

## WOMEN IN SITUATIONS OF GENDER VIOLENCE: MEANINGS OF AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE

### *MULHERES EM SITUAÇÃO DE VIOLÊNCIA DE GÊNERO: SIGNIFICADOS DA VIVÊNCIA AFETIVA*

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#### ABSTRACT

It is aimed in this study to analyze - women in situations of gender violence: meanings of affective experience, for women receiving care in the Reference Center in Northeast Brazil. Study participants: 10 women, between 27 and 67 years old. It is used semi-open questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The data were subjected to thematic content analysis in the light of Socio-Historical Psychology. The analysis identifies three interrelated themes: conceptions of gender violence, amounting to 59.9% of the meanings elaborated; difficulties with 22.4% of speech; prospect of change with 17.7%. The study highlights the affective experience of women in gender violence, as expressed by the affections, by suffering psychosocial, by the reflection of the lived. Concluded with the affective experience (perejivânie) is related to the intensity with which these women live the gender violence, reflect on the lived, create projects life in the pursuit of transformative actions.

**Keywords:** gender violence; women; affective experience; affections; Sociohistorical Psychology.

#### RESUMO

Tem-se como objetivo neste estudo analisar – mulheres em situação de violência de gênero: significados da vivência afetiva, por mulheres em atendimento em Centro de Referência no Nordeste do Brasil. Participaram da pesquisa; 10 mulheres, entre 27 e 67 anos. Utilizou-se questionário semiaberto e entrevista semiestruturada. Os dados foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo temática, à luz da Psicologia Sócio-Histórica. A análise realizada aponta três temas inter-relacionados: concepções da violência de gênero, perfazendo 59,9% dos significados elaborados; dificuldades enfrentadas com 22,4% das falas; perspectiva de mudança com 17,7%, que são menos predominantes nos discursos elaborados. O estudo evidencia a vivência das mulheres em violência de gênero, expressa pelos afetos, pelo sofrimento psicossocial, pela reflexão do vivido. Conclui-se que a vivência (perejivânie), está relacionada com a intensidade com que essas mulheres vivem a violência de gênero, refletem sobre o vivido, elaboram e executam projetos de vida na busca de ações transformadoras.

**Palavras-chave:** violência de gênero; mulheres; experiência afetiva; afetos; Psicologia sócio-histórica.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that violence is a social and public health problem since 1996. Among the external causes of mortality, in different countries, violence is considered one of the leading death causes, being a problem that afflicts mankind by its magnitude and transcendence (Fonseca & Okabe, 2009). There are different types of violence that may be more likely to happen in some societies than in others, having their origin in cultural, economic, political and religious factors, among others (Silva, 2005). An example is the violence against women, or gender violence.

Gender violence is an extremely complex social problem that fits into the context of identities and

differences (Barros, 2005), social inequality culture, disrespect to differences, power relationships, injustice and lack of sympathy, reduction of the equality space, and insult to human expansion (Catão, 2001, 2007).

It features deep roots in the perverse logic of exclusion / inclusion that configures the social system of production. It is a problem that affects all social classes, differing in form or kind of manifestation. This situation shows the violation of rights and the existence of a hierarchical order which, once internalized, serves as a justification for anyone to judge that the other is not as important as him, thereby, opening doors to violence (Alves, 2005; Ilha, Leal, & Soares, 2010). The threats from social inequality and the affective

responses of the ones who are subjected to them compose a powerful political psychological process for the reproduction of inequality (Sawaia, 2006a).

Gender violence, the phenomenon addressed in this study, is understood as any act, conduct or omission which serves to inflict, consistently and with intensity, physical, sexual, mental, economic and moral suffering, directly or indirectly on women, whether by threats persecution, deception, or any other means. Those involved may inhabit a private domestic space (housing in common), or not inhabit the same domestic space, and the agent of violence may be a spouse, marital partner, ex-spouse or ex-marital partner (Alves, 2005).

The literature on violence against the women, in Brazil, has its origin in the 1980s. These studies are the result of social and political changes in the country, following the development of the social movement of women and the process of redemocratization. In the 1990s the gender category is introduced, to these studies, in Brazil. The concept of gender, understood as the social construction of masculine and feminine, and as a category of analysis of relations between men and women, shall be used to understand the complexity of the problem posed (Debert & Gegeri, 2008).

