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**THE LABOR MARKET
FOR WOMEN DURING
THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL**

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Abstract: With the emergence of COVID-19, many situations of inequality were aggravated in Brazil. Issues of domestic violence, the increase in social inequality, the increase in the number of people in miserable conditions on the streets, the unemployed and the gender wage gap, are among the most serious aggravations, with significant negative results. This research, arising from the research project entitled “Coletivo Feminino: abuse in labor relations in Brazil”, carried out at UNIRIO, aims to outline the parameters of differentiation between the labor market in Brazil, between men and women. As seen in this study, given social isolation, many women had a significant increase in their unpaid work, developing their activities not only in their work and “normal” activities at home, but also in greater educational monitoring of their children. The number of women working in this situation is, on average, three times greater than the male participation. In addition, also due to social isolation, we see a significant increase in cases of violence against women and femicide, taking into account reported and known cases. In addition to all the already known difficulty for women to report the violence they have suffered, isolation has made it more difficult for many to leave their homes to report it, either because of exposure to the virus or because they feel hostage in their own lives. home. To carry out this study, we used the quantitative method, seeking statistics, news and articles, as well as research in specific bibliography. As the study is still in progress, a conclusion was not possible, but we can verify that the pandemic did not change the gender inequality framework in the labor market in Brazil, what happens is a worsening of the disparity that already exists due to social isolation and its consequences.

Keywords: Woman; coronavirus; pandemic; work; unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

The new coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in 2019, in March 2020 the pandemic was officially announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and, since then, the impacts on the economy and public health have been devastating. The suspension and drop in activities dealt a heavy blow to the economy and caused the record unemployment rate in Brazil, which rose from 11.9% in 2019 to 13.5% in 2020, according to Agência Brasil. In addition, the average informality rate also declined, which does not represent a greater number of workers in the formal market, but an increase in informal workers without occupation.

Social distancing was presented as a way to contain the spread of the virus, completely changing the routine of millions around the world. However, the effects of the crisis were not the same for all workers, in a way that affected those who normally find themselves in an unequal situation in the market, as is the case of Brazilian women, more severely. From the understanding that the place occupied by women in the labor environment belongs to the different reality of men, the article aims to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in this context.

The crisis only accentuated the gender inequality that has always been present in the labor market. According to a survey carried out by the International Labor Organization (ILO), 12 million women lost their jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Brazil, the data reflect the same scenario. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), through the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) identified that, compared to the previous year, 8.5 million women left the labor market in the third quarter of 2020. The rate The unemployment rate for men in the period was 12.8%, while for women it reached 16.8%. If a racial cut is

made, the number is even higher for black women, reaching 19.8%.

The numbers reveal a reality that has always existed, but which is now even more indisputable as a result of already known facts. Men and women usually have different occupations, so that in addition to having lower wages, female labor is less found in positions of greater power and autonomy. Women are responsible for most of the unpaid work that involves taking care of the home, children and the elderly. Normally, this discrepancy already has negative effects, but without a doubt there was an increase in the problem due to social isolation and the adaptation of work to a home office. In addition, there was an increase in cases of domestic violence during the pandemic, a factor that undoubtedly influences both the domestic work and the employment of these women.

The article aims to examine the true impact of the health crisis on women's work and, consequently, on their lives. The study is part of a research project that is dedicated to the analysis of abuse against women in labor relations in Brazil, therefore, it will be the object of examination not only the current situation, but the possible causes for the pandemic to represent an unequal threat. for men and women.

LABOR MARKET IN BRAZIL: AN OVERVIEW BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

For the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the unemployed population is not formed by those who do not have a job, the entity defines, in fact, as "unemployed" all people over 14 years old who, despite not being working, are available and looking for work. Thus, university students and housewives who do not work outside the home, for example, are excluded.

The Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Continuous PNAD) monitors quarterly fluctuations in basic data on socioeconomic development, including values related to work. In order for us to understand the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of the labor market for women in Brazil, it is necessary, first of all, to analyze the social statistics for the period between 2018 and 2019, prior to the influence of the virus.

