
MARITAL CONFLICTS IN LONG-TERM MARRIAGES: MOTIVES AND FEELINGS¹

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ABSTRACT. Marital conflicts are complex phenomena that have an impact on physical and mental health of the spouses. However, they have been little studied in the national context, and, in particular, in long-term marriages. The aim of this article is to identify and to compare the motives of marital conflicts, as well as to understand the feelings associated with them in long-term marriages. It is a mixed, exploratory and sequential study. In the quantitative phase, 200 individuals responded to marital conflict scale and in the qualitative one, nine people participated in a focus group. Quantitative data were submitted to average comparison analysis and qualitative data were submitted to content analysis. The results indicated the agreement of the participants that conflicts are part of the conjugality and can be constructive to marriage. The found discord motives were: children, the experiences in the families of origin, finance, different characteristics and preferences of each partner and the time to be together. It also identified that the feelings of the spouses in the course of conflict situations interfere in their way of solving this situation. Studies with newly married couples at different stages of family life cycle could help to broaden the understanding about the issue at hand.

Keywords: Marriage; marital conflict; marital relations.

CONFLITOS CONJUGAIS EM CASAMENTOS DE LONGA DURAÇÃO: MOTIVOS E SENTIMENTOS

RESUMO. Os conflitos conjugais constituem um fenômeno complexo que têm repercussões na saúde física e mental dos cônjuges, entretanto ainda é pouco estudado no contexto nacional e, especialmente, em casamentos de longa duração. Objetivou-se identificar e comparar os motivos de conflitos conjugais, assim como compreender os sentimentos associados aos mesmos em casamentos de longa duração. Trata-se de um estudo misto, exploratório e sequencial. Na etapa quantitativa, 200 indivíduos responderam à escala de conflito conjugal e, na qualitativa, nove pessoas participaram de um grupo focal. Os dados quantitativos foram submetidos à análise de comparação de médias, e os qualitativos à análise de conteúdo. Os resultados apontaram a concordância dos participantes de que os conflitos fazem parte da conjugalidade e podem ser construtivos ao casamento. Os motivos de discórdia encontrados foram os filhos, as experiências nas famílias de origem, as finanças, as diferentes características, as preferências de cada parceiro e o tempo para ficar juntos. Identificou-se também que os sentimentos dos cônjuges no decorrer das situações de conflito interferem em sua resolução. Estudos com casais recém-casados e em diferentes etapas do ciclo vital familiar poderiam contribuir para ampliar a compreensão do tema em questão.

Palavras-chave: Casamento; conflito conjugal; relações conjugais.

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CONFLICTOS CONYUGALES EN MATRIMONIOS DE LARGA DURACIÓN: RAZONES Y SENTIMIENTOS

RESUMEN. Los conflictos maritales constituyen un fenómeno complejo que tiene repercusiones en la salud física y mental de los cónyuges. Sin embargo, aún está poco estudiado en el contexto nacional y, en especial, en matrimonios de larga duración. El objetivo de este estudio fue identificar y comparar las razones de los conflictos maritales, así como comprender los sentimientos asociados a los mismos en matrimonios de larga duración. Se trata de un estudio mixto, exploratorio y en secuencia. En la etapa cuantitativa 200 individuos respondieron a la escala de conflicto conyugal y en la cualitativa, nueve personas participaron en un grupo focal. Los datos cuantitativos fueron sometidos al análisis de contenido. Los resultados enseñan el acuerdo de los participantes que los conflictos son parte de la relación de pareja y pueden ser constructivos al matrimonio. Los motivos de desacuerdo fueron los hijos, las experiencias en las familias de origen, finanzas, los distintos rasgos personales y preferencias de cada cónyuge y el tiempo para estar juntos. Se identificó también que los sentimientos de los cónyuges en el curso de las situaciones de conflicto tienen interferencia en la resolución de desacuerdos maritales. Los estudios realizados con parejas de recién casados en las diferentes etapas del ciclo de vida de la familia podrían contribuir a una mayor comprensión del tema.

Palabras-clave: Matrimonio; conflicto marital; relaciones conyugales.