According to a survey of the Commission on the Status of Women - United Nations – conducted in 2000, at least one of every three women in the world had suffered violence. In Brazil, a survey of 2001 performed by the Perseu Abramo Foundation showed that one in five Brazilian women had suffered violence, at least 6.8 million women had been beaten once in their lifetime, and at least 2.1 million women were battered each year, or one woman every 15 seconds (Planeta Sustentável, 2009). In 2010, the women's call center CALL 180, created specifically for violence against women complaints, registered 343,063 complaints in the first seven months of the year, comparing to 161,774 in the first months of 2009 (G1Brasil, 2011). According to the Department of Women and Human Diversity, over 1,700 events were registered in Paraíba in 2010, and the number of events reached 1,500 in the first half of 2011 (Governo da Paraíba, 2011). The increasing number of notifications and the worldwide concern with violence generated a demand for support, protection, and justice mechanisms for these women. As examples, there are the increasing implementation of public care policies and the enactment of stricter women protection laws towards this subject.

The existence of Women's Police Stations (WPS), in Brazilian municipalities, is increasing. It

is estimated that every Brazilian capital has at least one WPS. The problem is that this number is not sufficient for the demand. Only 10% of Brazilian municipalities have a WPS, and 11% of these are usually located in the capital. The Women's Police Stations are also named Police Station for Women or Specialized Women Assisting Police Station. In general, this stations are responsible for reporting incidents, conducting research work, and if necessary forwarding investigations to the Public Ministry or Ministry of Justice. There is a common service model for the police stations, but in some, there is also a network of support for these women, with social and psychological assistance in the stations or referred to other places, such as the Women's Reference Centers (Santos & Pasinato, 2008).

Amid this situation, it is necessary to know more and more about this reality in order to support actions to face this social problem. The object and purpose of this study is the analysis of gender violence experienced by women attended at public care institutions. The aims are: to identify the meanings of emotional existence; to understand the women's reflection about the living experience of the relationship between past, present and future; to analyze situations of gender violence experienced by women in the light of the theoretical and critical Sociohistorical Psychology; identify possible contributions of the study to the theoretical position, to the problem of gender violence, and to the Critical Social Psychology.

This study is justified: by the possibility of providing the research participants with a reflection on their experience, as a way to boost the conscious thinking about the problem in the past, present and future; by the identification of relationships and social practices in women care centers; by the contribution to the academic/scientific commitment with society, human rights, and social transformation; by the possibility for the exercise of Critical Social Psychology and Sociohistorical Psychology in the analysis of the social problem of gender violence; and by the prospect of directing public policies that deal with the problem under study.

### **Social exclusion/inclusion: from bondage to the power of action of women in the living experience**

In order to overcome the dualism and reductionism perpetrated by the antagonism of many theories of Psychology, as well as to put the emotions / affections of the human being under analysis to understand his world, this study finds the support

of the Sociohistorical Psychology. In this analytical perspective, the subject is seen as a whole, as a unit, body and mind, emotion and reason, determined and decisive in society; a subject that in the midst of suffering, fear, humiliation, has a desire to be happy and start over, even when it seems “impossible”. Thus, subjectivity becomes constitutive of social objectivity and its analysis is essential for the understanding of social issues (Sawaia, 2000, 2006a ; Vygotsky, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004, 2010). Under this view of human being and development, any human phenomenon must be studied as a process in constant motion and transformation, consisting in a context of historical and social relations (Vygotsky, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004, 2010). The psychological world is the configuration of inter-related systems of psychological functions, called higher psychological functions (HPS) or voluntary functions, whose development occurs in the experiences of the subject (Sawaia, 2000; Vygotsky, 2001a , 2004, 2010).

The purpose of human ontology is the perseverance of human relations in living experiences (Espinosa, 2009; Lukács, 1979; Marx, 1984; Vygotsky, 2001a, 2004). To this conserving strength, also called conservation power, Espinosa refers as ethics, the desire to preserve life in search of freedom and happiness, which are needs as fundamental to human existence as food and reproduction. However, despite this strength being irrepressible, it can be affected, because it can vary depending on inter-subjectivities of the human being, i.e., the condition of body and mind after good or bad events of the past, present and future. This intensity transition of the conservation power refers to affections. This intensity transition of power of action refers to the configuring affections ranging on the experience of the subject (Espinosa, 2005; Sawaia, 2006a ; Vygotsky, 2001a, 2004).