According to PNAD, in the fourth quarter of 2018, although 52.4% of the working age population was female, only 45.6% of the employed population was made up of women. In the same year, according to the IBGE, women aged between 25 and 49 years had an average income of R\$ 2,050.00 (two thousand and fifty reais), while for men of the same age group the value would be R\$ 2,579.00 (two thousand, five hundred and seventy-nine reais). In the fourth quarter of 2019, the numbers change a little, but inequality remains, with a percentage of 44.1% of the employed population represented by women. Regarding the average salary, in 2019 women earned, on average, BRL 1,958.00 (one thousand, nine hundred and fifty-eight reais) against BRL 2,945.00 (two thousand, nine hundred and forty-five reais) for men, a wage gap made even more pronounced by the gender difference.

It is possible to see that in addition to filling less space in the labor market, women represent undervalued labor compared to men, not only due to the lower average salary, but also to the average hourly rate, which for men would be R\$14.20 (fourteen reais and twenty cents), while for women the value was R\$13.00 (thirteen reais) in 2018.

The inequality between men and women in the labor market is structural and appears from hiring to the greater presence of women in jobs normally avoided, such as unhealthy

and informal, since the formal market and the most “desired” jobs do not satisfactorily absorb this population.

In this vein, another expression of inequality is found when observing the configuration of leadership positions. In 2018, the G1 portal published an article on the participation of women in managerial positions based on the PNAD Continua, bringing the data that only 37.8% of leadership positions were occupied by women in 2016., this number represents a drop, since in previous years the percentages were 39% in 2015 and 39.5% in 2012. According to the G1, the IBGE’s explanation for such numbers, at the time, was the economic crisis, also called “the great Brazilian recession”.

On the other hand, analysis is necessary from the perspective that the situation of imbalance between opportunities and guarantees of rights persists and is accentuated from any market influences. In 2016 there would have been an economic crisis, 5 years later, we experienced another crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and we have the same problematic picture, despite the distinction between the causes of the current crisis and the previous one mentioned. For IPEA, the main difference between the crises is that in the latter, in a general overview, the transition of the employed was towards inactivity and not just unemployment, presenting an even more worrying picture.

CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC

GENERAL ACCENTUATION OF INEQUALITY

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), one of the priorities in the process of recovering the labor market after the Covid-19 pandemic would be the necessary and urgent creation and implementation of public policies in favor of

gender equality. This finding is the result of the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had on men and women, increasing the imbalance of opportunities. The ILO reported that, in 2020, women’s participation in the labor market fell by 5.4 percentage points, which means that 12 million women were victims of job elimination. According to the latest Labor Outlook of the ILO for Latin America and the Caribbean, some of the sectors most affected by the crisis were those with the highest participation of women, given their nature, such as hotel services, commerce and paid domestic work, more a factor that explains the greater female disadvantage in the labor market.

The greater affectation of women from specific areas of work is related to the “sexual division of labor”. The principles explained by Danièle Kergoat and Helena Hirata in their article “New Configurations of the Sexual Division of Labour” perfectly illustrate the foundations of deepened inequalities in the context of the pandemic, which involve an idea of separation of jobs for men and jobs for women in addition to the imposition of a hierarchy that defines that man’s work is worth more.

The “Covid-19 Special Report N° 9: Women’s economic autonomy in a sustainable recovery with equality”, released in February by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) points out that the pandemic has, so far, meant a setback of more than 10 years in terms of women’s participation in the labor market. According to the Portuguese newspaper *Público*, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) did not bring discrepant information on the subject, showing that the discrepancy between men and women in the labor market is not exclusive to Latin American countries. According to EIGE, the most impacted countries are: Spain, Belgium,

Ireland, Italy and Portugal. In Portugal, according to the newspaper, the number of women who go from unemployment to inactivity is considerably higher than that of men. In addition, the article explains how, before isolation, much was said about the advantages of teleworking and its possible contributions to reconciling work, personal life and family life, but, although in different proportions, the country also arrived to the conclusion that the negative impacts of the modality affect women more painfully.

In Brazil, PNAD Contínua pointed out that between 2019 and 2020, the percentage of employed women dropped by 3 points, meaning the loss of employment by 5.7 million Brazilian women, in addition to 504 thousand who suffered from unemployment itself and the drop in the informal work around 2.7 million. According to InfoMoney, in February 2021: “the participation of women in the labor market is the lowest in 30 years”, information also released in a headline by the Estadão.

