of 2 or more on the TWEAK are associated with a greater probability for problems with the use of the alcohol. 75% of the women whom who noted that they drink alcoholic beverages also had a score of 2 or greater on the TWEAK.

Possible risk factors, which may guide further studies, include the following variables:

- Civil Status: the average TWEAK scores for separated women was slightly larger (2.75) than those for married women (1.89) and single women (1.75). On this question, aspects related to the experience of separated women who must assume responsibility for the family need to be understood.
- Presence of a friend or husband: independent of civil status, 45% of the women had lived alone in the month prior to the interview. Among these, TWEAK scores were also slightly higher than those obtained among women who had lived with husband or friend. However, this was not verified by probability statistics (OR=1.00).

- Children: in this sample, women with children presented slightly greater risk of consuming alcohol than women who did not have children (OR=1.52).

- Type of work: manual, intellectual or relational: Women with relational work had higher TWEAK scores than women employed in manual or intellectual work.

Education, religion and number of children were factors that did not affect alcohol consumption in the studied sample. Some statistical inferences (bivariate and logistic regression between variables) did not reveal a statistical relationship between variables in this sample.

In women who consume alcohol, 81% were catholic, 13% protestant, and 4% of other religions. The moral restrictions regarding the use of the alcohol in protestant religions and sects, especially those belonging to neopentecostal groups. It is well-known that neopentecostal group are a significant presence in non-urban setting in Brazil.

A closer examination of this variable reveals important differences in the action of each church or sect about the use of the alcohol. The gap between who you are and who you should be according to religion is more common in the catholic religion than in pentecostal churches where militancy to who you should be is an essential dimension. In the neopentecostal religions it is through speech that the "believer" produces the expression of his or her own identity. All the other social roles that they have are secondary. The strong opposition to any recognized behavior as "catholic" or "umbanda" includes the establishment of rigid clothes rules and the prohibition of alcoholic drink and cigarettes.

The beneficial effects of religious conversion to Pentecostalism include a decrease in undesirable behaviours that intervene in family life, such as sexual promiscuity and use of alcohol. Frequently it is only the woman in the family who converts⁽¹⁵⁾.

In juxtaposition to the position against the use of the drink, one in-depth interviewee felt that the use of the alcohol, especially beer, is something that does not necessarily create problems. The women who consume alcohol usually do it in the weekend as a form of leisure or they incorporate it into other forms of leisure. They do not attribute any negative effect to this. Some alleged that the effect of alcohol is relaxing. They related their use of alcohol to work in stating that after a hard week of work drink helped to relax on the weekends.

The use of the cigarettes was found in 21% of the women. It is not statistically associated to socio-demographic factors or to work. There was no reporting of illicit drug use.

The three forms of violence described on the questionnaire (physical, verbal or sexual), did not produce significant TWEAK scores when only reporting occurrences in the year prior to the questionnaire.

The use of cigarettes was either present or absent, with no scores for amounts or type of cigarette. In the sample, 21% of the women affirmed using cigarettes. Any of the socio-demographic variables could have been considered as possible risk factors for the use of tobacco. Neither the environment nor work conditions could have been verified in this direction.

There were no reports of the use of any type of illicit drug in the period of one year prior to and including the date of the interview. It is possible that this is not an accurate reflection of the absence of drug use, but rather a reflection of fear of some type of investigation as there is a punitive politic in Brazil related to drug use.

In the 9 women who reported some type of physical violence, 3 identified customers or patients as the aggressors and 1 person identified a fellow worker. Two women did not answer this question. In relation to consider this a typical incident of the workstation, 3 answered "no", and 4 "yes". Again, 2 women did not answer to this question.

The majority of these incidents occurred inside of the workplace (n=6). Responses to the attack included physical defense (n=3), telling the aggressor to stop (n=2), seeking the aid of the professional association (n=1). Four respondents considered that the incident could have been foreseen, and 3 did not.

The immediate consequences on the health and welfare of the attacked woman included being "super-alert" against further attack. Four women said that after the attack they felt fatigue and avoided to speaking about it. 2 reported having repeated images of the occurrence.