This means that the conservation power may vary, increasing or decreasing due to changes that my body and my mind retain in the form of emotions and feelings, thus affecting the power to think, act and desire. This fluctuation will depend on the resistance force, or on the ethical quality of the existence. Under this idea, the emotions and affections become the foundation and condition of being and existing, and hence, of ethics. Then, the way each person assesses what is good or bad depends on their affections. Therefore, the ethical life begins inside the affections and this relationship constitutes the ethical-affective dimension (Chauí, 2005; Espinosa, 2005; Sawaia, 2006a ; Vygotsky, 2004). According to Espinosa (1677/2005), men submit to bondage and become passive when they are in a state of alienation, of

passion, of power excesses, accepting to live according to the will of another and/or naturalizing the state they live in.

The concept of the affective experience (in Russian *pereživânie*) has an enormous significance and methodological role for Psychological Science (Vygotsky, 2001a, 2003, 2004). The experience of some situation designates both the experience of the external world by the subject, and his internal world, permeated by emotion and awareness, arising as the unity of conscious life marked by the dialectics of psychological systems. Through experiences, shaped by emotional tones, we suffer the actions of the environment.

Vygotsky believes that all content experienced implies an affective tone (Toassa, 2009). The situation affects individuals in different ways, depending on how much they realize its meaning and significance, feel and are aware of the situation experienced. *Pereživânie*, therefore, is not only about a particularity of the individual or only about the social environment in which he finds himself, but about the relationship between both. There is not a social environment without an individual who feels and interprets it. It is a reality that involves the environment and the person, it is *the between* (Prestes & Tunes, 2012). The logic of the social environment aimed in this configuration is the dialectics because it observes human and socio-historical context in permanent motion, relationships, synthesis and transformations. In this analytical perspective, it is understood that behind violence there is suffering, exclusion, humiliation, shame, and alienation, thus enabling the design of the experiences for the analysis of the problem of gender violence.

## Method

This is a descriptive and analytical study. It refers to a project of the research and intervention program entitled - Listening and Psychosocial Guidance Service: Work and Life Project, approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University Hospital, protocol 068/09.

### *Participants*

The participants were women who had experienced or were experiencing gender violence and were in care in a Women’s Reference Center in the Northeast Region of Brazil. From the acceptance and availability of their participation, the work was focused on 10 women. They were between 27 and 67 years old, being 30% married, 20% single, and 50%

in other marital status. About family income, 20% earned less than a minimum wage, 60% up to three minimum wages, and 20% up to six minimum wages. Relating to education, 70% had a complete Secondary Education Course or a complete or incomplete Higher Education Course, 20% studied from 1st to 4th grade, and 10% from 5th and 8th grade; 40% were currently studying, and 60% were not studying. Considering their occupation, 30% did not have a profession, 10% had a technical profession, and 60% had another type of occupation such as hairdresser, manicure or cook. With regard to previous work, 60% had been autonomous, and 40% had worked in an institution. As for their current job, 30% were not working, 20% were working in an institution, and 50% were in a self-employment exercise.

*Instruments and procedures for data collection*

Data were obtained from the application of a semi-open questionnaire for socio-demographic characterization. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the application of the following inductive script: (a) *What comes to your mind when I talk about domestic violence?* (b) *Talk about the domestic violence experienced by you. What do you feel about that? Describe your feelings.* (c) *What comes to your mind - you and domestic violence in the future? Describe your imagination about it. What do you think about it?* Only the participant and the researcher were in the room during the interview. The anonymity and confidentiality of the answers were guaranteed.

*Procedures for Data Analysis*

It was chosen the thematic content analysis technique (Bardin, 1977) driven by the Sociohistorical Psychology approach in order to analyze and infer new knowledge from the reports of the subjects. The content analysis aims at the critical understanding of the meaning of communications, their present or latent content, explicit or hidden meanings. Through this technique, the large volume of information contained in a communication is reduced to conceptual categories or contextual classes, which allow passing from the description of the elements to the interpretation of the meaning of the content. To achieve the reduction of data into conceptual and/or contextual categories, they were organized into a corpus, which has been considered in its constitution as a theme categorization and homogeneous presentation, that is, a whole thematic.