Introduction

Conflict situations have always been present in marital relations and have been investigated in the scientific community for over two decades (Cummings & Davies, 2002). Conflicts are part of the natural adaptation process between the spouses and therefore they do not necessarily point out to the dysfunctionality of a relationship (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010). If it is managed constructively, conflict can reflect even positively in marital behavior through validation and support between partners (Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, De Clercq, & Peene, 2005).

The literature conceptualizes marital conflict as an event where the spouses disagree. It is characterized as more or less severe by the frequency and intensity that it occurs, by its content and by the strategies the couple use to resolve the situation (Mosmann & Falcke, 2011; Rehman et al., 2011).

Conflict is destructive at the moment it involves physical or verbal aggression, threats of abandonment of the relationship, hostility, discussions in annoyed tone, rigid position and unwillingness to resolve the issue. Conflicts are constructive if they offer the possibility of hearing the views and the partner's commitments on the situation, respect differences and understand that the problems will not always be solved in a first attempt (Cummings & Davies, 2002).

In literature, researches on the reasons for conflict and on the variables that explain the variations in its intensity and frequency is controversial (Mosmann & Falcke, 2011; Zordan, Wagner, & Mosmann, 2012). Some studies indicate that conflicts are associated more strongly to how spouses communicate themselves than to the reported motive (Karahana, 2009; Silva & Vandenberghe, 2009; Torossian, Heleno & Vizzotto, 2009). Other research indicates that the negotiating before the conflicts will be constructive if the spouses are empathetic, optimistic and appreciate more the positive aspects of his/her partner and their relationship, and that they will be destructive if the spouses are individualists, pessimists tend to rationalize and to blame (Cundiff, Smith & Frandsen, 2012; Iveniuk, Waite, Laumann, McClintock, & Tiedt, 2014; Pazo & Aguiar, 2012; Veldorale-Brogan, Lambert, Fincham, & DeWall, 2013). In this sense, it is identified that there are individual and interactional factors that relate to the occurrence of marital conflicts.

Marital conflicts motives are also related to multiple situations, such as the perception of unfairness in the division of housework, the overinvestment in personal issues, to how the relationship is more open or closed to the influence of environmental factors and to questions of equity and unilateral determinations (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2005; Giudici, Widmer & Ghisletta, 2011). Other studies also indicate: to raise children, the time spouses have to enjoy together, the division of household

chores, sex, money and legal issues such as credits, assets and contracts (Mosmann & Falcke 2011; Stieglitz, Gurven, Kaplan, & Winking, 2012).

Some research has found an association between marital conflicts and negative experiences in the family of origin. These involve the parents' relationship memories (Curran, Ogolsky, Hazen, & Bosch, 2011), parents' marital conflicts (Darling, Cohan, Burns, & Thompsons, 2008) and conflicts in the wives' family of origin (Topham, Larson, & Holman, 2005). The experience of wives has more strongly influence in the structure and marital dynamics for keeping a more meaningful connection with their family of origin during the marriage, by broadening and deepening the repercussions that these connections have about their own wives and about marriage.

In addition, the feelings and the expectations that spouses have about their marriage also interfere with the outcome of marital conflicts (Miller & Rempel, 2004; Sanford, 2006). According to the authors, feelings and expectations can change over time and they are explained more strongly by the interpretation that spouses make about the motives than by the reason of the conflict itself.

In this sense, a survey conducted in the United States in 2006 with 77 couples (Sanford, 2006) evaluated the change in intrapersonal communication during the conflict in couples with less than three years of marriage. The results showed that positive expectations about the outcome of the conflict determine the constructive resolution through strategies such as cooperation and negative expectations determine the behavior of self-protection, defense and attack, making it a self-fulfilling prophecy, which is, confirming the initial expectation of the spouse on marital conflict.

In the opposite direction, Sullivan, Pasch, Johnson and Bradbury (2010) believe that the expectations for the resolution of conflicts do not interfere with conjugality until the first year of marriage. According to the authors, the spouses do not show negative expectations in conflict when they are newlyweds, as they are in the stage of enchantment, news and plans for the future. However, heartbreak and unresolved situations in this period may emerge in another time and become fundamental to the resolution of conflicts in marriage.

The assessments and behaviors during marital conflicts have also been investigated in a survey conducted in the United States in 2009. It was conducted with 300 couples in two phases of the life cycle: middle-aged couples with an average union time of 18.4 years, and older couples with an average union time of 36.4 years (Smith et al., 2009). The results indicated that older couples have more positivity, less anxiety and negativity and they are less submissive during the conflict. They face conflicts more easily than middle-aged couples, report more understanding and realize the spouse in a less hostile way.