In just 2 cases there was some investigation of the attack. The consequences for the aggressor included verbal warning in one case and discontinuity of the care in another. In 2 cases there was no consequence for the aggressor. The boss offered some type of support to one woman and 5 women said that they did not receive any support.

Psychological violence or verbal abuse was the most frequent form of violence found in this research: 33% of women workers had suffered some type of psychological violence, including put downs, yelling, verbal humiliation and being an "expiatory body" for humiliating tricks. In 83% of the cases the aggression occurred more than once and in 20% it occurred all the time.

When we compare these data with social speech, we verify that often this type of violence was attributed to a female boss, rather than to a male boss. This can be explained because the woman is the one who, historically, assumes the command of the activities related to maintaining the home, including making decisions regarding hiring and firing the house servants. This seems to be a subject on which men have little or almost no command and interest. The reaction of women against this type of aggression can be very diverse. In different contexts the same woman can react submissively or actively, depending on the history of the relationship, the advantages of the work, and the life situation of the woman.

Women who respond actively demonstrate, in their speech, a somewhat vague notion of their rights as citizens and the injustice of the violence of the boss against the employee.

Fear unemployment is a preponderant factor which causes many women to remain silent in the face of violence in the workplace, especially the psychological violence. However, in some speeches it is evident that the fear of unemployment is not strong enough for the woman to tolerate the aggression indefinitely. After some time the woman will search for alternatives to escape this situation. One woman stated that she quit so as not to have to tolerate the verbal aggressions of the boss.

The possibility of foreseeing this type of aggression does not seem to be considered: 21 women agreed that the incident could not have been foreseen. Also, 88.8% of the incidents occurred inside of the work environment and only 3 cases could have been foreseen.

Impunity for this type of aggression is another issue suggested by the data: 75% of the attacked women were unaware of the consequences for the aggressor. Only 1 case was reported to the police authorities. Generally, this suggests that the women face this type of aggression as inevitable and with few possibilities to be moral or judicially repaid.

Another aspect that must be considered about women workers in the salary range specified for inclusion in the study is that these women enter their income as basic support of the family income as a whole. The work in unhealthy conditions in a social context of high unemployment could act as a protective factor rather than a risk factor for the use of drugs. This possibility was strengthened by the results of the content analysis of the on-depth interviews. 2 women reported marijuana during their marriage and pregnancy, although this use was not in the year prior to the study.

Returning to the issue of the use of alcohol, of the 10 women interviewed 6 reported occasional or regular use of alcohol. The quantitative data did not reveal a relationship between the variables of work and alcohol use; however, the social speech analysis showed that some women see the use of the alcohol not as a problem in itself, but rather as a factor in relaxation and leisure, especially when associated with the company of the husband or a friend.

Personal control of the use of alcohol is considered a virtue, a "moral strength". The use of drink, when related as something under total control, is then seen as an option and a right to be enjoyed after the day or the week of work.

Women who work and contribute financially to the maintenance of the home - especially women who are the sole support for the family - feel that "freedom" implies that she neither owes anything to anyone, nor must she give an accounts of her behavior. If she is in or has left an overwhelming and controlling affective relationship, her attitude in relation to the use of alcohol affirms her desire for her right to freedom -for many times it has been a difficult victory. The rupture with stereotypical "submissive woman" can include the use of alcohol as a legal means of trespassing this stereotype. This is a situation full of ambiguity as the women of the popular classes are also the women who are in a situation of greater vulnerability for the domestic violence.

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between work and drug use is still inadequate in Brazil. This research points to some questions that are relevant for this type of research.

The rate of alcohol consumption in women in this study correlated with rates reported in the literature. However, this study showed that the establishment of risk for abuse must take into consideration not only test scores, like TWEAK, but also the type of drink consumed and the conditions of the consumption. Drug use is a complex problem and for the establishment of the relationship between workplace and drug use it is necessary to identify other variables that were not included in the present study, such as ethnicity, type of work, working conditions and the degree of work-related stress.

There is a methodological limitation related to obtaining a randomized probabilistic sample of women workers in popular communities. This type of study must search alternatives for defining the sample; for example, drawing the sample only from women who reside at their place of work. In this way the unions and associations representative of the workers would be able to provide legitimacy and operational viability for the collection of data.