**Results and discussion**

The analysis identified three interrelated themes which are configured in the meanings of emotional existence of gender violence for women receiving care in the Reference Center. The axes established were: *Conceptions of gender violence*, totaling 59.9% of the meanings developed and with greater prevalence; the axis *difficulties*, with 22.4% of the statements; and the axis *change of perspective*, with 17.7% and lower prevalence. The three routes identified in the analysis make up a total of 97 UCEs (elementary context units). The thematic content is systematized in the form of sub-axes in each axis, in terms of UCE, and may be observed in Table 1.

**Table - Distribution of themes and sub-themes of gender violence - meanings of emotional existence identified by interviewing women who experience this problem**

Themes and sub-themes	(f)	%
<b>Conception of gender violence</b>		
• Physical abuse	23	23,7
• Moral Harassment	25	25,8
• Servitude / Imprisonment	10	10,4
<b>Difficulties faced</b>		
• Involvement of others (children, family, friends)	12	12,0
• Delay of legal procedures and the lack of support	05	5,2
• Want to overcome violence, but do not know how	05	5,2
<b>Perspective of changes</b>		
• Denial of violence: present and future	07	7,3
• Leadership role in daily life	10	10,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

### *Gender violence conception*

In this axis, the women developed conceptions of gender violence due to physical aggression, bullying, slavery / imprisonment. In one hand, the gender violence described is related to attack or threat to the body, an action that limits the expression of the body. The women were affected by feelings of pain, suffering, oppression, disability, and low self-image: *"I was aggressed with a blow to the leg and head"* (67 years old); *"He hit me with slapping, shoving, pressing me against the wall"* (28 years old); *"I have also suffered physical violence, he tugged on my arm"* (35 years old); *"He used to hit me, throwing punches; all that he could, he did. It is very hard to talk about it"* (27 years old).

Women determine the attack or threat to their body as something that rapes, that incapacitates, that limits, showing that the disorders of their body are presented in their mind, in the form of images, emotions and ideas (Espinosa, 2005; Sawaia, 2000; Vygotsky, 2001b, 2004). Women's reflection about this moment is not limited to the physical harm. It is built upon the affections caused. An example of this is the vision of someone in a position of victimization, or when they point to the physical aggression and oppression as provocative of suffering: *"It was not a physical problem, it was something I had to free myself of"* (35 years old). According to Espinosa (2005), the human being does not exist without the body, which is of the same substance of the mind, i.e., what affects my body affects my mind and vice versa; images, emotions and ideas of today originated in the relationship of my body with other bodies. The mind is in the whole body and it drifts, so the idea that I have of myself is the idea that I have of my body. The mind does not control the body or vice versa, they are one, and therefore, active or passive together and as a whole.

On the other hand, gender violence is done through verbal and/or psychological aggression: words of humiliation and contempt, i.e., acts of embarrassment. These are veiled or explicit threats, persecution that intimidates and frightens: *"He did not beat me because I put him out; he drank a lot, but attacked me with words ... I was small, I thought I had no value"* (46 years old); *"In my case it was annulment. I just started taking care of him and forgot about myself. I have suffered verbal abuse, words of low esteem, such as: 'you will not get it right, you are lying'"* (46 years old). These women's feeling on the actions they experienced are consistent with the widely held definition of harassment: to humiliate, to diminish, to disqualify someone, through the use of verbal or physical aggression, persecution, threats and

explicit or subtle acts violence, with the consequences of social isolation (Barreto, 2010).

Gender violence is configured as a bad encounter, resulting in feelings that diminish the power of action, since women laden with suffering and sorrow build a negative self-image and feel powerless to overcome the experience. Here, it is also evident the relationship between body and mind - everything that affects my mind inevitably affects my body and vice versa, as elucidated earlier: *"He speaks some words to me that make me ashamed... I feel powerless, even for walking. Every human being has to be cheerful and happy and this embarrassment brings me sadness"* (67 years old).