Frequent, intense and destructive strategies via conflicts may culminate in separation, they are predictors of irritability and destructive criticism, they have negative impact on the quality of life of spouses and, finally, they are associated with the search for health services (Zordan et al., 2012). Furthermore, the psychological distress due to marital conflict dynamic culminates in a context that reverberates along deleterious form of the mental health of spouses and their children (Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Papp, 2007).

The found researches suggest the motives of marital conflicts and other variables associated with their occurrence, however, how these factors are expressed in marital interaction still needs to be explored. In addition, the scarcity of research on marital conflicts at the national context (Bolze, Schmidt, Crepaldi, & Vieira, 2013) and the impact that high levels of conflict cause to family members justify studies with this approach. In this sense, the aim of this research was to identify and to compare the motives for marital conflicts just as well to understand the feelings associated with them in long-term marriages.

Method

Design: it is a mixed, exploratory and sequential study. In the first phase of the study a quantitative survey was conducted by means of which we sought to identify and to compare the main reasons of

marital conflicts and in the second phase, a qualitative one was conducted whereby the motives for conflict and the feelings associated with them were explored in a detailed and comprehensive manner (Creswell, 2007).

Method - Phase I

Sample: the quantitative phase of the study included 200 participants (100 men and 100 women) living in Rio Grande do Sul State. Participants were part of a larger project of Núcleo de Estudos de Casal e Família – NECAF and were selected initially, by the criterion of convenience and known people's indication. There were cases where the participants themselves indicated others. This is a procedure called "snowball". The selection criteria were based in these factors to be heterosexual, married or who were in an ongoing steady relationship and to have children.. The average age of participants was 41.81 years old (SD = 7.82), and 22 years old was the minimum age to the maximum age of 66 years old and average union time of 18.26 years (SD = 6.68).

Instrument: *Marital Conflict Scale* (Buehler & Gerard, 2002, adjusted by Mosmann, Wagner, & Sarriera, 2008). Nine items are presented separately in two subscales. The first is called "conflicts / misunderstandings" and it has six items, measured on a Likert scale of six points, which refer to the frequency that the respondents have experienced disagreements with their partners last year. The other subscale called "conflict / aggression" has three items scored on a Likert scale of five points, concerning the intensity of conflicts ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Collection and analysis of data: the indicated couples were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study by the survey team. As they accepted it, day and time was scheduled so that a staff member went to the house of the participants and held the questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive analysis of the main reasons of marital conflicts and comparison inferential among the motives and intensity of conflicts, sex and wedding time were analyzed (ANOVA and Student T TEST).

Method - Phase II

Participants: all participants in the quantitative phase who were willing in collaborating in this phase of the study were contacted, and from these, nine of them constituted the qualitative phase. Five women and four men, heterosexual, living in a steady union, but not married to each other in focus groups, with children and residents in *Rio Grande do Sul* state were the final participants. The minimum age of the participants was 40 years old while the maximum was 57 years old; the union time ranged from 20 to 32; as schooling, four participants had high school or technical course and the others five had higher education; all of them were employed, working from six to 14 hours / day; the remuneration for work ranged from 2 to 4 minimum wages ($n= 4$), 6 to 10 ($n= 2$) and 10 to 15 minimum wages ($n= 3$); the number of children was 1-4, and their age ranged from 2 to 31 years old. According to some researchers (Smith et al., 2009; Sullivan et al., 2010), the union time is a variable to be considered in the evaluation of marital conflicts. In this sense, the relationships defined as long-term in this study were those with longer than 15 years. This parameter was defined based on the average of formalized marriages in Brazil, according to IBGE data (2013).

Instrument: We used the Focus Group, which is characterized by being generally homogeneous and consists of a small number of people who will talk about specific topics suggested by the moderator, by triggering questions. In focus groups, the mutual influence among participants through the interaction occurs, promoting the emergence of individual and collective issues, which enriches the material to be analyzed (Minayo, Souza, Constantine, & Santos, 2008).