Based on the Continuous PNAD, IPEA published an article that mapped inequalities in the labor market during the pandemic, indicating that in a comparison between the second quarter of 2019 and 2020, the employment rate of women fell by 46.2% to 39.7%, while that of men went from 64.8% to 58.1% in the respective years. In the same period, the unemployment rate between men and women rose by 1%, information that does not seem to demonstrate inequality, but there is, since the participation of women is lower, so despite having the same percentage variation, in terms of number of individuals, there is an imbalance.

FULL-TIME UNPAID WORK

In addition to the various forms of discrimination and harassment experienced by women in the workplace, unpaid work is

a determining factor for gender inequality in the labor market. According to a 2020 report by the NGO Oxfam, 75% of unpaid care work is carried out by women around the world, which leads them to reduce the journey in their jobs or even to dedicate themselves exclusively to this care, given the lack of options, a fact reflected in the statistics of 42% of women without a job because of this responsibility. In Brazil, PNAD Contínua still in 2018 proved that women would spend 18.5 hours of their week committed to household chores, while men would have 10.3 hours per week. This workload was identified among those who have a job, among those who are not employed, the difference is even greater, reaching almost twice as much (12 hours for men and 23.8 hours for women).

In 2019, the Continuous PNAD on Other Forms of Work elucidated the issue of the so-called “invisible face” of inequality, which influences from entry into the labor market, as already mentioned, in its permanence and exit from it. According to the survey, 85.7% of the Brazilian population would be responsible for household chores and, in this context, the female population represented an incredible 92.1%, against 78.6% of men. Inequality, in this sense, is higher in the Northeast Region (91.4% for women and 76.9% for men) and lower in the South Region (93.6% women and 84% men). Interviewed by Agência Brasil, economist Alessandra Brito associated regional differences with schooling, which changes men’s mentality, making them more prone to housework.

In addition to basic household chores, women are also responsible for people other than themselves: 36.8% of the female population have, among their duties, the care of children, sick people, the elderly and people with disabilities, while the male population has 25.9% of individuals with the same attribution. The PNAD highlighted that between 25 and 49

years of age there is a greater presence of the task, probably explained by raising children.

The organizations “Gender and Number” and Alwaysviva Feminist Organization (SOF), carried out the “Sem Parar” survey on the effects of the pandemic and social isolation on women’s lives, especially in their work. The study was based on an online questionnaire, which had 2,676 responses. Through the responses, it was found that, in Brazil, about 50% of women began to care for someone else during the pandemic (ranging from 46% for white women to 52% for black women). Among the totality of women responsible for the care of other people, 72% stated that isolation implied a greater need for monitoring and companionship.

Caring for children, for example, which falls almost exclusively to women, a legacy of a patriarchal culture, ceased to be a responsibility for part of the day and became a full responsibility from the moment in which face-to-face classes were suspended. In this case, in addition to routine supervision, women have become responsible for ensuring that children attend distance learning classes independently of their own jobs. As Maria Valério Junho Pena says (Women and Workers, p. 73):

Housework is at the heart of women’s oppression, and as long as marriage includes it as a mechanism through which services are provided free of charge and children are borne and raised, with a woman in charge, her oppression, with or without property, with or without with no alternative of a salaried job, it seems inevitable.

Another clear example is the change in some methods of carrying out tasks that already existed: there were recommendations from health authorities in the sense of total cleaning of purchased products, as well as care for clothes and shoes that would have been used in public spaces when entering at home. It is evident that such a task would

exist in the new context, the point is that the unbalanced division of tasks or the “sexual division of labor” (HIRATA E KERGOAT, 2007, p. 596) implies a greater attribution of this task to women. As a result, the division between what would be paid work time and unpaid work time was erased, so that the routine became one, as a result of the attempt to reconcile internal and external demands.

Still in September 2020, approximately 6 months after the beginning of social isolation in most states of Brazil, the newspaper Extra published an article about the transformation of women’s workdays into “doubles or triples”, due to the accumulation of professional tasks, home and children. Hildete Pereira, a professor at “Universidade Federal Fluminense” (UFF) and a gender and economics researcher, told the newspaper:

Women are so socialized with care that, even those who break barriers and manage to enter the job market, carry the responsibility of managing the household — says the researcher: — And this unpaid work is what allows people to exist and do not get sick. Imagine how much would be spent if you had to pay for services done “for love”?

