

The fragility of interpersonal relationships evidenced in the pandemic period with COVID-19

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Received: 07 May 2022,

Received in revised form: 01 Jun 2022,

Accepted: 08 Jun 2022,

Available online: 15 Jun 2022

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Keywords— *Pandemic, Social Isolation, Interpersonal Relationships, Liquidity, Fragility.*

Abstract— *The pandemic with Covid-19 established a social chaos on the planet, which required extreme changes in order to contain the large-scale contamination of the disease. Social isolation, adopted as one of the restrictive measures, generated other problems with high repercussions in the indices of domestic violence, femicide, divorces, among others, highlighting the fragility of interpersonal relationships and the consequences for society. The present study aims to present how interpersonal relationships were affected during social isolation. As methodology, the research was based on a literature review based on theorists such as Bauman (2001; 2004), Forbes (2010; 2019), in the approach about liquidity in contemporary relationships; in studies on the subject available in scientific and research platforms, college observatories and analysis of statistics about problems instaurated from relational conflicts during the pandemic period. As a result, it became evident that sudden changes in the rhythm of life, such as residential confinement, contributed to increase the rates of domestic violence, consumption of alcoholic beverages, psycho-emotional diseases and divorce among couples. Evidence that human beings need to detach themselves from the liquidity and fluidity that contemporary immediacy adds to interpersonal relationships and reinforces the need to undertake more solid and effective relationships so that they can face crisis situations without destabilizing family ties and, thus, have more serenity and collaboration in solving challenges, such as the pandemic with Covid-19.*

I. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of 2020, the world population was suddenly affected by the dissemination of the new coronavirus (SARSCOV-2), accentuating in a pandemic

that would drastically mark the lives of human beings all over the planet. Changes in habits and social organization became urgent in the race to stop the spread of the virus and the number of deaths.

The protocols designed to contain the transmissions and mitigate a catastrophe imposed social isolation as an urgent and necessary measure at first, followed by the gradual return of face-to-face activities, maintaining the social distance between individuals. The isolation determined the changes in routines, mainly altering the family life.

People who spent most of their time at work had to live together 24 hours a day, often in small spaces, performing professional activities. The new format of work assumed in an emergency (Home Office) was a strategy so that the society didn't stop, a way of minimizing the damages resulting from a general paralyzation of the social segments.

In this way, homes with their particularities (children, elderly people, pets, among others), became offices, classrooms, extensions of factories, changing interpersonal and work relationships. Allied to this, the insecurity in relation to the situation faced, the fear of contagion by the virus and the pain of loss in many families worked as stressful and sickening elements in the world population.

Interpersonal relationships were highly affected, whether by isolation, distance from loved ones, or by the change in routine, with the uninterrupted coexistence in the same space, without options of leaving home even for a short period.

Immersed in this context, there has been in Brazil an increase in domestic violence, femicide, as well as in divorces between couples. The pandemic, brought to the surface, the fragility in human relationships, based on liquidity, according to studies by Baumann (2001; 2004) and the disorientation of contemporary man stated by Forbes (2010).

This article aims to present through a literature review, how interpersonal relationships were affected in the context of social isolation, in the pandemic with Covid-19. For this, it was based on studies that deal with contemporary relationships and in recent publications that deal with the period of social isolation and the reflections on human relationships.

II. METHODOLOGY

The present research is characterized as an integrative literature review, with exploratory descriptive objective, anchored in the theory of fluidity of human relationships in contemporary society of Bauman (2001; 2004) and Forbes (2010; 2019). Based on the theory of these researchers, a search was conducted for scientific productions focused on the theme of interpersonal relationships in the pandemic, establishing an analysis with some data presented by

Brazilian statistics, with close connection or as consequences of problems of interpersonal relationships in coexistence during confinement.

The option for integrative review focuses on the intentionality of presenting a broader approach on the subject, relating current data, available on public platforms or reports in the media.

III. CONTEMPORARY MAN AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Bauman (1925 - 2017), a Polish sociologist, has shown great concern for the individual and social relationships. According to Bauman (2001), modern society has already been forged in the liquefaction of patterns of dependency and interaction. "They are now malleable to a degree that past generations neither experienced nor can imagine; but, like all fluids, they do not keep their shape for long" (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 12).

The changes in consumer relations, in the forms of work, after industrialization, have changed the form of social coexistence. The Western contemporary ideals "of efficiency (performance and competitive success) and immediacy (intolerance to uncertainty and impulsive activity) and change and body manipulation (alteration of somatic and sexual skills)" (GUEDES, 2020, p. 392), have directly interfered in the formation of the personality of individuals and the relationship with the other.

