

MATERNAL DEATH DUE TO UNSAFE ABORTION: ANALYSIS OF REPORTS IN THE LIGHT OF GENDER

MORTE MATERNA DECORRENTE DO ABORTO INSEGURO: ANÁLISE DE REPORTAGENS À LUZ DE GÊNERO

MUERTE MATERNA POR ABORTO INSEGURO: ANÁLISIS DE REPORTAJES A LA LUZ DEL GÉNERO

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Objective: to analyze how the media portrays maternal death due to unsafe abortion. **Method:** qualitative documentary study, which used electronic Brazilian newspapers as data sources. Data collection took place from June to October 2022. The data were submitted to thematic content analysis, supported by webQDA software, in light of the gender category. **Results:** 27 reports from 16 newspapers were analyzed. Five categories emerged: How the media portrays unsafe abortion; Motivation described for the practice of unsafe abortion; Interface of unsafe abortion with health service; Duality of the media discourse: between condemnation and women's right; Gender inequity present in speeches. **Final considerations:** part of the media supports speeches that condemn women who perform abortion, based on gender norms, another part seeks to protect women's rights, approach abortion as a public health issue.

Descriptors: Abortion. Maternal Death. Gender and Health. Mass Media. Health Inequities.

Objetivo: analisar como a mídia retrata a morte materna por aborto inseguro. Método: estudo documental, qualitativo, que utilizou jornais brasileiros eletrônicos como fontes de dados. A coleta de dados ocorreu de junho a outubro de 2022. Os dados foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo temática, apoiada pelo software webQDA, à luz da categoria gênero. Resultados: foram analisadas 27 reportagens de 16 jornais. Emergiram cinco categorias: Como a mídia retrata o aborto inseguro; Motivação descrita para a prática do aborto inseguro; Interface do aborto inseguro com o serviço de saúde; Dualidade do discurso da mídia: entre a condenação e o direito da mulher; Iniquidade de gênero presente nos discursos. Considerações finais: parte da mídia sustenta discursos que condenam as mulheres que realizam aborto, apoiados em normas de gênero, outra parte busca proteger os direitos das mulheres, abordando o aborto como uma questão de saúde pública.

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Descritores: Aborto. Morte Materna. Saúde de Gênero. Meios de Comunicação de Massa. Iniquidades em Saúde. Desigualdades de Saúde.

Objetivo: analisar cómo los medios retratan la muerte materna por aborto inseguro. Método: estudio documental, cualitativo, que utilizó periódicos electrónicos brasileños como fuentes de datos. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo entre junio y octubre de 2022. Los datos fueron sometidos a análisis de contenido temático, apoyado por el software webQDA, a la luz de la categoría género. Resultados: se analizaron 27 reportajes de 16 periódicos. Emergieron cinco categorías: Cómo los medios de comunicación retratan el aborto inseguro; Motivación descrita para la práctica del aborto inseguro; Interfaz del aborto inseguro con el servicio de salud; La dualidad del discurso de los medios: entre la condena y el derecho de la mujer; La desigualdad de género presente en los discursos. Consideraciones finales: parte de los medios de comunicación sostiene discursos que condenan a las mujeres que realizan abortos, apoyándose en normas de género, otra parte busca proteger los derechos de las mujeres, El aborto como un asunto de salud pública.

Descritores: Aborto. Muerte Materna. Género y Salud. Medios de Comunicación de Masas. Inequidades en Salud.

Introduction

Unsafe abortion is a procedure performed by people without the necessary skills or in environments that do not meet the minimum medical standards for terminating an unwanted pregnancy⁽¹⁾. Each year, approximately 73 million induced abortions occur worldwide⁽²⁾, and 68,000 women die every year due to unsafe abortions⁽³⁾. In developed countries, it is estimated that 30 women die every 100,000 unsafe abortions, while in developing countries, this number reaches 220 deaths per 100,000 unsafe abortions⁽⁴⁾.

Studies indicate that restrictions on access to abortion do not reduce its occurrence. However, the safety and dignity of abortions performed by women and girls have an impact on this reduction⁽⁵⁾. The most comprehensive research on abortion in Brazil has revealed that approximately one in seven Brazilian women have already performed an abortion when they reach the age of 40⁽⁵⁾.