Collection and analysis of data: In the second phase of the study, conducted approximately one year after the quantitative part, one of the moderators called a total of 38 respondents who scored at the end of the questionnaire, the "I have interest in participating in other research in NECAF" option and providing a phone contact. From them, 17 answered that they could not or would not want to participate anymore, 21 have confirmed the participation and 9 showed up for an appointment to carry out the focus group. During the phone call, participants were invited to a meeting in which they would debate topics related to everyday married life, as the main reasons of marital conflicts. Two moderators, who were psychologists and couple and family therapists, led the focus group held in placeholder in the educational institution to which the larger project is linked. The meeting started at 19:30, and finished at 22:00 and it had the following structure: (a) welcome moment - reception of the participants by moderators; (b) Opening - presentation of the moderators, signing the informed consent, general information about the aims of the meeting and how it would occur; (c) Heating - participants introduced themselves and were asked to talk about characteristics of marriages; (d) Thematic Discussions - moderators used triggering questions such as: What is expected of a marriage? What are the reasons/motives for conflicts among couples? How do you feel during conflict situations? Moreover, they were aware that all of the participants in the debate expose their viewpoints; (e) Closing.

Qualitative data, that is, the dialogue among the participants were fully transcribed and examined by both moderators, through content analysis method that apply systematic procedures and content description of objectives and valid inferences in the analyzed text are made (Bauer, 2008). The steps of content analysis were: a) repeated reading of the transcribed material in order to fully understand the text; b) identification of units of meaning; c) thematic categorization of sense units and grouping of the categories in thematic axes defined a posteriori; d) Identification of particular intentions, considering the manifest content, interpretation and inferences based on experience of the researcher and to the light of systemic theory. In the sessions of discussion and results, quantitative and qualitative data were discussed separately and into each other.

Ethical issues: The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Teaching Institution under protocol number 11/016 (quantitative phase) and under protocol number 495 313 (qualitative phase). The free and informed consent form was read and signed by the participants in both phases of the study and the ethical care in the use of data and guarantee of anonymity of participants were especially highlighted. In addition, all regulatory guidelines and standards for research involving human beings, according to orientations of Resolutions 466/2012 from the National Health Council (2012) and 016/2000 from the Federal Council of Psychology (2000) were followed.

Results and discussion

In phase 1 (quantitative), descriptive analysis of average for the frequency of the marital conflicts motives were carried out. It was identified that the highest average, indicating the most referred conflict reason by the participants was the time to be together ($X = 3.07$; $SD = 1.95$), followed by sex ($X = 2.62$; $SD = 1.53$), and by the children ($X = 2.44$; $SD = 1.60$). Less frequent reasons were housekeeping ($X = 2.17$; $SD = 1.40$), money ($X = 2.07$; $SD = 1.28$), and legal issues ($X = 1.63$; $SD = 1.25$).

Through ANOVA, there was a statistically significant difference among the comparison variable (time to be together) and the other reasons stated by the participants: sex ($F(29.861) = 19.959$; $p < 0.001$), children ($F(18.467) = 8.821$; $p < 0.001$), housekeeping ($F(12.260) = 7.458$; $p < 0.001$), legal issues ($F(8.971) = 6.727$; $p < 0.001$) and money ($F(6.862) = 4.601$; $p < 0.001$). Among the other conflict reasons, there were no significant differences.

In the analyzes of comparison between men and women, through the Student T TEST, among all the conflicting variables (type and intensity) there was a significant difference only regarding intensity in the variable "calmly discuss or shouts" ($t = 2,136$ $gl = 198$ $p = 0.03$) having women higher rates ($m = 2.27$) than men ($m = 2.00$). In the comparison among the union time and all other conflict variables (type

and intensity) there was again significant difference in intensity in the variable "Do you just hit or throw things at each other?" ($t = 2,999$ $gl = 197$ $p = 0.03$). To this question, those with shorter marriage (15 years) got higher average ($m = 1.20$) than those married for longer than 15 years ($m = 1.05$).

The so-called conflicts named time to be together, sex and children had higher average, while household chores, money and legal issues had lower averages. This result may indicate that the study participants have discussed about the time they reserve to be together as spouses and also about their sex life, variables that may be interrelated, considering that if time is short, a couple's sex life is also affected. In addition, the fact that the children have been identified as conflict reason may also indicate that the partners disagree about how they are dividing parental care, which ends up interfering in other areas of family life, such as the conjugality (Mosmann & Falcke, 2011; Stieglitz et al., 2012).

