

FAMILY CAREGIVERS: AN ENDANGERED CLASS?

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ABSTRACT

The position of the family caregiver is symbolically related to the female universe and the feminization of caregiving as historical evidence that expresses the social mutations regarding the function of family since ancient times. Our interdisciplinary experience with the Interdisciplinary Program of Support for Elderly-PIATI at the Federal University of Campina Grande-PB placed us in contact with the following question: Are the family caregivers an endangered class? Through the oral history methodology a research in the home of low income families was carried out. An absence of adult family caregiver was observed and cases of co-care and co-education among vulnerable individuals, that is, children and elderly were diagnosed. Our existential coldness has plastered us, therefore, made us emotionally weak. Those individuals are every day forced to acknowledge their dependence and fragility, what we are conditioned to continuously deny in order to work with competence and mastery in public life.

Keywords: Family Caregiver. Human Rights. Gender.

INTRODUCTION

This article refers to a reflection on the family caregiver, contextualizing some dilemmas experienced at the present time which generate concern among health professionals. Our interdisciplinary experience on the Interdisciplinary Program of Support for Elderly - PIATI at the Federal University of Campina Grande-PB since 2009, placed us in contact with the following question: *Are the family caregivers⁽²⁾ an endangered class?*

The impressions we bring from the home visits we had at low income neighborhoods of the city of Campina Grande-PB, during the training period of the Caregiving course, configure a scenario that involves situations of intra family violence against the fragile elderlies and children who need caregivers, and that experience situations of negligence, abuse, and disdain from their relatives. It is very common in these communities to find co-care situations and co-education⁽³⁾ among the fragile ones. In other words, the children and the seniors, victims of the contempt and the abandonment of youths and adults help each other as the only reciprocal

salvation.

Amid this chaos one can find the infants whom the family and parents' love should arouse the notion of identity in order to develop a moral conscience⁽⁴⁾. In that sense, the references for the virtuous behavior are given by the expectations and experiences lived with the family. However the care given by the family is in adverse conditions; with its members concerned in meet the needs of the capitalism, which at its time, is not interested in assisting the real human supplications.

Our reflections regarding the destiny of the infants and their relationships in the family interfere in a post-modern configuration of home, with a great number of monoparental families managed by overloaded women, usually concerned with the family' support, with little time remaining to interact with their children. The children, a lot of times, spend their development period interacting through virtual relationships. The home stopped being a place of intimacy and sharing among the generations, and the experience of the family conviviality was limited to mere typical fast encounters of the domestic quotidian. From the mother it is expected visibility and social emancipation, and

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the domestic figure becomes repugnant, to the point of caregiving become an obstacle and a disguise for the feminine figure⁽⁵⁾.

The contemporary woman considered as "uncertain", who conscious of her possibilities, searches to be recognized as a mother and as a professional⁽⁶⁾. She lives inserted in that compound arrangement of the feminine universe, where the models of families reflect its mutations. The advent of the modernity suggests different, and a lot of times, diverging views about her social role in the family, what leads us to believe she is in risk of implosion facing the ideals of the new social individual created according to shape of the modern society.

Nowadays the infants grow immersed in a dense paradox of values, in which the mutations of identity related to the maternity and to the feminine have caused irreparable rifts in the gender places in all the social contexts, turning the family life into an intricate net of relationships, in which the public mother/woman was hyper sexualized by the so called sexual revolution, transforming the inter gender relationships, so that no theory of the Modern Psychology is able to interpret⁽⁶⁾.

The caregiver's place is symbolically related to the feminine universe and the feminization of the care is historical evidence. The feminist studies point that subject woman lives in the dimension of caregiving, and that many of them are just geographically in the public life. A nurse, for instance, she extends her abilities as a professional in the public sphere, as a caregiver, she builds her abilities culturally through learning from previous generations. Another profession that experiences that same dilemma in Brazil and it is also predominantly assumed by women, it is the one of a teacher, what lead us to understand how determining the gender is in the feminine emancipation⁽⁷⁾.

That subjectively implicit dependence of women in the professional field reminds us what the French and defensive philosopher of the women's rights affirmed in her work "The second sex":

(...) women have always been, if not the men's slave, at least their vassal; both gender never shared the world in equality of conditions; and still today, although autonomy is increasing, women carries a heavy handicap. In a very few countries their legal statute is identical to the

men's and most of the times it comes to harm them considerably. Even when the rights abstractedly recognized, a long habit impedes to find in the customs their fair expression^(8;14).

That historic of inequality and social injustice is at the present time preponderant, to the way that we observed that in the middle of the century XXI the disqualification of the professions that demand caregiving is socially visible.