Abortion, being an illegal and stigmatized practice, is performed in a clandestine manner without adequate access to health care, which results in complications and deaths of women⁽⁵⁾. In the press reports that address the issue, abortion is predominantly discussed on the basis of moral, religious, legal and police perspectives⁽⁶⁾, despite the perception that the journalistic field is based on criteria of objectivity and neutrality⁽⁷⁾.

In this sense, the press plays a significant role as a social actor in establishing the public

agenda and guiding debate on important issues. The way the press approaches a given topic can have different repercussions and, as a result, influence the formulation of public policies that aim to promote changes in the current scenario. The way in which the theme is presented to the public, through the selection of perspectives and voices heard and interviewed, allows the media to build narratives and defend theses on the subject in question⁽⁷⁻⁸⁾.

This study assumes that media influence the formation of public opinion, reinforcing discriminatory stereotypes about abortion in the collective consciousness. Therefore, it is essential to identify and analyze how the media portrays gender inequality in their news about women's deaths due to complications arising from unsafe abortion. Thus, the object of this study is maternal death due to unsafe abortion. In view of this, objective defined was to analyze how the media portrays maternal death due to unsafe abortion.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative documentary approach, based on the Theory of Praxis Intervention in Collective Health (TIPESC). The TIPESC is based on a historical-materialist and dialectical view of the world, aiming to understand the objective contradictions related

to Nursing in Collective Health as theoretical and practical field⁽⁹⁾.

The data source used in this study were electronic reports from news portals and Brazilian newspapers, which addressed cases of maternal death due to unsafe abortion. The data collection period was from June to October 2022. The reports were searched through Google News, a widely available online search engine, using Portuguese terms such as “*aborto*”, “*abortou*” in combination with “*morte materna*”, “*morreu*” and “*morte*”.

To carry out the research, 17 media were tracked through the online search engine used, which were considered as sources for analysis. Data collection was done using a semi-structured instrument developed by the authors themselves and adapted in a spreadsheet in the Notion application. Notion’s media clipping and data management features were used for this purpose.

Several data were extracted from the reports, including date and time of publication, data source, source session, gender of the author of the report, text content, geographical location of the case, the woman’s age, race, gestational age, place where unsafe abortion was performed, the person responsible for the procedure, result of unsafe abortion, images and discourses related to the central question of the research.

Reports of Brazilian media, written in Portuguese, were included, which were freely accessible and mainly addressed the object of study. There was no time limit for data collection. As exclusion criteria: reports that did not address cases of unsafe abortion that resulted in maternal death, texts that only mentioned the cases and content associated with blogs.

The collected data were submitted to thematic content analysis, based on the methodology of Bardin⁽¹⁰⁾, with the help of webQDA software, and analyzed in the light of the analytical category of gender. The information registered in the Notion application was incorporated into webQDA through the direct coding function that automatically assigns codes to the descriptive data, publication date and time and gender of the author, and makes available empirical data in the

system of internal sources. Based on the coding system, code trees were built, which emerged from the complete reading of the reports, taking into account the analytical category of gender.

The gender category is based on understanding of the social differences built between men and women, which constitute social relations and the way power relations are meant and articulated⁽¹¹⁾.

The research did not require evaluation by a Research Ethics Committee, as it used publications of public access. To guide the methodological procedures, the instrument Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) was used.

This study is the result of a completion of a nursing graduate course work⁽¹²⁾.

Results

There were 93 reports in Google News, using the Portuguese terms “*aborto*”, “*abortou*” in combination with “*morte materna*”, “*morreu*” and “*morte*”. After reading the titles, reports that did not deal with the theme of maternal death due to unsafe abortion were excluded. Thirty-five reports that addressed cases of maternal death due to unsafe abortion were selected for full reading. Of these, 27 reports were selected to make up the final sample and eight were excluded because they did not explore the theme of maternal death due to unsafe abortion.