Household chores, money and legal issues variables had the lowest average while conflict reasons. This result may suggest that, in this study, participants have less conflict involving the management of the household and financial matters (cash, credit card, property, contracts), but more conflicts involving the marital relationship, especially as regards the lack of time to be together or disagreement about it. This variable, which showed statistically significant differences with respect to the others, points out to the importance of preserving the couple moments together despite the demands that arise during the different stages of family life cycle (Mosmann & Falcke, 2011).

The comparison among the sex, the reasons of conflict and the intensity of the discussions showed differences only in intensity, and women had higher averages than men as discussing quietly or shout with the partner. This result may indicate that, in this study, female participants express themselves more explicitly before the conflicts and may even reach more intense discussion levels during episodes of contention. This finding corroborates other studies (Topham et al., 2005) that women tend to be more aware and involved with the wedding, which makes them more susceptible to perceive, to report and to seek to resolve conflicts.

The union time, to 15 years and above 15 years, compared to the motives and intensity of conflicts has demonstrated significant differences only in intensity. Participants with shorter union had higher average for the variable "just hit or throw things at each other" than married participants who had longer union time (over 15 years). This result may indicate that people in long-term marriages demonstrate greater self-control in the face of conflicts. Two possibilities can be thought: as time goes by, the spouses can control more their emotions and expose their positions more assertively, less direct, especially during conflict situations that require greater emotional control, or the stability of long-term marriage is associated with lower levels of aggression, as a strategy of conflict resolution (Miller & Rempel, 2004; Sanford, 2006; Smith et al., 2009).

In phase II (qualitative), in which content analysis procedures were used, revealed three thematic axes: 1st Axis: Perceptions about the presence of conflicts in conjugality; 2nd Axis: Motives of marital conflicts, divided into five categories: (a) children, (b) experience in the family of origin, (c) finance, (d) different characteristics and preferences, and (e) time to be together; 3rd Axis: Feelings that emerge during conflicts. The categories are exemplified only with words considered most representative of the above content and to preserve the identity of those involved in the research, their names were replaced by codes, namely: men like M-1, M-2, M-3 and M-4 and women as W-1, W-2, W-3, W-4 and W-5.

1st Axis - Perceptions about the presence of conflicts in conjugality

According to the group members, certain divergences are expected in a conjugal relationship. They state that all couples, sooner or later, face very similar conflicts because they are considered common situations of everyday life in marriage. *"And couples have difficult times, discussions, crisis and it happens"* (M-1).

No use, it always have discussions, it is normal. Because you're together, so the differences will always exist, depends on what you stipulate to the other, in your married life, what you will accept and what you will not (M-4).

It is understood through the lines, that conflicts are inevitable and thus it is necessary to have a clarification that the relationship will go through times of crisis and that the other does not always correspond to your expectations, it will transform what is expected and realize the problems in another way. These results corroborate with what some researchers (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010; Verhofstadt et al., 2005) point out when they state that conflicts, beyond to be expected, indicate a marital maturity process in which the partners try to negotiate the differences and adjust them so as to make conjugality satisfactory for both.

In addition to recognizing that all couples have conflicts, they must be faced with maturity and not feel discouraged, after all, as Cummings and Davies (2002), many of the conflicts make up transitional phases through which the couple probably will cross. Besides, disagreements and routine within marriage may serve as a way for partners to invest in conjugality and to get together in order to resolve conflicts and to make their life more pleasurable, "... *It's always good to have a different conflict, because it can avoid the marriage falls into monotony, oh we already know each other, it's okay*" (M-1). *"Some days you're not cool, because you keep adding the problems. Today I'm no longer cool and part of me is already acid, so I will excuse, because this happened or that happened, then you have to stop and think "* (W-1).

2nd Axis - Motives of marital conflicts

In this thematic area, five categories on the grounds of marital conflict mentioned by the participants in the focus group discussions are presented, namely: (a) children, (b) experience in the family of origin, (c) finance, (d) different features and preferences, and (e) time to be together.

According to the participants, issues concerning education and behavior of children can cause conflicts between the couple, *"We have the children, you know? To raise them... We sometimes do not come to some agreement with each other about their education, right? "* (W-2). *"Today in my marriage, one of the biggest conflicts in my reality, in our reality and in my family, is related to our children"* (M-1).