The advent of the internet with its dissemination at the end of the XXI century favored the increase of contact between people from distant geographical spaces, optimized opportunities for different work strategies and social interaction. In this context, the daily flow in the lives of individuals, especially in large cities, is immediacy, excessive attributions and goals to be achieved in order to maintain the desired status of life and the demands of a society based on profitability and accumulation of property for some and the fight for daily survival for others.

The psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jorge Forbes, a researcher of subjective changes in contemporary society, states that due to the changes brought about mainly by the emergence of the Web in the 1990s, postmodern man is "disoriented", without direction, turned upside down, like a castaway carried away by a torrent, trying to cling to the first trunk to try to save himself. According to him, "from birth to death, passing through all the stages of life, such as love, family, work, health, leisure, education, nothing is as it used to be" (FORBES, 2019, digital document).

The frenetic pace is not only limited to adults, it extends to the universe of children, young people and

adolescents. All phases have different commitments: schools, language classes, sports practice, various activities offered in community institutions. It is not common to find someone living in total idleness nowadays.

Thus, the contemporary homes, in its majority, unlike the reality of past generations, are points of meetings and coexistence only at some specific times of the day, usually at meals, night shift, weekends and holidays.

Another aspect that should be highlighted regarding the current family nuclei is the permanence for a longer period of time of adult children at home. Young people are postponing leaving their parents' home, which changes the dynamics in families and brings new standards to family behaviour (HENRIQUES; FÉRES-CARNEIRO; MAGALHÃES, 2006).

The way of structuring, the relational behaviours in the family nucleus and in the society were totally affected in the pandemic with Covid-19. The unexpected and sudden ordering of social isolation changed the routines, requiring a new format of emergency adaptation in the homes.

IV. THE PANDEMIC WITH COVID-19 AND SOCIAL RESTRUCTURING

The sudden establishment of the pandemic with SARSCOV-2, named as Covid-19, from the beginning of the year 2020, led almost the entire planet to a health and humanitarian crisis, testing the human species in several dimensions (LIMA; BUSS; PAES-SOUSA, 2020).

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, 2020a), seven types of human coronavirus (HCoV) have already been identified: HCoV-229E, HCoV-OC43, HCoV-NL63, HCoV-HKU1, SARS-COV (causing severe acute respiratory syndrome), MERS-COV (causing Middle East respiratory syndrome) and the most recent, SARS-COV-2, responsible for causing Covid-19.

A disease that rapidly evolves into a severe acute respiratory syndrome, Covid-19 has become a tragedy, filling hospitals, requiring the expansion of the number of health teams, medication and Intensive Care Units (ICUs), in addition to countless other demands. Several countries have experienced chaos in the health system and an alarming number of deaths.

Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) confirm that by March 17, 2022, 462,758,117 cases were confirmed worldwide, with a total of 6,056,725 deaths. In Brazil, on the same date there were 29,432,157 confirmed cases, adding 655,585 deaths (WHO; WHO, 2022).

In Brazil, the health systems were not prepared to face the pandemic situation, especially in the Unified Health System (SUS) network. There was a lack of beds, ICUs, medication, human resources and investments in vaccine procurement. There was also dissemination of false news that confused the population about the risks of the disease and the importance of prevention; conflicts generated from the divergence of ideas between political leaders and doctors, hindering investments in the preparation of policies to confront the disease, as well as the acquisition of vaccines to immunize the entire population.

A highly contagious disease, due to the ease of spread of the virus through coughing, speaking or breathing, when larger droplets are expelled that settle on people, objects, or surfaces and also through smaller aerosols that can float in the air (BVMS, 2021), Covid-19 spread rapidly throughout the Brazilian territory.

In order to quickly reduce the number of infected people and transmitters, since there were still those who hosted the virus asymptotically, Brazil adopted the restrictive measures proposed by the WHO. Thus, in addition to the use of masks, constant hand washing with soap and water, use of alcohol 70 to disinfect hands, objects and surfaces and the use of personal safety equipment (PPE), the WHO recommended social isolation. People should stay in their homes until the virus was contained or the contamination rates were significantly reduced (flattening of the curve).

The decree of social isolation caused changes in all social spheres, since it closed schools, businesses, colleges, suspended elective care in health, remaining only the services considered essential and the character of urgencies and emergencies.