The inclusion of a comparison group of male workers would assist in the identification of specific questions of gender and extend the scope of the analyses.

In regards to the use of licit drugs, the relationship between type of work and the use of anxiolytics, barbiturates and other drugs needs to be understood. In the same way, the use of cigarettes should not be understood only in terms of "yes" or "no", but also in terms of what type of cigarette, how much is smoked and the type of relation established with the tobacco.

Finally, investigating the use of drugs in a sample of dismissed women will assist in delineating the role of employment as a factor that impacts on the use and abuse of substances.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission/CICAD, the OAS Scholarship Program, the Government of Japan, all Faculty of the University of Alberta/Canada, and the eleven representatives from the seven Latin-American countries that participated in the "I International Research Program", implemented at the University of Alberta/Canada in 2003-2004.

REFERENCES

1. Costa NR. Política social e ajuste macroeconômico. *Cadernos de Saúde Pública* [periódico na Internet] 2002 [citado 18 de novembro de 2003]; 18 (supl); 13-21 [9 telas]. Disponível em: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S003489102004000200018&lng=pt&nrm=isso
2. Melo HP. Globalização, políticas neoliberais e relações de gênero no Brasil. In: Borba A, Faria N, Godinho T, organizadores. *Mulher e Política: gênero e feminismo no Partido dos Trabalhadores*. São Paulo: Ed. Fundação Perseu Abramo; 1998. p. 55-71.
3. Organização Internacional do Trabalho. *Panorama Laboral 2002 de America Latina y el Caribe. Relatório da Oficina regional para America Latina y el Caribe*. Lima: Organização Internacional do Trabalho; 2003.
4. Deslandes SF, Gomes R, Silva CMF. Caracterização dos casos de violência doméstica contra a mulher atendidos em dois hospitais públicos do Rio de Janeiro. *Cad Saúde Pública* [periódico na Internet] Jan-Mar 2000 [citado 23 de março de 2004]; 16 (1): 129-137 [9 telas]. Disponível em: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-311X2000000100013&lng=pt&nrm=iso
5. Reiss AJ, Roth JA. Alcohol, other psychoactive drugs and violence. In: Reiss AJ, Roth JA, editors. *Understanding and preventing violence*. Washington: National Academic Press; 1993. p. 182-220.
6. Allen TJ, Moeller FG, Rhoades HM, Cherek P. Subjects with a history of drug dependence and more aggressive than subjects with no drug history. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. 1997; 46: 95-103.
7. Fagan J. Intoxication and aggression. In: Tonry M, Wilson JQ, editors. *Drugs and crime Crime and justice: a review of research*, 13. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1990.
8. Wrigth MG. La Contribucion de la Enfermeria frente al Fenómeno de las Drogas y la Violencia en America Latina: Un Proceso en Construcción. *Ciencia y Enfermeria* 2002; 82:9-19.
9. Chermack ST, Giancola, PR. The relation between alcohol and aggression : an integrated biopsychological conceptualization . *Clin Psychol Rev* 2002; 17(6):621-49.
10. Goldstein PJ. The drugs/violence nexus: Atripartite conceptual framework. *Drugs Issues*. 1985; 15 (4): 493-506.
11. Goldstein PJ. Drugs and Violent Crime. In: Weiner NA, Wolfgang ME, editors. *Pathways to Criminal Violence*. NewYork: Sage Publications; 1998. p.16-48.
12. Fisher BS, Gunnison E. Violence in the workplace: Gender similarities and differences. *Criminal Justice* 2002; 29(2):145-55.
13. Islam SS, Surender E, Priscah M, Doyle E. Risk Factors for physical assault: State-managed worker's compensation experience. *Am J Preventive Med* 2003; 25(1):31-7.
14. Giffin K. Pobreza, desigualdade e equidade em saúde: considerações a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero transversal. *Cad Saúde Pública* 2002; 18(supl):103-12.
15. Machado MD. *Carismáticos e Pentecostais: Adesão religiosa na esfera familiar*. Campinas: Autores Associados ANPOCS; 1996.