In addition, the leaving of the children from their parents' house, that is happening later than other times, was also cited as a reason for conflict. Participants reported that the children grow up, start dating and often lead a life as a couple in the parental home. Thus, the parents' conjugality suffer interference due to problems with adult children, as parents remain exercising parental function and they disagree, for example, on consenting that another marital subsystem is installed inside their house.

Because I have my son who is 28 years old and lives with me. Sometimes, this situation creates conflict. Especially because he has a girlfriend and everything, you know. His girlfriend comes here, her family, then she lives more in my house than in her family's, and then they want their space, but they are quite spacious there and they have to stay, my husband doesn't speak anything, but he has been rightly indicating his dissatisfaction (W-5).

Over the course of time, conflicts are no longer yours. Our conflict today is because of our son, we have to resolve this situation, in a moment she will think in one way and I will in another way. (M-3).

These findings may be related to the stages of family life cycle, as point Carter and McGoldrick (1995). Study participants, from both the quantitative and the qualitative phases, are divided into three steps: (1) Families with small children (2) Families with teenagers and (3) releasing the children and moving on. In the conflict scale (quantitative phase), the children were mentioned by respondents as the third most frequent cause of discord in marriage. This result, in terms of average, confirms the qualitative findings that link the children as a reason for conflict in the couple when they are children and adolescents just as well when they become adults and remain in the parental home.

Regarding the stages of the life cycle, families with young children and families with teenage children, the parental couple can disagree about their children's education and the appropriate management before the typical characteristics and behavior of this phase. The disagreements in the exercise of parental function can be perceived by the children what can create more difficulties for

parents and increase the problems. The difficulties in the exercise of parental function of these participants may have provoked reflections on their marriage leading them to point the children as a reason for conflict, as point by Mosmann and Falcke (2011).

Regarding the permanence of adult children into their parents' house, this may be a characteristic of contemporary society, in which children are leaving home later and parents tend to take responsibility for them for longer in terms of subsistence and care, as suggested by Ponciano and Féres-Carneiro (2014). This tendency of staying at their parents' house can be a result of dedicating himself/herself to professional formation, for economic reasons and even because of the difficulty of separation between parents and children. Then, this trend is referred to as a reason for conflict. It is conjectured that families are getting smaller and smaller and parents invest more in their children, often leaving aside personal and marital interests and, consequently, children have difficulty to leave home financial and emotional security in order to start a new and independent life cycle.

The second category deals with the experiences in the family of origin. Such experiences, according to the speech of participants, were repeated in the new family, revealing that the couple led to their marriages characteristics of a familiar pattern: *"Many of the things, you try not to copy, you know, even not to practice, and sometimes it is an involuntary act, because it also make wounds"* (M-1). *"Because my mother always accepted a lot of things and kept still, she swallowed everything, but me, I do not!"* (W-1).

In addition, participants talked about the link and the interference of the women's families of origin in respect of the new couple relationship, a fact that has generated conflicts between them. *"I've never been away from my parents, I've always been very dependent on my family"* (W-5).

Sometimes I see in my wife, in her attitudes her parents and I know it brings a very strong marital problem, indeed, that's why I, when I want to hurt, I say, Mrs. so-two. Mrs. So did not come but her secretary did (W-1).

According to the data, the family of origin can influence and hence to create conflicts situations in conjugality of the couples in two ways: (a) directly, by excessively close relationships in which family opine and interfere in decisions, which compete exclusively to the couple, and (b) indirectly, through experiences that are repeated or are suppressed, resulting in both cases, any impact on the relationship. These results confirm the ideas of some authors (Curran et al., 2011; Darling et al., 2008; Topham et al., 2005) that negative experiences with the family of origin leave significant marks on the life of the individual and become the toughest conflict areas to manage. They are lived moments during childhood and adolescence that emerge when a person becomes an adult, raises a family and connects himself to situations similar to those that lived in the past, repeating familiar behavior to his life story.

