

The Stimulus to Violence and its impacts on Mental Health of the Population: A context in the Brazilian Elections

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Abstract: In 2018 the presidential dispute in Brazil fomented a series of violent acts throughout the country drawing the attention of the national and international press. Due to the psychological suffering inflicted on the population by the increasing rates of violence in Brazil, aggravated in the last three months in the run-up to the election, it was decided to reflect on mental health in the context of the Brazilian presidential elections. The studies show that where elections are competitive there is a greater probability of electoral violence occurring. Underdeveloped countries appear to be more amenable to this phenomenon because of excessive inequality of distribution / access to resources and political power. The main impacts on the mental health of the population are exacerbation of basic psychiatric conditions (such as schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders); increased fear, insecurity and sadness that produce psychic suffering in the population; and suffocation of social relations by preventing the process of socialization and the full use of spaces to collectivities. Therefore, the debates surrounding the mental health of these populations should be stimulated as they are fundamental for eliciting interdisciplinary public policies that align social and health needs.

Keywords: Brazil; Elections; Violence; Mental health.

O Estímulo à Violência e seus impactos na Saúde Mental da população: Um contexto vivenciado nas Eleições Brasileiras

Resumo: Em 2018 a disputa presidencial no Brasil fomentou uma série de atos violentos em todo o país chamando atenção da imprensa nacional e internacional. Devido ao sofrimento psíquico infringido à população pelos crescentes índices de violência no Brasil, agravados nos últimos três meses em vigência da eleição, decidiu-se por refletir acerca da saúde mental no contexto das eleições presidenciais brasileiras. Os estudos mostram que aonde eleições são competitivas há maior probabilidade de ocorrência de violência eleitoral. Os países subdesenvolvidos parecem ser mais propícios a esse fenômeno devido a excessiva desigualdade de distribuição/acesso aos recursos e ao poder político. Os principais impactos na saúde mental da população são exacerbação de quadros psiquiátricos de base (como esquizofrenia e outros transtornos psicóticos); aumento do medo, insegurança e tristeza que produzem sofrimento psíquico na população; e sufocamento das relações sociais ao impedir o processo de socialização e a utilização plena dos espaços às coletividades. Portanto, os debates em torno de saúde mental dessas populações devem ser estimulados uma vez que são fundamentais para suscitar políticas públicas interdisciplinares que alinhem as necessidades sociais e da saúde.

Palavras-chave: Brasil; Eleições; Violência; Saúde Mental.

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Introduction

Culture of Peace implies the rejection, individually and collectively, of the violence that has been an integral part of any society, in its most varied contexts (Dupret, 2002). In Brazil, according to data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1980-2002, there were 696,056 homicide deaths, in 2004 the country reached 4th place among 84 countries in the ranking of violence (Unesco, 2018). In 2016, according to the Brazilian Public Security Forum, there were 62,517 homicides in the country (Cerqueira, 2018).

According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), a report published in February 2015 shows that the costs of violence in all 162 countries surveyed - 99.6 percent of the world's population - total \$ 7.16 trillion. When included the loss of investment opportunity in the economy, this value doubles and corresponds to 13.4% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Cocolo, 2016).

During the presidential elections in 2018, there was a worrisome but not unprecedented phenomenon that drew also international attention because of the dimensions it took. The presidential dispute between the two main opponents: Fernando Haddad of the Workers' Party (PT) and Jair Bolsonaro of the Social Liberal Party (PSL) fomented a series of violent acts throughout the country. According to the BBC Brazil, the number of reports of violence and verbal or physical assaults occurred in several Brazilian states increased significantly (BBC Brazil, 2018). The French Newspaper *Le Monde* published in November/2018 reports that 85% of Brazilians were concerned about public safety. It further asserted that gang warfare, growing insecurity, social crisis and corruption of political parties favored the popularity of harsh methods advocated by the military and the far-right (Franco, 2018). The situation went so far as to urge the United Nations (UN) to issue a statement expressing concern about the situation in Brazil.