4.1 - Restrictive measures and the repercussions on interpersonal relations

With the determination of social isolation, the residences, which used to have fixed times for the family members to meet due to the daily routine (school, work, leisure, etc.), started to reoccupy the function of full-time shelters. The family had to reorganize itself to stay at home and also transform its spaces into a classroom, office, gym and above all, into a place of continuous coexistence, of re-adaptation.

As an aggravating factor, many were the people who lost their jobs, adding another problem to the family routine. The vulnerability of finding oneself unemployed or losing one's source of income characterizes as a stressful element in interpersonal relationships, a fact accentuated in a pandemic context in which the possibility of finding work opportunities was reduced due to the closing of companies and suspension of services.

Therefore, the determination of the "Stay at Home", conveyed in social media campaigns carried in itself a weight of requirements ranging from the reorganization of physical spaces to the restructuring of life as a whole, especially for those living in situations of social vulnerability. Therefore, the human being needed to change the way of relating to himself and with the daily challenges imposed by the pandemic in living with others.

The forced isolation is a sickening psychic experience, it puts us in a series of questions and anxiogenic situations, of continuous stress and affective helplessness, puts us in front of issues that perhaps we would not want to get in touch with now, challenging us in many issues (TELLES, 2021, p.37).

As pointed out by Telles (2021), the fact of being stuck in a single space for a long period, causes anxiety, continuous stress and awakens affective needs. Factors that arise due to the social nature of the human being. In this way, the abrupt reduction of life to the spaces of the house may constitute a risk for psychological and physical illness.

Among the consequences that were being disseminated in the society during the aggravations of the pandemic were the fear of contracting the disease, or a relative, a close friend; the intensification of loneliness for those who lived alone; the insecurity about the future; the financial instability, and for many, the pain of losing loved ones. The mourning that entered thousands of homes worldwide. Canuto (2020) reinforces that among the social impacts of the pandemic with Covid-19, social isolation is capable of drastically changing the routine of individuals by developing feelings such as stress, fear, instability and distrust.

All these situations affect relationships directly, especially in the context of the proximity and continuous coexistence of several people in the same place. In this scenario, respect for otherness, for differences, needs to be practiced in daily relationships, since when it doesn't happen, conflicts are inevitable.

The contemporary technological apparatus and the internet have contributed to the communication process of the confined, helping to shorten the distances, through messages, meetings and virtual encounters. However, the virtual cannot meet the human need for physical contact and moments of face-to-face meetings and festivities among friends and relatives.

Magalhaes (2020) when discussing relationships in the pandemic period emphasizes that meetings through social networks and the existence of a virtual world without borders do not satisfy, or replace the body of the other, the physical presence, the relationships of affection, not even

using the highest definitions and pixels. In this sense, physical distance interferes directly in the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Studies such as the one conducted by Baltor and Oliveira (2021) prove that human relationships can be directly affected in periods of social isolation. In their research they interviewed 120 people of whom 75% declared that their friendships were distanced or ended during the pandemic. In this sense, the results converge with Bauman's theory (2001) when he states that one of the characteristics of contemporary human bonds is fragility. According to the sociologist, there is a dubious feeling for the insecurity that fragility inspires and the conflicting desires to tighten ties and at the same time keep them loose. The liquidity of relationships becomes evident in moments and situations that will require greater efforts or resilience in overcoming great challenges, as in the case of the pandemic with Covid-19.

4.2 - Interpersonal relationships in isolation and the escalation of conflicts

The forced isolation, triggered a series of problems related to the failure of harmonious confinement for a long period of time. In many homes, "what used to be supported, easily becomes intolerable and a feeling that something is going very wrong takes over the relationship" (MAGALHÃES, 2020, p. 192).

The experience of living in isolation interfered directly in the increase of several indices of social destabilizers due to relational problems, among them the increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages, in the number of divorces, domestic violence and in the appearance of psychic and emotional diseases.

4.2.1 - Domestic violence in the pandemic

The restrictive measure of social isolation reflected directly on the increase in the rates of domestic violence in Brazil. The greatest victims were children, women, the elderly and people who present some vulnerability such as those with special needs.

The sharing of the family environment for a long period of time, the stressful factors of confinement for adults and children, as well as the reconfiguration of the roles of fathers and mothers, especially mothers, whose routines began to involve the professional exercise (Home Office) and family responsibilities in the same place, contributed to the intensification of behavioural changes in people, exposing them to the practice or victimisation of violence. The isolation also favoured the forced presence between potential aggressors and their victims.