The G1 portal presented the largest number of news on the subject, totaling 9 reports. The following portals were also representative: Uol Notícias⁽²⁾, Uol Universa⁽²⁾, A Gazeta⁽¹⁾, Agora RN⁽¹⁾, O Dia⁽¹⁾, Correio do Estado⁽¹⁾, Campo Grande News⁽¹⁾, Cruzeiro FM⁽¹⁾, Metrôpoles⁽¹⁾, Jovem Pan⁽¹⁾, Diário de Petrópolis⁽¹⁾, Yahoo Notícias⁽¹⁾, Notícias R7⁽¹⁾, BBC News Brasil⁽¹⁾, SBT News⁽¹⁾ and Portal Catarinas⁽¹⁾.

The oldest report found was published on 11/15/2014, while the most recent one was published on 10/28/2022. Regarding authorship, ten reports were written by women, six by men, ten did not report authorship and one had shared authorship.

There was the analysis of 27 reports that dealt with 11 cases of unsafe abortion that resulted in the death of women, that is, the cases of unsafe

abortion mentioned were identified in one or more reports analyzed in this study. Of these 11 cases, 75% of the women were white and 25%, black. The average age of women was 25 years. In 45.45% of the cases, women had children,

and in 36.36% of the cases, they had two or more children.

The following chart shows the general characteristics of the reports analyzed (Chart 1)

Chart 1 – Characteristics of the reports selected for the study, title, news portal, date, city and case

(continued)

Case of abortion	Report Identification	Title	News Portal	News date	City and state of the case
1	1	After abortion, teenager dies at the <i>Hospital Municipal de Santarém</i> ; stepfather is suspected of abuse	G1	08/05/2019	Santarém/Pará
2	2	Pregnant woman dies after paying R\$800 for clandestine abortion in the South of Espírito Santo	A Gazeta	06/03/2020	Bom Jesus do Norte/ES
	3	2-month pregnant woman dies during clandestine abortion procedure	SBT News	06/04/2020	Bom Jesus do Norte/ES
3	4	Survivor recommended injection of 'abortion tea' to woman who died in Rio	G1	10/16/2017	Rio de Janeiro/RJ
4	5	Suspects in the death of pregnant woman after abortion in clandestine clinic in the West Zone of Rio go to jury trial	G1	08/09/2018	Campo Grande/ RJ
	6	Militiaman dismembered body of pregnant woman who died while trying to have an abortion	O Dia	11/15/2014	Campo Grande/ RJ
	7	'Abortion is killing', says mother of pregnant woman who died in clandestine abortion clinic	BBC News Brasil	06/08/2018	Campo Grande/RJ
	8	Victim of illegal abortion	UOL Universa		Campo Grande/RJ
5	9	Woman died of internal bleeding after abortion, police report says	G1	09/06/2016	Rio de Janeiro/RJ
	10	28-year-old dies after having an abortion at a clandestine clinic in Rio	UOL Notícias	08/24/2016	Rio de Janeiro/RJ
6	11	Death of woman after alleged clandestine abortion is investigated in Rio	G1	07/15/2015	Rio de Janeiro/RJ
	12	Woman dies after alleged clandestine abortion in Rio	UOL Notícias	07/15/2015	Rio de Janeiro/RJ

Chart 1 – Characteristics of the reports selected for the study, title, news portal, date, city and case

(continued)