Furthermore, it was discussed in the focus group that women tend to repeat experiences from their family of origin. According to participants, they get married and keep excessive closeness with family members, a fact that hinders the construction of the new marriage and family life. This result corroborates with Topham et al. (2005) study, in which he states that closer and more meaningful relationships remains between the wives and their families of origin, especially at the beginning of marriage relationship, while men tend to distance themselves from their original cores. According to the authors, the proximity of women in their families of origin and the involvement with their marriage make them more sensitive and attentive to conflicts and therefore they tend to be more vulnerable and to report marital conflict more often than men do.

According to participants, the finances were also a cause for conflict in their marriage. The main issues raised were there are the unemployment of one partner, the concerns about the lack of money, the burden on the member of relationship that pays the costs alone, the problems in the management of finances and the fact that women earn more than husband or do not work out: *"Today, wife can sometimes earn much more than the husband. Or you do not know how to deal with your finances, you know?"* (W-4).

I also think that the lack of money, sometimes, the unemployment...well, sometimes just one is working and he/she can't manage the situation. So, rub it in like, hey Mr.so, you do not help, you do

not work out. If the wife is working at home, she works as much as on the street, right?. But, sometimes, man has not this notion, you know? (W-1).

The results of the marital conflicts associated with finance effectively point to how the said topic is sensitive, corroborating with other studies which suggest the importance of this variable in conjugality (Mosmann & Falcke, 2011; Stieglitz et al., 2012.). A possibility of understanding for this finding is that the finance for some people represent other needs, such as subsistence and personal interests, and have other meanings, such as security, equality, power and control.

It was also noted as a reason for marital conflict in relationships of the participants certain characteristics in the way of being of the partner and the differences in the couple related to leisure. "We will discuss the soap opera every day, but she can also discuss the soccer from time to time, because woman does not like, got it?" (M-3).

Sometimes, women's immaturity does not accept a hobby that man has. A woman likes, let's suppose, dancing, ballroom dancing, or other types of dancing, finally, the husband does not like at all. Then they go to a party, either the man got that grumpy look on his face or they even not go out (W-1).

The results presented in this category are also mentioned in literature as conflict reasons (Faulkner et al., 2005; Giudici et al., 2011; Iveniuk, et al., 2014; Karahan, 2009; Pazo & Aguiar, 2012; Silva & Vandenberghe, 2009; Torossian et al., 2009). These are problems that couples relate, usually at the beginning of marriage and that are resolved gradually, while others arise throughout the life cycle. In this study, these results appear in long-term marriages ($X = 27.11$), pointing to two possibilities: either they are problems that generated conflict early in the marriage, but they were solved; or problems that remain generating conflict between the couple, and they were cited as an example of questions that do not change even after long time of coexistence.

In the category "time to be together", factors that hinder the moments that partners could enjoy together as husband and wife, for example, household tasks, child care, the stress of day-to-day were appointed. Furthermore, in quantitative phase, time to be together was the variable with the highest average ($X = 3.07$; $SD = 1.95$) and showed a statistically significant difference compared to other motives for conflict.

I think the hardest today is the level of stress that modern life leaves to each other. Problems related to the house and all the individualized problems of our four children, the whole function, the entire absorption, the level of stress that each one brings. It's a whirlwind, you know, modern life today is very demanding, and for you to absorb it all, this pressure, is complicated. I think this is the great problem of life together today, how can this level of stress that each one brings home be absorbed when the moment to be together starts? (M-4).

These results may be related to the characteristics of participants in the study, married people, professionally active with children at different stages of development. Among the reasons for this to occur, some researchers (Faulkner et al., 2005; Giudici et al., 2011) cite the effects of stress of modern life to marital relationships. In addition, the absence of moments of intimacy and experience of life together may be a consequence of the time devoted to managing family, professional and social demands, or even the lack of planning for such spaces may exist into their relationship. Such questions provoke conflicts between partners who may be communicating, in this way, the need to be closer and more united as husband and wife, to share the difficulties and to grow stronger to face them.

3rd Axis - Feelings that emerge during conflicts

According to participants, conflicts create anxiety, anger, heartbreak and indignation in spouses. Intensified emotions if the problem is not resolved. In addition, if they are externalized without proper self-control, they may cause more serious negative consequences than the conflict motive itself: "It is

that inner thing, that anger, emotion, impulse, adrenaline, you know?, indignation. Anyway, we sometimes notice a few things that we see with a certain excess and you also feel indignant, it's natural, isn't it?" (M-1). "I think, at the height of any type of conflict, you will always have that feeling of hurt or anger, depending on the situation, frustration. Finally, you put an expectation in a situation that did not happen, indeed" (W-3).