(...) this environmental configuration seems to generate, on one hand, an increasing absence of intra-

family management of rules and intrusive "affectionate" behaviours of parents towards their children (i.e., the parental figure that sets aside the function of becoming the other "friend", implementing leniency in basic routines, such as bedtime, nutrition and hygiene) or, in the other polarity, excessive discipline or the use of violence as a regulatory mechanism (GUEDES, 2020, p. 394 - author's emphasis).

Raciunas and O'Kuinghttons (2021) mention that the closing of schools during the pandemic contributed to the increase of violence against children and adolescents, however, the isolation itself makes it difficult to report, generating the underreporting of cases. Also according to the article published by these researchers, during the period of social isolation, the channel for complaints of human rights violations had received, until May 2021, 25.7 thousand complaints of physical violence and 25.6 thousand of psychological violence. Of this total, 59.6% referred to children and adolescents.

Women and the elderly are also found as victims of violence in rates that have risen significantly in the period of social isolation. The Brazilian Yearbook of Public Safety (2021), reports that Brazil recorded 3,913 homicides against women, with 230,160 cases of malicious bodily injury due to domestic violence, according to civil police records. There were 1,350 feminicides, 61.8% of them committed against black women. The data also indicate that the aggressors are people they live with, as shown in figure 1.

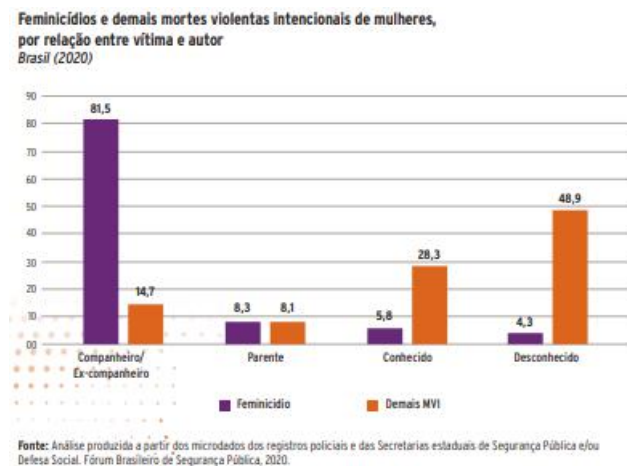


Fig. 1: Identification of Perpetrators of Women - victims of femicide and violent deaths

Regarding this increase in domestic violence during social isolation, Piccini and Araújo (2020) point out some factors that corroborate the increase in cases: loss or reduction of family income due to unemployment, suspension of work activities, overload of domestic

activities, including caring for the children, isolation of the victim from family and friends, increased consumption of alcoholic beverages, and other situations that increase the tension in domestic relationships.

It is observed in these environments the absence of dialogue or of an assertive and non-violent communication, based on affection and respect for the other. The vulnerability of the victims who are forced to live with their aggressors for a longer period of time also contributes to this high rate. In the case of feminicides, there is still the pressure suffered by many women in sexist relationships in which the woman is considered an object of belonging to her partner.

4.2.2 - Increased consumption of alcoholic beverages

Another aspect that directly interferes in human coexistence, causing interpersonal conflicts with serious consequences, is the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Recent research, such as that conducted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 33 countries and two territories of the Americas, revealed that alcohol consumption increased considerably globally during the pandemic.

According to PAHO (2020b), Brazil presented the highest prevalence of the factor "heavy drinking", known as "Binge" episode, among all countries surveyed. The survey also revealed that the country also had the highest rate of severe anxiety in relation to other countries.

These results are ratified by the research conducted by the Brazilian Liver Institute (Ibrafig), published in December 2021. The study evidenced that 55% of the Brazilian population has the habit of consuming alcoholic beverages. Of those interviewed, 17.2% declared having increased their alcohol consumption during the pandemic. From the total of 1.9 thousand people who participated in the survey (from the five regions of the country), 18.8% reported to have made abusive consumption of alcoholic beverages in the pandemic (JANONE, 2021).

The reasons mentioned for the increase in consumption were the difficulties in dealing with the changes arising from the pandemic context, such as: stress, job loss, anxiety crises, fear, relationship difficulties at home, among others. "As the rates of anxiety, fear, depression and uncertainty became more commonly reported during the pandemic, alcohol consumption also increased. The presence of severe anxiety disorders increased the chance of more frequent drinking by 73%" (DAHL, PAHO, 2020, Webinar).