Case of abortion	Report Identification	Title	News Portal	News date	City and state of the case
7	13	Four-month pregnant woman dies after having an abortion at home and suspect of performing the procedure is arrested	G1	07/20/2018	Petrópolis/RJ
	14	Ingriane died, Luciene was arrested: abortion case goes to jury trial on Thursday	UOL Universa	03/17/2021	Petrópolis/RJ
	15	Woman dies after performing clandestine abortion	Diário de Petrópolis	10/24/2022	Petrópolis/RJ
8	16	Man accused of impregnating sister-in-law who died after abortion and nurse go to trial 11 years after the crime	G1	05/25/2022	Campo Grande/MS
9	17	Pregnant woman who died had complained of pain after applying “abortion kit” injections	Agora RN	10/28/2021	Votorantim/SP
	18	7-month pregnant woman dies after attempted abortion in Votorantim	Cruzeiro FM	10/27/2021	Votorantim/SP
	19	Pregnant young woman from a city in the interior of São Paulo dies after using an ‘abortion kit’ purchased online	Jovem Pan	10/28/2021	Votorantim/SP
	20	Police try to identify who sold an ‘abortion kit’ to a pregnant woman who died after using an injection	Yahoo Notícias	10/29/2021	Votorantim/SP
	21	Young woman who died from an ‘abortion kit’ said she felt like her belly would explode	Metrópoles	10/28/2021	Votorantim/SP
	22	20-year-old woman dies while trying to have an abortion in the 7 th month of pregnancy	Notícias R7	10/28/2022	Votorantim/SP
	23	With the help of her boyfriend, pregnant woman who died after taking medication bought an ‘abortion kit’ online, police say	G1	10/27/2022	Votorantim/SP
10	24	Death of 23 years woman in Santa Catarina reignites debate about safe abortion	Portal Catarinas	02/23/2018	Itapema/SC

Chart 1 – Characteristics of the reports selected for the study, title, news portal, date, city and case (conclusion)

Case of abortion	Report Identification	Title	News Portal	News date	City and state of the case
11	25	Young woman dies after suspected illegal abortion and police remove body from wake	G1	12/08/2016	Porto Murinho/MS
	26	Mother goes to wake and removes daughter's body after discovering attempted abortion	Campo Grande News	12/08/2016	Porto Murinho/MS
	27	Lab technician is arrested on suspicion of involvement in illegal abortion	Correio do Estado	01/09/2017	Porto Murinho/MS

Source: created by the authors.

After the collection, the data were organized and analyzed through the content analysis proposed by Bardin⁽¹⁰⁾. An exhaustive reading of the reports was carried out, identifying the central themes and categorizing aspects, such as the method of performing abortions, the people involved, the motivations and the approaches adopted by the news portals.

The webQDA software helped in identifying patterns, highlighting recurring themes and differences between sources. With the software, it was possible to understand how the different aspects of unsafe abortion are reported and the reactions of the parties involved, family members, partners and authorities. Finally, reports from different sources were compared to identify similarities and differences in the retraction of cases of maternal death due to unsafe abortion.

Next, the topics identified in the reports were grouped by similarity as follows: topics regarding the abortion process, method used, the influence of the value of the procedure in its performance and the role of the companion constituted the category *How media portrays unsafe abortion*. Topics on the reasons and justifications for performing abortion formed the category *Motivation described for the practice of unsafe abortion*. Topics related to health care in cases of unsafe abortion and the fear of women of suffering some punishment when seeking health service composed the category *Interface of*

unsafe abortion with the health service. Themes about the condemnatory discourses of the practice of abortion and discourses that promote the discrimination of abortion generated the category *Duality of the media discourse: between condemnation and women's right*. The themes that involved the culpability of women, correlation between abortion and violence, the right to legal abortion not fulfilled and the tendency of the reports to associate women with socially expected gender roles comprised the category *Gender inequity present in the speeches*.

How media portrays unsafe abortion

The analyzed reports presented detailed information about the process of unsafe abortion, resulting in the identification of three main themes: the method used; the value of abortion and its influence in practice; and the way the media portrayed the role of the partner.

Regarding the abortive methods, of the 11 cases analyzed, four used home methods, such as syringes, probes and the use of castor stalk. In three cases, the method was not reported. In two cases, abortive drugs were used, and in other two cases, the abortion was performed in clandestine clinics.

The abortive process was performed by using syringes, probes and potassium permanganate. (R2).

Among the 27 reports analyzed, 13 mentioned the amount charged for the procedure. The reported values ranged from 300 BRL to 4,500 BRL.

Luciene de Sá received 300.00 BRL from Ingriane to help her terminate her pregnancy in the fourth month. (R12).

Moreover, the lowest values are related to home and experimental methods, conducted by unqualified professionals. On the other hand, procedures with higher values were performed in clandestine clinics. Women who opted for the home methods often counted on the support of their partners or friends, or looked for other women who charged less to perform the procedure, usually in the homes of pregnant women. In contrast, reports of abortions performed in clandestine clinics did not provide details on the method employed.