The Tricontinental Institute for Social Research prepared the dossier “CoronaShoque and Patriarcado”, in November 2020, and made an exact point about the accentuation of gender inequalities in the labor market combined with unpaid work:

To carry out work that requires high concentration, for example, does not combine with a routine of interruptions. After the implementation of isolation measures in different parts of the world, editorial teams of scientific publications have reported a sharp drop in the number of submissions of articles signed by women around the world, while publications by men increased by almost 50%.

The overload of functions that already existed, combined with the difficulties brought about by social isolation, brought consequences for women's health. According to a study carried out by the Institute of Psychiatry of the Hospital das Clínicas of the Faculty of Medicine of USP, the pandemic had a greater emotional impact among women, with high numbers of depression, anxiety and stress that were attributed, mainly, to the exhausting journey of work (paid and unpaid). Telecommuting has become a safer and sometimes even cheaper option for employers who no longer have demands such as maintaining facilities and spending on employee travel. On the other hand, just a little closer look is enough to realize that, for women, the home office proved to be a more hostile scenario for the work routine.

HOME OFFICE AND THE RISE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In 2019, BBC News Brasil released the result of a survey commissioned by the NGO Forum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (FBSP) to Datafolha in order to analyze data on violence against women in Brazil. That year, 42% of cases of violence against women took place within their own homes. In 2018, FBSP released no less alarming numbers referring to the previous year: Brazil witnessed, on average, 606 cases of domestic violence per day and a daily average of 530 women who triggered the Maria da Penha law that year.

Domestic violence in Brazil has always been a concern and during the pandemic it would be no different. Social isolation considerably aggravates the harsh reality of women who do not have a safe place in their homes. The 3rd edition of the research "Visível e Invisível: the victimization of women in Brazil" by FBSP in 2021 has already brought reality in the context of the pandemic: one in four women claimed to have been a victim of

violence or aggression during the pandemic and the statistics of Brazilians who claim to have witnessed a woman suffer violence in their neighborhood is 51.1%. The survey uses a sample space of the adult population of all social classes aged 16 or over and reports that approximately 8 women are physically assaulted per minute during the pandemic.

According to the FBSP, still in April 2020, that is, in the first month of social isolation alone, the number of emergency calls needed jumped from 6,775 from the same period in the previous year to 9,817 and was accompanied by the number of feminicides that increased by 46, two%. In São Paulo, the Military Police had a 44.9% increase in service requests in the same period.

In addition to all the inequality factors already mentioned, combined with unpaid work, during the pandemic, women are also constantly part of a daily struggle for survival. The data are appalling, but there is underreporting of cases that makes us question the real level of violence suffered by women in Brazil. If women normally already have difficulty formalizing the complaint, either because of fear or the idea that there is no solution, during the pandemic this difficulty increases considerably due to isolation and greater proximity to their aggressor.

If, on the one hand, social isolation is the most effective way to combat the spread of the virus which, at the time of writing this article, reached the mark of 589,000 fatal victims out of 21 million cases, on the other hand, we have women confined in the most risky environment for their lives: their homes.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The labor market, not only in Brazil, but in different parts of the world, has always treated men and women unequally. Since the selection process, carrying out the tasks and, mainly,

the salary value, it has always prioritized male labor to the detriment of female labor. Women who, in addition to their normal workload, which is paid, maintain a second work schedule, in their homes, without any remuneration or recognition, inheritance of a culture of patriarchal domination that we have carried for many years.

With the emergence of COVID-19, we had the worsening of gender differences in the labor market, in which more women lost their jobs or had a significant decrease in their income, in addition to the emergence of a third workload with remote teaching and the need for many mothers to act actively in the education of their children.

We cannot forget the increase in the number of cases of domestic violence and femicide during the pandemic, since social isolation and the need to protect themselves from the virus and its consequences meant that many women remained at home offices, hostages of their partners. and those they

trusted most. We emphasize that in the present study we cite reported and known cases, but we cannot say that they are consistent with reality, given the knowledge of the many difficulties in denouncing, which, possibly, reduced the number of occurrences, since many women remained isolated, either for being under the judgment of their dominator, either because of fear of exposure to the virus and the possibility of death.

As the study has not yet been completed, we present in this article some of the many consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic brought to women in their work functions. We can say that there was a very significant increase in cases of layoffs and a decrease in wages for women, even with an increase in their work, especially at home, which unfortunately is not recognized and, therefore, is not remunerated, aggravating, even more, the gender difference in the labor market in Brazil.

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