Gender violence is internalized by women as bondage / imprisonment when the relations of power in which they are involved make them feel subservient, repressed, without freedom of expression and autonomy: *"At first, I worried very much, I could not work, study ... It's horrible not having freedom to do your things"* (33 years old);

*My violence started with manipulation, domination, I could not go to church. He forbade me to wear makeup, I could not go out, have friends, take a ride... I was a woman who valued freedom highly, and he wanted to suppress it.* (35 years old)

The statements express the women's dissatisfaction and / or sadness for having their right of choice and recognition curtailed by another person, demonstrating therefore the lack of freedom and the state of suffering, which are fundamental to generate servitude (Espinosa, 2005; Sawaia, 2006a). *"I had a feeling of imprisonment"* (35 years old); *"I try not to leave the house, and when I leave, is always for places I know he is not"* (28 years old); *"I felt bad because I depended on him"* (33 years old); *"I come here to dance, I had no such right, he would not let me out, only with him, it was a prison"* (46 years old).

### *Difficulties faced*

Women experience difficulties in gender violence. On the one hand, the focus of the analysis prepared by women regards to others when it reflects on the involvement of children, family, friends, i.e., people with whom they maintain an affective relationship, making the process of confronting their condition more difficult.

*He uses his son to come closer ... another thing is that my family intrudes a lot, I have a sister who is married to a friend of his, she is always telling him where I am. She thinks that I still have the obligation to excuse myself.* (33 years old)

*“Another thing is the involvement of my children. I have five children and they may eventually want to do bad things against their father” (67 years old); “After the first aggression, I did not call the police because my mother did not allow me. She fears what he can do” (28 years old); “Given the things that have happened, people move away, family members, friends move away, ... you are already in a state of anger for not getting out of the situation, and others abandon you” (44 years old).*

It is observed that the difficulties faced by women are presented as a critical reflection on the living experience in order to overcome certain realities, such as the delay of legal procedures and the lack of support from the justice system and from the network of support and protection to gender violence, i.e., public mechanisms to face this problem. They state that doing justice is very time-consuming. The researches and processes, when there is a record of the complaints against the abuser, take a considerable time, leaving them insecure with regard to their rights under the law. Besides, they constantly have to face the indifference with which they are treated in these same places, through a bad reception or withholding of information, evidencing the lack of social responsibility towards them:

*On Monday, I went to the Women’s Police Station. Until then, I did not know that this Reference Center existed. I only got to know about it at the first court hearing, and here I am for my first visit ... Well, thinking about justice on the violence against women, we find many faults. We provide the evidences and there is a delay, and also a lack of information and support from the Women’s Police Station, for example, on informing about the Reference Center for Women. (28 years old)*

Women define the moment that is part of the violence experience when they seek for help, seek justice, demand the rights of citizens, that moment when they need to have the support and social protection, as a moment that does not meet their expectations. Instead, it just makes their situation more difficult, and through this reality, they report suffering as they feel forsaken and insulted, facing the idea of being alone, of not being recognized as subjects of law, of being demanded to leave the cycle of violence, but in return, no receiving the necessary care, neither from the state apparatus, nor from civil society:

*So, I asked for justice and the commissioner told me to take my son and vanish away. I left the police station angrier than I entered. I used to report him; he was arrested, and later released. There was no use in it. (33 years old)*

In the referred situation, it is evident the lack of care and commitment that the state assumes to the citizen, revealed by the suffering of women towards the care received. This suffering configured by women, both in gender violence, and in their relation with legal social institutions, supports the concept of ethical-political suffering (Sawaia, 2006a), which is expressed by the way that it is treated by, and that it treats the other in inter-subjectivity relations. The Reference Centers for Women configure an exception, since they are referred, on the statements, as a necessary and effective support: *“I used to be assaulted when I was out of treatment. During treatment here, at the Center, it did not happen because they helped me, I was rescued, he was scared of the consequences of going to jail” (46 years old); “Another thing that helped changing, was when I tried this place. Here, I saw that there are people for the people. He came to visit, he saw that it is serious” (48 years old); “He was only punished when I found the Reference Center. I learned about it in a lecture” (33 years old).*

Moreover, the focus of the analysis prepared by the women concerns a desire to overcome violence, without knowing how. The women show a desire to change the situation that makes them suffer, i.e., the denial of their living conditions, but they cannot visualize and create possibilities to materialize their desire, which would be the transformation of their reality:

*If there is violence, there is no future. As I am going through this, I have no vision of the future. While I cannot change the present, I cannot think about the future... It will only depend on me to get out of it. I got to find a way out... I want to change my life. It is going nowhere... (44 years old)*

Women’s personal effort is considered essential to get out of the gender violence situation, but even recognizing the need for this effort, they do not know how. Being active and aware of the present situation experienced by women is a necessary condition for building the future. Between the desire to change their lives and the objective reality of violent relationships, the focus is on the difficulty of not knowing how to overcome this reality. The fact that women deny their reality does not mean, and is not a sufficient condition for overcoming it, since they must deny it, but, at the same time, dialogue and critically reflect on the praxis of living, evaluating possibilities and impossibilities of achieving the desired changes while looking at the future and building life projects (Catão, 2001, 2007).