The work "For the Ethics in Caregiving" provides us theoretical and empiric foundations which are valuable to reflect upon the culture of negligence that has been prevailing in the "post-modern" capitalist societies, highlighting the negligence with life and its vulnerabilities as the nodal point of our serious civilizatory crisis⁽⁹⁾. As mothers/women and professionals we believe that the family women's publicization, the banalization of the violence, the narcissistic cleavage resulting from the individualism and of the wild competition among individuals, as well as the fragility of the matrimonial ties shaking the family configurations have been generating in the public and private spheres an unsustainable coexistence and an absolute denial of the fragility of the family relationships⁽¹⁰⁾. We are quite submerged in a model of paradoxical and ambivalent society that gives life and at the same time kills all the human experiences.

Invisible bodies, untouchable and careless, the bodies of children, seniors and chronic patients, for they are bodies that claim for care and permanent and attention! Who is willing to assume the place of caregiver in the family? In its majority those that are considered the unsuccessful ones "the social failure", the homemaker, the older ones, the maids, the women that are single "aunties", or the children that are already victims of work exploration. The caregiver's social disrespect, the idealization of the public life, the need of intense work on the part of all the members of the family in a way to assure the support, the consumption society that has been taking the people to expand their working hours to be inserted in the consuming market, as well as the crisis of the human relationship and the indifference regarding the "other" are diagnoses that have intensified the state of invisibility and negligence of the children, the dependent elderlies, and the chronic

patients inside the families which no longer represents nests, but a potential threat to the physical, psychic and emotional integrity of those fragile and solitary individuals⁽⁶⁾.

The actions in interdisciplinary and interinstitutional nets are indispensable to denounce that state of inhumanity and widespread negligence, and to develop proposals and public actions that ratify the human rights through the ethics of the care, of the support to those who stay home, because without a home it is not possible to think the survival of the families. If all the relatives build their identities ruled in the paradigm of work, of individualism and of the consumption society, the affective ties will never be built⁽⁶⁾. The art of being together and the existence of a collective experience among the families is *asine qua non* condition for the materialization of a civilizatory process. If we are becoming unable to live together in the smallest social nucleus, that is the family, how the society is going to survive? How will we be able to relate?

Children, seniors and chronic patients longing for love, care and relationship are in the basements of our utilitarian and great spender society, but at the same time they represent our salvation in the humans' world. When they ask us for care, they are us inviting us to recover our own humanity. In times of negligence and banalization, all those that connect us with our affective memory, with our own corporality and alterity, are the guardian of life. Bodies that struggle to survive, as that mother who forgot her baby in the car, because she was immersed and entangled in the world of work, in the time of the clocks and of dehumanization of individual. They are overflowing inhumanity, destructivity and self-destructivity. For the specialists of the Humanities, critics of that model of instrumental society, our redemption is in those bodies that live in the slow time, in the time of weaving relationships, in the time of narratives, in the time of taking care of yourself and of the other, in the time of the challenging art of being together^(11,12).

Our "post-modern" fleshless and heartless bodies strongly need the bodies considered fragile and dependent, which are: the seniors, the children and the chronic patients. Before being an endangered class as family caregivers, all of

us, active and public individuals, we are becoming endangered species as human being. The more we worked, we ran and we spend, more inhuman we become, meanwhile, the ones that stay home strengthen their sense of humanity because they know their emotions and needs⁽⁶⁾.

Some authors defend as a solution for that predatory civilizatory process, the feminization of the humanity⁽¹³⁾, affirming that the human wounds are product of the negligence, of the indifference and of the banalization of life that can be cured starting from the recovery of the collective unconscious preserver of life, giving passage in our quotidian to the creative potential of the feminine soul. Our patriarchal, authoritarian, competitive and aggressive inheritance should not be reproduced by women who assume the public life. Many so called emancipated women assumed a phallic subjectivity in their daily life, masculinizing themselves, denying their legacy of the private world, the world of sharing, of solidarity and of caregiving⁽¹⁴⁾. In that way, the women's fast admittance to the job market should not represent the victory of the capitalism and of the competitive masculine paradigms, but the announcement of a dialogue between the values of the domestic world and the values of the public world⁽¹³⁾. With that, it is believed that the women of the third millennium reconciled with their feminine soul will be able to transform in a quantitatively and qualitatively way that predatory state in a creative and collective process⁽¹⁴⁾.

Our careless world is hungry for ethics and care for itself and for the others. Our existential land relational subsistence depends on the rescue of our humanity/femininity. According to statistical data of the Trusteeship of the Childhood and Youth and of the Trusteeship of the Citizenship in Paraíba, of the cases of violence denounced, be these against children and adolescents or against senior, the great majority were caused their own relatives. Which society is that that has been manufacturing a high rate of familiar enemies? Which families are those that

do not create bonds and that hate each other and destroy themselves as ferocious animals? Whose mothers and parents are those that do not

identify with the position of caregivers of their own children and even mistreat them? Whose children and grandchildren are those that destroy the ones who gave their own existential, material and affective ground? Which world is that where we do not have the encouraging and nurturing sensation of arriving home, once the nests became boxing rings? The Maria da Penha Law invites us to recover the humanity and a culture of care in our houses when it re-contextualizes family as beyond the patrimonial capitalist perspective. The delimitative criterion of the borders between public and private, between the house and the street, from this Law is quite affective, no more institutional, neither patriarchal⁽¹⁵⁾. It is very paradoxical, in the same scenario in which the family ties are torn, the concept of family is based in the affective ties, in a vinculum that is agonizing and bound to die.

