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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MATERNITY PROCESS AND WORK IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF WORKERS: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW.

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Abstract: Objective To evaluate the relationship between the process of motherhood and the quality of life of female workers in the single health system **Method:** This is an integrative literature review, which allows the identification, synthesis and performance of an extended analysis of the literature on a specific theme **Results:** It was observed that the quality of life of female workers is often neglected due to the influence of their professional choices in view of the lack of support for them during the maternity period.

Keywords: “Mother”, “maternity”, “work”, “worker”, “health service”, “single health system”.

INTRODUCTION

Mothering is a word used in areas such as psychology and nursing to describe the care of mothers or other caregivers with children under their responsibility. But the idea can be expanded to include the tasks of educating and caring for a child, or even caring for someone who is, in a way, dependent on the person who is mothering them. Although it is generally associated with children, mothering is not restricted to them, but can include adolescents and even adults (Santos, 2024).

The definition of mothering comes from the Latin suffix *agem*, which expresses action or the result of action. In this way, mothering can be understood as a successive, routine process that takes place through daily activities. Therefore, mothering can not only be understood as the daily practice of motherhood, but also as its own performance. In other words, mothering is one of the strongest elements that make up the routine of activities and attitudes that classify a woman as the mother of her children.

However, mothering alone is not enough to call someone a mother. Babysitters, grandmothers, teachers, stepmothers, aunts and godmothers often perform tasks related to mo-

thering the people (usually children, but this can include teenagers, young adults or adults with some kind of disability that requires greater support) under their care. This doesn't necessarily mean that they see them as children, nor that they are considered mothers by those they mother (Pereira, et al, 2024).

In the same way, a mother who stops mothering her children will continue to be perceived as a mother by a large part of society - since she gave birth to or adopted those children - even if she does not correspond to what is expected of maternal behavior.

OBJECTIVE

To assess the relationship between the process of motherhood and the quality of life of female workers in the public health system.

METHOD

This is an integrative literature review, which allows for the identification, synthesis and performance of an expanded analysis of the literature on a specific theme (GARUZI *et al.*; 2014). To this end, the following stages were followed: definition of the topic and elaboration of the research question; elaboration of the eligibility criteria, inclusion and exclusion of studies; survey of publications in databases; categorization and analysis of the information found in the publications; evaluation of the selected studies; presentation of the results, including critical analysis of the findings and synthesis of the review (MENDES, *et al.*; 2008). The review was guided by the following question: "What is the relationship between the process of motherhood and the quality of life of working women?"

For the construction of this work, the databases Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Nursing Database (BDENF), National Library of Medicine (MEDLINE), National Library of Medicine (PubMed) and Index Psicologia were

consulted. The search for articles used the DeCS descriptors for the VHL database: "Mother", "maternity", "work" and "health service".

Inclusion criteria: complete articles available in full, quantitative and/or qualitative primary studies in the databases listed, between 2020 and 2025, in Portuguese, English and Spanish. Theses, literature review articles, publications that did not respect the delimitation of the topic and the objective of the study; as well as those resulting from opinion articles, editorials, ministerial documents, book chapters, theses and dissertations will be excluded.

For the search, these descriptors will be linked together by the term "AND" and "OR".

To help with the integrative review, the PRISMA tool was used and 89 articles were found on 5 different platforms. Of these, 77 were effective articles after excluding duplicates. In ".txt" and ".ris" file format, files were exported to the Rayyan platform. On this platform, the files are arranged in such a way as to facilitate their selection and allow each reviewer to include or exclude them independently of each other by reading the title, abstract and objectives of each paper according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and by reading them in relation to the proposed theme of the relationship between motherhood and the quality of life of female workers. In this study, there were three reviewers and the 5 discrepancies - after the exclusion of 72 papers - were resolved by reading the papers in full in order to reach a consensus, in which only 1 of the papers met the inclusion criteria and corresponded to the proposed theme.

Below is the outline of the study using the PRISMA method.

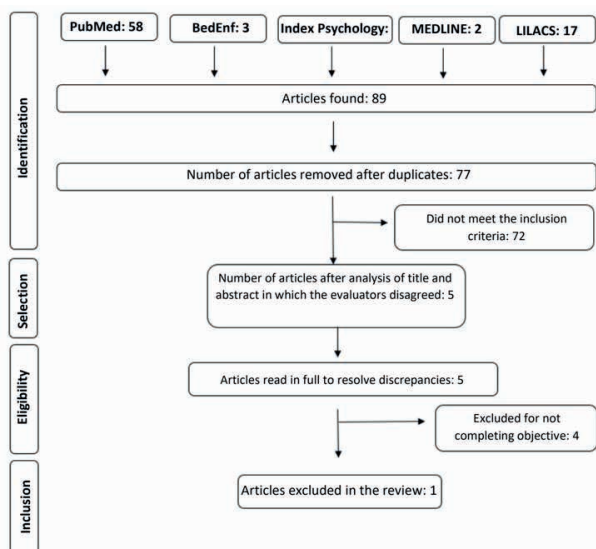


Figure 1: Flow of the process for selecting studies for review

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The process of motherhood - understood not only as the act of caring for children, but as a set of practices, feelings and responsibilities historically attributed to women - has a profound impact on the quality of life of female workers. Despite advances in access to the labor market, women continue to face the challenge of reconciling their professional responsibilities with the demands of maternal care, which compromises their physical, emotional and social well-being.