In this context, considering the definition of "health" of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Alma Ata Declaration, as a complete physical, mental and social well-being and not only the absence of disease or illness (WHO, 1978) and psychic pain. Which has been aggravated by the rising rates of violence in Brazil, worsen in the last three months in the run-

up to the election, it was decided to reflect on mental health in the context of the Brazilian presidential elections and how this affects the search for a culture of peace.

Discussion

Toyoda (2012) argues that where elections are competitive there is a greater probability of electoral violence, consisting of any act of physical coercion and intimidation directly linked to the impediment of protest or electoral demonstration, and in reaction to the announcement of election results in a six months before the vote and three months later (Strauss & Taylor, 2012).

In October/2018 a journalist was assaulted and threatened with rape by two men in the city of Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco, northeast Brazil. According to data from the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism, the reporter said that the attackers justified their actions based on the statements that she was "leftist", "rich" and they wore a shirt in support of candidate Jair Bolsonaro (ABRAJI, 2018). In Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia, northeast Brazil, a capoeira master was assassinated when he declared his vote for the left party PT, and at least 50 attacks across the country were attributed to the followers of Jair Bolsonaro (Carpanez, 2018).

During the campaign of this same candidate in the city of Juiz de Fora, in the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil, he suffered a stab in the abdominal region, having to submit to an emergency surgery. Later, also during demonstrations throughout the country, at least six PSL supporters were beaten (Carpanez, 2018).

Studies have shown high rates of electoral violence, especially in underdeveloped countries such as Cambodia, Belarus (Hafner-Burton, 2016) and Nigeria (Okoro, 2015). According to the World Health Organization's report on violence and health, there are multiple causes of violence in communities, among which we can mention the excessive inequality of distribution/access of resources, particularly health and education services, and political power - by area geographical, social class, religion, race or ethnicity (WHO, 2002). Wainberg says that the strength of the media in spreading negative (violent) events would provide what the author calls "social mimicry." According to him, young people tormented or stimulated, act reproducing what they see (Wainberg, 2011).

In Brazil, since 2015, economic and political instability has been experienced, the first one due to the global crisis and the second one due to the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, leading to a growing deepening of social inequalities in the country.

Violence is imposed on the mental health agenda in many ways. For public mental health policy, violence appears to be associated with the production of psychic suffering, barriers to access to treatment, institutional contexts of mortification of the subjects, the genesis and consequences of the eruption of antisocial paroxysms, the complex phenomenon of drugs, mitigated and sometimes invisible forms of domination (Delgado, 2012).

On the other hand, the literature has shown that violence worsens physical health, suicide and mental health problems (Ribeiro, 2009) such as depressive disorders, anxiety disorders (which includes Posttraumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD) (Gonçalves, Queiroz & Delgado, 2017), use or abuse of alcohol and drugs, eating disorders, sexual disorders, mood, reduced quality of life, and compromise of satisfaction with life and body (Souza, 2012); behaviors such as sadness, insecurity, feelings and persecutory thoughts, self-destruction, low self-esteem, irritability, lability, intolerance and aggressiveness (Barbosa, 2014).

According to Aleixo (2014) violence can block the natural encounter of the subjects with each other, as well as suffocating the human possibilities, forming a society controlled by fear and distrust. Even with society investing its own resources, acquiring equipment, systems, alarms, doing preventive training to create mechanisms that make life safer, disrespect for human life is increasing and spreading to almost all social sectors. It is a peculiar experience in the Brazilian scene. Thus, violence, especially in contexts such as elections, can not be reduced to a study only psychopathological, due to its historical and social dimensions, mental health has much to contribute in this field.

Final Considerations

The electoral process is a democratic tool that gives free peoples the opportunity to feel legitimated in the choice of their representatives. However, when this process occurs under the influence, but not exclusively, of low socioeconomic levels, social inequalities and high rates

of violence provide fertile ground for the emergence of violence in its most varied forms, promoting in society fear, terror, sadness and suffering, especially psychic.

The debates around mental health of these populations should be stimulated since they are fundamental to elicit interdisciplinary public policies that align social and health needs, seeking ways to promote health so that the democratic process is in fact for the population and with the population.

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