The reports published in the media portrayed the involvement of partners as accomplices and supporters of abortion, describing their participation during the process. In one case, after the death of the pregnant woman, the companion even hid the body to make it difficult to investigate her disappearance.

The two then placed the young woman's body in a truck and abandoned it in a sugarcane field located on a country road near MS-162, in Sidrolândia. (R8).

Motivation described for the practice of unsafe abortion

In some reports, the motivation behind the decision to perform the abortion was addressed. Although there are variations in the motivations described in these reports, the feeling of despair is often mentioned as the emotional state in which these women found themselves when seeking unsafe abortion.

We used to be very joined. I knew [she was pregnant] and really wanted it. Twelve or thirteen weeks. She was very worried, really desperate. That is why she trust the very first person that appeared. (R4).

The lack of structure was mentioned as a motivation for unsafe abortion. However, in the reports, this concept was approached in a generic way, and could refer to both the lack of financial resources and the psychological state of women.

The process includes prints of conversations between Ingriane and friends talking about the need to terminate the pregnancy, since she was unable to raise another child.. (R12).

Interface of unsafe abortion with the health service

The search for health services was identified in ten reports that addressed seven different cases of maternal death due to unsafe abortion. In one case, the chosen health service was the Emergency Care Unit (UPA), in two cases, the Mobile Emergency Care Service (SAMU) was activated and in four cases, the search for assistance occurred in the emergency rooms of hospitals. In all cases, the demand for health services occurred late, resulting in the impossibility of avoiding death.

The young woman was taken to the Porto Murinho hospital for treatment, but she failed to tell the local doctor that she was pregnant and had taken an abortion pill. (R24).

In the speeches presented in the reports, it was observed that the fear of suffering punishments when seeking health service is a constant concern, causing women to postpone seeking assistance and thus aggravating their health condition.

She was feeling sick, but she was afraid to go to a hospital and be arrested. (R12).

Duality of the media discourse: between condemnation and women's right

Reports that address maternal death from unsafe abortion can follow two opposing approaches. Some choose to adopt a condemnatory discourse regarding abortion, while others use the space to promote debate about the decriminalization of the procedure. Those seeking to raise the discussion on the decriminalization of abortion often interview experts in the field, including public defenders and researchers.

The real victims of the criminalization of abortion are women. (R20).

On the other hand, reports that adopt a condemnatory discourse in relation to abortion

usually seek to interview relatives of the woman who chose to perform the procedure. These interlocutors show sensitivity to the issue, tending to condemn women and defend the criminalization of abortion.

She keeps her memories and love for her daughter intact, but also believes that abortion should continue to be a crime in Brazil. "There is no difference between killing a 13-year-old child and the one inside your belly," she says. (R19).

Gender inequity present in the speeches

It is understood that gender inequality permeates the entire process of unsafe abortion. However, some speeches in the reports on the subject have endorsed this inequality, attributing the blame to women, those who decided to have an abortion for themselves as well as those who performed it.

"Luciene is under house arrest. Two people have been charged, she and the young man who was Ingriane's friend and who recommended her to have an abortion," she says. "However, he is responding to the case in freedom. It is very symbolic that the man is free to respond while the woman is in prison. Women are doubly disapproved when the subject is abortion." (R12).

It was also observed the need of reports present in the reports to validate women by framing them in traditional gender roles, as motherhood, dedication to marriage and physical appearance.

She was vain, she liked to dye her hair, paint her nails. (R19).

In some cases, violence situations faced by women who have opted for unsafe abortion are exposed. In one of the situations, a 16 year girl was a victim of sexual violence, her suspect being her stepfather. In this case, the victim would have the right to legal abortion, as provided for by law.

After abortion, teenager dies at Santarém Municipal Hospital; stepfather is suspected of abuse. (R1).

In an additional case, in which the woman performed an abortion at a clandestine clinic, relatives interviewed for the report mentioned the presence of signs of violence on her body, as observed in the Forensic Medical Institute.