Based on the database searches, one article was included in this work “Entre Voltas e (Re) voltas: um Estudo sobre Mães que abandonam a Carreira Profissional”, published in 2021 by Thassia Souza Emidio and Matheus Fernandes de Castro with the aim of understanding the movement of women who currently abandon their careers to dedicate themselves to caring for their children, based on a reflection on the relationship between motherhood and work. Using semi-structured interviews, the qualitative research reveals that although the reasons vary, they all converge in the difficulty of reconciling professional demands with idealized standards of motherhood. This choice

reflects social pressures on the role of women, challenges in building a professional identity and the persistent idealization of motherhood in contemporary society. In short, the study highlights how the tension between career and motherhood leads many women to re-evaluate their career paths, highlighting the need for a broader debate on policies to support women in the job market.

According to Emidio and Castro (2021), many of the women interviewed reported psychological suffering, guilt, overload and, sometimes, the decision to leave formal employment. This abandonment does not occur voluntarily, but as a response to an environment that is structurally hostile to motherhood. The lack of institutional support - such as public crèches, equal parental leave policies and flexible working hours - turns motherhood into a lonely and stressful exercise.

This reality is part of what Hirata and Ker-goat (2007) identify as the sexual division of labor, which associates women with the private space (reproductive and affective) and men with the public space (productive and paid). Hirata (2015) deepens this debate by pointing out the predominant “reconciliation model” in Brazil, in which women alone try to balance their work and family obligations - a task that directly affects their mental health, financial autonomy and quality of life.

Badinter (2010) also criticizes the idealization of motherhood as an instinctive and all-encompassing mission. This ideal, reinforced by social and media discourse, demands a woman’s full presence, constant affection and absolute surrender, which generates feelings of guilt and failure when she fails to meet these expectations. Thus, the ideal of being both an excellent professional and an exemplary mother becomes a source of emotional distress.

Studies such as those by Guedes and Araújo (2011) and Meyer et al. (2019) show that precarious institutional structures, unequal

pay, rigid working hours and a lack of adequate public policies mean that many women see taking time off work as the only viable way out. However, this entails significant losses: it weakens professional identity, reduces economic autonomy and deepens fear about the future.

Fiorin, Oliveira and Dias (2014) add to this by stating that although work can be a source of pleasure, recognition and socialization, it is perceived as an exclusionary space because it is not suited to the demands of motherhood. This mismatch creates a cycle of exclusion: women leave because they can't reconcile their roles and, when they leave, they lose access to rights, opportunities and professional self-esteem.

In this scenario, so-called "entrepreneurship by necessity" emerges as an attempt to reconcile care and production. However, as Meyer et al. (2019) warn, this alternative often results in new forms of invisible exploitation, intensifying working hours without labor guarantees or stability.

Finally, the social devaluation of caregiving, since it is neither paid nor formally recognized, reinforces feelings of isolation and uselessness. Even when partners offer some support, the centrality of family responsibility still falls on women, perpetuating gender inequality.

Therefore, motherhood, when carried out in contexts marked by production pressures, a lack of public policies and an unequal division of labor, directly compromises the quality of life of working women. Far from being a

process integrated into women's personal and professional fulfillment, in these cases it becomes a factor of exclusion and suffering. Overcoming this scenario requires strengthening public policies that recognize motherhood as a collective responsibility and confronting the structures that maintain gender inequality.

CONCLUSION

Motherhood, although essential, is still marked by overload, invisibility and devaluation, especially among female workers in the Unified Health System. Reconciling work and care without adequate support compromises the physical and emotional health and quality of life of these women.

The data shows that without effective public policies - such as crèches, equal parental leave and flexible working hours - motherhood becomes a lonely burden. There is an urgent need to recognize care as a collective responsibility and to tackle the gender inequalities that still persist in the workplace.

In addition, there is a need for more studies on the subject, which deepen the understanding of the experiences of these workers in different contexts and contribute to the formulation of fairer and more effective public policies.

Thus, guaranteeing institutional support and promoting equity are fundamental steps to ensure that motherhood is no longer a source of suffering and becomes a dignified part of women's personal and professional lives.

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