The study "*grand maternal families*"⁽⁶⁾ showed the determinant social role of senior women in this scenario of children's abandonment in low income classes. Answering the major question raised in this article, the family caregivers are not an endangered class when it refers to senior women assuming the caregivers' position. But when they need to be taken care, and cannot they pay for a professional, do the grandchildren alternate the caregivers' position with them? It is worth to point out that this is not an exclusive diagnosis of the minorities⁽⁶⁾. This study gave visibility to invisible bodies of caregivers of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and it is concluded that:

Where doesn't happen anything, but everything, in the grandparents caregivers' daily routine, of the grandchildren residents of popular neighborhoods of Paraíba, many revolutionary molecular threads are woven daily and quietly. Grandparents are the familiar faces of this century, they are new (old) subject of the hypermodernity invented in the generational plots between public and private life.

The wrinkled caregivers' bodies have been anchoring the new generations in a domus. They have been the traditional guardians of the feeling of belonging to a family. The wrinkled women that I interviewed in their homes, are confirmation of the feminization and of the gerontocracy of the caregiving, of the status of a son and of the functionality of the public and private life, with all its ambiguities^(6:169).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is observed in the discussed situations that the socioeconomic conditions and the lack of social support influence directly in the behavior of the family members and in the society. When not elaborated, the conflicts experienced by the mother and public woman they can influence in a negative way in her caregiver position in the family.

Thus, it is indispensable that the politics of social assistance, be built based on the analysis of the behaviors of the contemporary families, focusing the needs of each family nucleus, so that those feminized guardians of the care have their faiths and values understood so that the functionality of the public and private life, do not turn ambiguous the meaning of caregiving in the family. In this sense, we, women and professionals, involved in the caregiving process, should assume an ethical posture, that give bases to practices of care interlaced with humanization and sensibility, in order to turn the caregiver's position, socially visible.

It is also emphasized, the insertion of the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary support associated to the development of public politics to acknowledge the human rights and the women's rights, as strategies that come to contribute in an effective way to avoid behaviors that exacerbate feelings of family insecurity in the contemporary society.

CUIDADORES FAMILIARES: UMA CATEGORIA EM EXTINÇÃO?

RESUMO

O lugar do cuidador familiar é relacionado ao universo feminino e à feminização do cuidado como uma evidência histórica que expressa às mudanças sociais sobre a função da família desde a antiguidade até os recentes dias. A nossa experiência interdisciplinar junto ao Programa Interdisciplinar de Apoio à Terceira Idade-PIATI na Universidade Federal de Campina Grande-PB nos colocou em contato com a seguinte questão, os cuidadores familiares são uma categoria em extinção? Por meio da metodologia da história oral⁽¹⁾ realizamos uma pesquisa em domicílios de famílias populares, identificamos uma ausência de cuidadores familiares adultos e diagnosticamos situações de co-cuidado e co-educação entre os frágeis, ou seja, as crianças e os idosos. A

nossa frieza existencial nos engessou tanto que nos fragilizou emocionalmente, essas pessoas são obrigadas diariamente a reconhecer a sua dependência e fragilidade e nós somos condicionados a negá-las diariamente, só assim funcionamos com competência e maestria na vida pública.

Palavras-chave: Cuidador Familiar. Direitos humanos. Gênero.

CUIDADORES FAMILIARES: UNA CATEGORÍA EN EXTINCIÓN?

RESUMEN

El lugar de los cuidadores familiares se relaciona con lo femenino y la feminización de la atención como una evidencia histórica que explicita los cambios sociales en relación a la función de la familia desde la antigüedad hasta los días de hoy. Nuestra experiencia interdisciplinaria con el Programa Interdisciplinario de Apoyo a las Personas Mayores-PIATI, de la Universidad Federal de Campina Grande-PB, nos puso en contacto con la pregunta, ¿los cuidadores familiares son una categoría en peligro de extinción? A través de la metodología de la historia oral¹, se realizó una encuesta en hogares de familias populares, se ha identificado una falta de cuidadores familiares adultos y se ha diagnosticado situaciones de co-cuidado y de co-educación entre los vulnerables, es decir, los niños y los ancianos. Nuestra frieza existencial nos ha enyesado a tal punto que nos ha fragilizado emocionalmente, estas personas se ven obligadas a reconocer cada día su dependencia y fragilidad y nosotros estamos condicionados a negárselas todos los días, sólo así funcionamos con competencia y maestría en la vida pública.

Palabras clave: Cuidador Familiar. Los derechos Humanos. Género.

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Submitted: 03/11/2011

Accepted: 16/01/2013