At the Forensic Medical Institute and later at the funeral, we noticed that she was scratched and had a cut on her forehead. The funeral home had to close her mouth so we could not see that her teeth were badly broken, some of them missing. (R27).

Discussion

It was possible to observe in the results the characterization of women who underwent unsafe abortions and whose death was reported in the media. According to the reports, 75% of the cases involved white women, while 25% involved black women. These results contrast with the findings of a survey⁽¹³⁾ that aimed to describe the situation of abortion in the country using data from the UHS Computer Department (DATASUS). This research analyzed the distribution of total number of deaths by abortion between 2006 and 2015. It was found that the Maternal Death Rate (MDR) specific to abortions, according to skin color, indicated that from 2006 to 2012, the group of black women had the highest values. In 2013 and 2014, indigenous people were the group with the highest MDR.

This divergence can be attributed to the limited amount of reports analyzed. However, studies show that the under-representation of blacks in the media is a constant. This demonstrates that media silence regarding racial inequalities persists and plays a role in the denial of processes of racial discrimination, which the racialization of social relations⁽¹⁴⁾.

The results regarding the category *How the media portrays abortion* are contradictory in relation to the Brazilian research carried out in the last two decades. These studies have shown that the main method used for abortion is Cytotec, a drug originally developed to treat gastric ulcers, which contains the active ingredient misoprostol. With the introduction of Cytotec in the Brazilian market in the 1990s, there was a reduction in maternal mortality and an increase in the number of hospital admissions for abortion completion⁽¹⁵⁾.

This indicates that the home methods mentioned in the reports analyzed may be associated with a higher risk of mortality, which is in line with national data that points to immediate physical complications, such as bleeding, infection and organ perforation, as one of the main causes of maternal death in the country⁽¹³⁾. Moreover, unsafe abortions, when compared to the safe ones, are also significantly related to a higher risk of infection complications⁽¹⁶⁾.

In two cases reported, women used drugs with abortive effect, and in one case, the drug was used in combination with other methods. Research has shown that misoprostol's incorrect and reckless use can result in changes in fetal development, leading to malformations and severe maternal complications, severe hemorrhages, sepsis and even death⁽¹⁷⁾.

The availability of more accessible information and pharmacological methods has the potential to reduce post-abortion complications. Therefore, it is important to consider that not all illegal abortions are necessarily unsafe. The procedure can be performed in an appropriate manner and with qualified professionals, even if clandestinely⁽¹⁷⁾. However, it is important to note that this abortion profile is more common among women of higher socioeconomic classes, who have access to quality information and financial capacity to pay for the procedure⁽¹³⁻¹⁸⁾.

Thus, restrictive measures related to abortion have the effect of aggravating the already existing socioeconomic inequalities in the country⁽¹⁵⁾. A survey in Australia has shown that restrictive barriers to abortion especially affect marginalized people, even in countries where abortion is legalized. These barriers cause delays in the care, reduce abortion options and increase the cost of the procedure⁽¹⁸⁾.

The results related to the category *Motivation described for abortion practice* show that the illegality of induced abortion has no effect on the need to make it, but it intensifies the risks and difficulties faced by women when seeking a safe abortion⁽¹⁶⁾. Both national and international research states that abortion should be recognized as a women's right. In this sense, denying access to abortion represents a risk to women's health, since forced motherhood can have a direct impact on their life plans, family relationships, education, employment and relationships⁽¹⁹⁾.

Studies conducted nationally corroborate the results found in this study, affirming that women living in vulnerable social conditions and without means to pay for safe abortions often resort to risky methods. This includes the ingestion of toxic substances, insertion of foreign objects into

the uterus and even procedures performed by unqualified professionals⁽¹⁶⁾.

The *Interface with health service* category reveals women's fear of seeking health care. The fear mentioned by women in the reports is justified, since national surveys show the hard reality faced by those who seek health services to end the abortion process: moral judgment, threats of reporting to the police, disrespectful physical contact and hospitalizations in shared rooms with women who have just given birth, as well as long waiting periods until they are assisted⁽²⁰⁾. Therefore, the stigmatization of women who choose abortion contributes to them seeking assistance only as a last resort.