Due to social isolation, closing of bars, beer halls and similar establishments, online sales have increased, proving that people have started consuming drinks at

home. According to a survey conducted by Plataforma Compre & Confie, a market intelligence company focused on e-commerce, the online sale of alcoholic beverages rose 93.9% with 248.9 thousand purchases made in the period from 24 February to 3 May 2020 (NEVES, 2021).

The close relationship of the increased consumption of alcoholic beverages in the pandemic with Covid-19 and the reasons given by the interviewees are anchored in the theory of liquidity of relationships advocated by Bauman (2001; 2004) and the unbussed man of Forbes (2010; 2019). The man who guides his life in the automatic of immediacy, who does not worry about sedimenting relationships, so at the moment when he needed to be reclusive in the family space and deal with a period of crisis, he became disconnected from the automated and fluid self, generating many other conflicts. To cope with the chaos, drinking became an escape strategy, which culminates in the appearance of many other problems for oneself and for society.

4.2.3 - Fragile couple relationships in the pandemic: "until the pandemic breaks them apart"

The fragility in relationships, according to Bauman (2001), is directly linked to the consumerist practice of contemporary liquid society in which getting rid of things has priority over acquiring them. Concept also adopted in relationships, which leads to the constant exchange of partners, relationships are called "connections", so it is easier to break, to disconnect.

In his work "Liquid Love" (2004), Bauman discusses the patterns of relationships between contemporary couples. According to the sociologist, people want to interact, they seek the experience of affection, however, they do not want to commit themselves. They change partners constantly and easily.

During the social isolation in the pandemic with Covid-19, families faced challenges focused on coexistence in the homes. There was a disorganization of routines, requiring the obligation of sharing longer periods in the same physical environment "and most were not prepared for this reconnection" (GUEDES, 2020, p. 394 - emphasis added).

Thus, many people took advantage of the pandemic period to try to reconnect with family members, experience experiences that the routine of working away from home did not allow before the pandemic, however, many were also the cases of shattered relationships.

The increase in stress and anxiety crises due to the multiplicity of problems during the pandemic period generated consequences in interpersonal family relationships, increasing the number of separations and divorces among couples.

In 2021, the number of couples who made their separation official in a registry office broke a record surpassing 77,000 cases. A survey by the CNB (Brazilian Notarial College) recorded that 77,112 consensual divorces were carried out in Brazil in 2021. One of the main causes alleged for the separations was social isolation at home, relational differences (R7, 2022).

The confinement potentiated the crises and fragilities exposed daily in conjugal relationships such as emotional exhaustion, fights, unemployment, infidelity, addictions, domestic violence (SILVA; LOPES; ROCHA, 2021). In this context, conflicts have triggered a high rate of disagreements and separations.

It is important to observe that the number of separations can be much higher due to the cases that are not notified, case of stable unions, concubinages not regulated in registry office, generating underreporting.

Behind the divorces there are, besides the behavioural changes and the daily difficulties, the difficulty in the communication process. The absence of assertive and non-violent communication, of the respect for otherness, reinforce the inter-relational conflicts, potentiating domestic violence, the appearance of psycho-emotional, psychosomatic diseases, the use of licit and illicit drugs.

When couples divorce, they generate other problems for themselves and for their children, when they have them, and for society, since the difficulties in dealing with the rupture of the bond may cause greater upheavals in many situations. A problem that originates other destabilizing problems for social harmony.

V. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The changes in the social life and organization forced by the pandemic with Covid-19, due to its high potential for contamination, triggered several problems not only in the health area.

Interpersonal relationships were greatly affected by the restrictive measures for the removal of relatives, boyfriends and friends who did not live together. On the other hand, the obligation of isolation increased the interpersonal conflicts of people who, with the abrupt routine change, needed to live in the same space for a long period.

The context of the modified and adapted homes for a multiplicity of functions, the work overload, unemployment, financial difficulties were the apex for the outbreak of high rates of domestic violence, divorces, increasing consumption of alcoholic beverages and psycho-emotional diseases.

The fragility of human relationships was bluntly evidenced. The scenario of fear, insecurity, pain of unexpected losses altered behaviour, reinforced situations of oppression, aggravating social problems and the relationship of man with others and with himself.

Contemporary man, despite the numerous technological advances and the agility of communication via information technology, has become accustomed to relationships at the fingertips of mobile phone screens and computer keyboards, however, the data confirm that they need to learn to live together at close quarters, in a concrete, more tangible way.

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