It is observed that, despite being on women that the situation of gender violence is centered, i.e., it is the women who feel it in different ways, such as slavery,

suffering, and lack of self, its origin is not on them. They are not the only responsible for this situation and are not able to change it by themselves. All these issues bring up the complexity of overcoming gender violence by women experiencing this problem. The difficulties are presented in several ways: legal institutions in delay of their proceedings, the lack of support from the justice system and network protection to gender violence, the involvement of children, family, and friends, the desire to overcome violence, but not knowing how.

### *Perspective of changes*

In this topic, the women established the relation between the past, the present and the invention of the future, from their reflection on the gender violence experience as a possibility or impossibility; they reveal their perspectives and actions regarding the problem, feelings and thoughts on the denial of violence in the present and future, and the opportunity to exercise leadership in their daily lives.

Women deny the experience of violence as a present situation and wish that it does not become part of their future, but they do not feel safe about this once they leave the future to chance, without the development and guidance of a life project: *“I do not know. I do not think so, violence no more”* (27 years old);

*I want in my future not to find a violent person like him. I hope I do not have to pass through this anymore, but if it happens... I hope that, at the first signs of violence... I can get out.* (28 years)

Women make clear that they deny their gender violence situation when referring to the present and future, but still fear that this will happen again in the future, revealing their state of suffering. Among the desire (future without gender violence) and the suffering from feelings of insecurity, women still find it difficult to direct their life to the concrete possibilities of the desired place, to avoid this past situation to become present again.

Fear is a feeling produced when we are dominated by sad passions. Fear consists in an idea of occurrence of something with a doubtful outcome, with respect to which nothing can be done, but to leave it to chance (Espinosa, 2005). *“Fear, because I’m afraid that it happens again. I think in the future, if I am assaulted again, I will not resist and I will die”* (67 years old); *“I do not know. I do not think so, violence no more”* (27 years old); *“No more crying. I hope this never becomes part of my life again, that it stays in the past, and if it happens again, I hope to know how to deal with it”* (38 years old). It is observed that women

deny their situation, recognizing what makes them feel bad, but that is not enough for overcoming the sad passions. The simple fact of rationalizing the situation in which they find themselves cannot overcome their submission, since reason and emotion are not separate and independent functions; instead, they work together, and it is through the dialectic between them that new ways are found to be free of inadequate ideas.

In the process of transformation of the living, women leverage the inter-subjectivities experiences and reflections of everyday life, defined in the relations between the affections registered in body and mind. Leveraging presupposes the development of ethical values in the form of feelings, desires and needs, to overcome suffering, servitude, working on the meanings and emotions of the suffering situation (Espinosa, 2005). Services received at the Reference Center are placed as a mediating action for configuring the power of action and the leadership role of women in situations of gender violence, materialized through the activity between two moments of the history process: the denied reality, and the new reality as product and process of praxis:

*I got here saying that I did not want this life anymore. I decided: he would have to either change, or to get out of my life. He changed. When I remember I feel like this. I do not like to remember. I do not know if it is fear. Oh my, I feel ashamed only to think about it ... but when I got my head up, it was for good.* (46 years old)

Women report the movement of reflection on their lives, on which they decided to concretize their desire to come out of that situation, seeking social transformation, through their reflection and their activity, even in the midst of feelings of fear, sadness and pain, for the joy of being free and autonomous is greater. They refer to the violence experienced as something that has passed and that is not part of the future, and see themselves as agents of transformation: *“I do not see it anymore ... Today I only live violence at home if I want to. I need to keep the balance no to fall into temptation and make the same mistake again”* (35 years old); *“I believe I will not suffer it again. For me, I think it will not happen. I already have one right statement: not to accept it”* (46 years old).