Interference, judgment, threats and refusal of medical assistance represent the institutional violence to which women are subjected, violence that they face throughout their lives⁽²⁰⁾. In the context of abortion, health professionals should provide assistance in an ethical and responsible manner. The professional ethics that guide health professions must be present in care and embracement, respecting the right to human dignity. In addition, this perspective highlights the need for care that takes gender issues into account, overcoming the exclusively biologicistic approach currently prevalent⁽¹⁹⁾.

The category *Duality of media discourse: between condemnation and women's rights* revealed the dichotomy present in the discourses broadcast by the media regarding abortion. This polarization is characterized by the opposition between conservative agents, which present forceful speeches based on religious convictions and emotional testimonials of relatives of women who died as a result of unsafe abortions, and progressive speeches based on scientific evidence on the subject.

This category demonstrated that the cases of abortion that result in maternal death reported by the media are those capable of shocking the public, either due to the methods used, individuals involved or the severity of the outcome. This finding is supported by a study⁽²¹⁾, which states that when reporting crimes, the media are concerned with the details of situations in which

journalistic information itself is not sufficient; what matters is the perpetuation of interest in crime.

The media has the power to alter and unbalance the access and distribution of symbolic and cultural resources in a society. Therefore, it is considered an autonomous field of power, with its own specific dynamics of action and resources. The comprehension of representations about social reality also occurs through activities of production, transmission and reception of media content⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾.

However, this conflict of narratives, which continues throughout the generations, does not contribute to the necessary advance in the debate on abortion. On the contrary, it emphasizes the criminal aspects in reports broadcast by the media, instead of addressing the prevention of harm to women who perform the procedure under unsafe conditions⁽²²⁾.

Going further, the media approach to abortion often attributes a woman's guilt for not wanting to be pregnant at that time. This approach assumes that all actions that result in pregnancy are exclusively the responsibility of the woman, reinforcing the reproductive role to the detriment of the rights of the female body. Thus, the media assumes the role of reinforcing certain discourses in their contents, reproducing and amplifying their opinion about who deserves protection or is worthy of it⁽²²⁾.

Therefore, it is undeniable that the media has influence on how people understand the relationships between individuals and their social environment. The development of social action occurs in socially structured contexts, which play a fundamental role in the formation of individual experience. In this sense, the media, as a channel of mediation, plays an important role in the formation of these contexts. It becomes the central element of this analysis, being essential for the process of identity formation of society, through the structuring of understanding, reproduction and questioning of the gender references present in social contexts⁽²²⁾.

The category *Gender inequity present in speeches* reveals that the punishment of illegal abortion is more severe for women, giving them

exclusive responsibility for reproduction. This strengthens the male irresponsibility in relation to their effective participation in this process. This dynamic is the result of gender inequalities, because the absence of male identity in abortion issues erroneously attributes an exclusively female character to these issues, transmitting the idea that abortion is a phenomenon restricted to the female gender, on which the male gender has no co-responsibility or accountability.

The understanding of power relations is fundamental to understand how the control of female bodies occurs through reproduction, a concept called biopolitics in the works of Foucault⁽²³⁾. Biopolitics encompasses the set of techniques and strategies that seek to exercise power to guide and control the bodies, health and life of a community, regulating reproduction, fertility and mortality. The application of these techniques constitutes an institutionalized biopower in the state, whose objective is to make the life of individuals the object of political domain⁽²³⁾.

Biopolitics aims to indicate the best ways of living, shaping subjects regulated by a patriarchal hegemonic thought, through the regulation of the way of life of individuals. Thus, it controls the female bodies through self-knowledge, such as natality, and causes women to have little knowledge about their own bodies. The social and historical objective of this control is social control⁽²⁴⁾.

Motherhood is one of the social roles assigned to women, and abortion is considered a practice that challenges this imposition. Motherhood is an institution that is imposed on women from birth, through norms that are passed down from generation to generation and suffer little interference from individual decision. Émile Durkheim defined as a *Social Fact* that which encompasses the objective relations imposed and external to the individual, but which exert a coercion on him/her independently of his/her will. Thus, motherhood is a social fact that exerts coercion on the individual, regardless of her will⁽²⁵⁾.

When trying to break with what has been instituted, the individual faces punishment. When

a woman tries to break with the institution of motherhood through abortion, she faces legal punishments; if she opts for adoption or donation of children, she suffers moral reprimand; if she does not want to become pregnant, she is judged socially and her sexuality is invaded because she refuses to fulfill the social role of mother⁽²³⁾.

It is possible to modify the institutions of repression that oppress women⁽²³⁾. Improve the practices of dialogue, promote women's listening and even transgress laws are strategies of resistance that can advance in the creation of public policies and change legislation and norms that regulate the female body⁽²³⁻²⁴⁾.

The category *Gender inequity in speeches* also revealed situations of violence faced by women who opted for unsafe abortion. In one of the cases analyzed, a 16 year was a victim of sexual violence, allegedly committed by her stepfather. In this case, the victim would have the right to legal abortion, as provided by law. However, the externalization of sexual violence is complex and the difficulty of reporting the violence to the safety net can directly affect the timely discovery of pregnancy and hinder access to legal abortion⁽¹⁹⁾.

A survey of female patients at the Metropolitan Boston Hospital, United States of America (USA), concluded that abortion is strongly associated with gender-based violence. The study found that the cumulative effect of multiple forms of violence against women increases the chances of abortion⁽²⁶⁾.

Abortion is a public health issue, and the denial of dialogue on this topic, both in academia and in the media, has fatal consequences for many women. Therefore, the simultaneous risk of unwanted pregnancy with an outcome in abortion and being a victim of violence indicates the need to understand gender-based violence as a determining factor for abortion⁽²⁷⁾.

A limitation of this study concerns the analysis of reports from the Brazilian written press. Expansion to other types of national, state and municipal media could expand the data. Moreover, the results are not generalizable, since the selected reports are related to only 27 reports on 11 cases

of unsafe abortion that resulted in maternal death. Thus, it is not possible to affirm that the contradictions identified in this study apply to all Brazilian women.

Despite these limitations, the results contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge about the influence of the media on women's issues, especially by women who contradict the social norms of gender. In addition, the results of this study revealed that women face fear when seeking health care after an unsafe abortion due to the concern of being judged, violence and facing legal punishments. Therefore, it is important to provide nursing care that takes gender issues into account and goes beyond the purely biological approach in the health field. It is essential to ensure care and embracement based on ethical principles that respect human dignity.

Final Considerations

The reports published in the media about maternal death due to abortion have the objective of subjugation and exposure of women, taking events to the extreme to involve the public. Some of these reports revealed situations of violence against women, highlighting that in society the woman is constantly victimized by the system, and the illegality of choosing abortion is a deprivation of their right to autonomy, to decide on their own body. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a portion of the media brought up the need to defend women's rights, promoting the debate on abortion as a public health issue.

The use of media reports as a source of data has proven to be a powerful way to analyze the different perceptions associated with maternal death due to unsafe abortion. It is concluded that, in general, the media have the ability to influence and guide public opinion. In this sense, the qualitative approach research shows itself as a relevant tool to capture the speeches conveyed by the media, contradictions that can be overcome through interventions in the objective reality.

Collaborations:

1 – conception and planning of the project: Thammy Novakovski dos Santos, Rafaela Gessner Lourenço, Laura Christina Macedo, Luciana Schleder Gonçalves and Daiana Kloh Khalaf;

2 – analysis and interpretation of data: Thammy Novakovski dos Santos, Rafaela Gessner Lourenço, Laura Christina Macedo, Luciana Schleder Gonçalves and Daiana Kloh Khalaf;

3 – writing and/or critical review: Thammy Novakovski dos Santos, Rafaela Gessner Lourenço, Laura Christina Macedo, Luciana Schleder Gonçalves and Daiana Kloh Khalaf;

4 – approval of the final version: Thammy Novakovski dos Santos, Rafaela Gessner Lourenço, Laura Christina Macedo, Luciana Schleder Gonçalves and Daiana Kloh Khalaf.

Competing interests

There are no competing interests.

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