As stated, there is a reflection of women as to whether to assess gender violence as something of the past, taking part of this active construction, and making use of the imagination to see the continuation of what they live now. Living creatively or not, evidences the relationship the individual has with himself and the world. The creative life shows that individuals are creators of projects, which direct them to participate in their culture, their history

and to be subjects of themselves, since creating projects requires transformation and overtaking the temporal relationship between past, present and future (Catão, 2007).

### **Final considerations**

The study highlights the experience of women in gender violence expressed by their affections, psychosocial suffering, knowledge, and awareness. The living experience configures human beings in different ways, depending on the intensity with which they perceive the significance and meanings that are socio-historically determined, i.e., how they feel and are aware of the situation experienced (Vygotsky, 2004). The experience of some situation designates the experience of both the external and the internal world by the subject, permeated by emotion and awareness (Vygotsky, 2004, 2001a, 2010). The analysis performed in this study presented three main themes concerning the experience of gender violence: Conceptions of gender violence; difficulties faced; perspective of change.

Women express their feelings, knowledge and reflection on the lived experiences as they develop the concepts of gender violence, which are defined as physical aggression, verbal aggression, bondage / entrapment, i.e., as a situation that assaults, limits and incapacitates. They are affected, in the violence experience, by the power of suffering and servitude (Espinosa, 2005).

Women experience the tension between the power of suffering and the power of action to develop critically the contradictions and difficulties in relation to the problem of violence. They identify the involvement of children, family, and friends, criticizing their behavior. They state the need to seek for help and justice, the need of counting on the support and protection. At the same time, they criticize the support received as a moment that does not meet their expectations, on the contrary, makes their situation even more difficult. They reported suffering because they feel abandoned and angry, influenced by the idea of being alone, of being demanded to leave the cycle of violence, but not receiving the necessary care in return. As an exception, the Reference Centers for Women are configured as a necessary and effective support. At this point, the support network for dealing with violence against women is questioned, bringing up the suffering experienced and the critical evaluation of the institutions of support: Are they contributing to the expansion of women and therefore creating means for action, or are they supporting the power of suffering?

Moreover, the focus of the analysis elaborated on the difficulties faced by women regards themselves: they desire to overcome violence, but do not know how. They show a desire to overcome the situation that makes them suffer. The effort is considered essential for people to come out of the situation of gender violence, but even recognizing the need for this effort, they do not know the ways to do so. The idea of being active and aware of the situation experienced by women is a necessary condition to build the future.

In the same direction, the affections, the knowledge organization, and the awareness of the power of action are approached, even if women feel difficulty in directing their lives to the concreteness of the desired possibilities. It is observed that they deny their situation, recognizing what makes them feel bad. They elaborate meanings about the prospects for change in a gradation of affections and thoughts that emerge from the development of the problem denial to the construction of their leadership role in daily life.

Thus, this framework corroborates earlier studies by Sawaia (2006a, 2006b) on the ethical-affective dimension, and the ethical-political distress involved in the process of analysis of social exclusion / inclusion. It also identifies studies by Catão (2001, 2007, 2011) on the affections and meanings involved in the construction of projects of life by youth and adults in the process of inclusion / exclusion.

By introducing the study of the affective experience (*perevivãnie*) in the analysis of gender violence, it is stated the implications of the subject and of the ethics of the human expansion in everyday life and in the analysis of social problems: the expression and expansion of affections, of desires, of knowledge, of the external and internal world, of senses and meanings, of reflection, of planning and implementing projects of life. The emotional existence denies the neutrality of the scientific analysis of social problems, which epistemologically means to place, in the center of the reflections, the idea of humanity in its existence conditions and, as a theme, the subject and how it relates to the social. When talking about gender violence, affective experience is concerned. It is understood as a responsibility of the Critical Social Psychology, the advancement of this field knowledge, since its expertise is the subject and the social relationship.

From this perspective, it is possible to identify the theoretical and methodological designs configured in this study, as a contribution to debates, public policies, researches and practices which seek to consolidate the transformation of gender violence within the sciences, specifically in the Psychological Science and Social Psychology approach. It is believed in the



relevance of the subject to social change, identifying the reflection that makes their reality paths of analysis and intervention for transformative action.

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Received in: 29/09/2012

Revised in: 09/11/2012

Accepted in: 14/01/2013

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## How to cite this article:

Catão, M. F. & Lucena, M. S. R. (2013). Women in situations of gender violence: meanings of affective experience. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 25(n. spe.), 122-130.