According to reports, conflicts can also cause psychological and physiological reactions in the partner. *"Sometimes I get mad at the time when I face these problems. I get upset, anger, but those ends. For me, I, particularly, my bravery is momentary. Especially because it ends fast, for me it's normal" (W-4).*

Wow, it is super bad, when such a thing remains pending is very bad. For example, she told me something I did not like, I'll be bad until I resolve this issue, but at night I know it will be resolved, but it gives you a bad sensation, you are willing to leave everything, to kick up a fuss (M-3).

When I did not solve the situation at the same day I feel bad, I cannot sleep well, the thing remains in the psychological. Sometimes it lasts, two or three days and that bored mood remains, I cannot even sleep properly until I solve it, but I'm anxious to solve that, I feel bad (M-4).

These results corroborate with other studies (Miller & Rempel, 2004; Sanford, 2006) as the negative expression of emotions emerging from conflict situations. The similarities and differences regarding the channeling of emotions can be associated to the individual characteristics of each participant, as self-control (Iveniuk et al., 2014; Pazo & Aguiar, 2012) or can point to the natural oscillation of emotions and reactions to which people, especially in love relationships, are susceptible (Bolze et al., 2013).

Furthermore, in long-term marriages, the global satisfaction with conjugality may be more significant than certain conflicts (Smith et al., 2009). Both possibilities show that you can handle the emotions in a spectrum that encompasses more positive or negative, impulsive or contained ways and emphasize the positive aspects of the relationship at the expense of conflicts. Such reactions, different for each couple, will pass idiosyncratically on conjugality. The destructive impact of marital conflicts can also be an opportunity to re-evaluate the relationship, considering the positive and negative points, the life projects of each spouse, the desire to stay together and, especially, if it is possible to continue the dialogue in the face of differences.

Final considerations

The main marital conflict motives found in the two phases performed in this study, quantitative and qualitative, have been the time to get together and children. The complementarity between the two phases enabled us to understand, in the qualitative moment, the specificities of statistical data. Such specificity refers to the excess of demand in other areas such as professional and familiar, which interferes with conjugality, resulting in less time for husband and wife dyad and even in decreased of sexual life of the couple. Regarding children, the results showed that the conflicts between the parental couple can happen when children are young and when they are in adulthood and involve different reasons, as mentioned in the previous session.

In the qualitative phase, experiences in the family of origin, finance and the different characteristics and preferences of each spouse were also cited as motives for conflicts. This result may suggest that there are other reasons for conflict in marriage, than those measured in marital conflict scale and that were relevant to the couples in this study. Future studies could attempt to reveal if these data are repeated in other socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

The results mentioned were similar to those found in international studies on the main reasons of marital conflicts and can point out the most sensitive issues within a marriage and, therefore, deserve greater attention in the experience of conjugality. Clearly, there will be proper specificities of each couple dynamic and they will need a deeper understanding, which can be identified through qualitative studies, as pointed out earlier.

In the present study, the variables time of union, children, and the intensity of the conflicts were associated most directly to conflicts in conjugality being evidenced in both phases of the study. The feelings of the participants mentioned in the focus group may be related to the intensity of the discussions more than the motive of the conflict, as shown by the area literature. The variables that have emerged in the qualitative phase, experience in the origin family, finances and individual characteristics and variables that appeared in the two phases, time of union, children, and the intensity of conflicts, confirm the existence of common and specific factors in conjugality. It can be concluded that the study participants need more time to the experience of conjugality and that the preservation of this space can be protective factor before the marital conflicts just as well it can assist in coping expected difficulties throughout the stages of the life cycle.

On the sample loss in the focus group, where there were 21 confirmed participants and the attendance of nine at the scheduled day, it is understood to be in agreement with other studies in which normally occurs a loss of 50% of the sample. On the other hand, gathering nine participants in long-term marriages, average of 27 years of union, can be considered a strong point of this research, since there are few studies on this population in Brazil. Moreover, the comparison of quantitative and qualitative data made it possible to discuss the results in different and complementary perspectives.

It is understood that further research on the said topic must be developed to investigate, for example, the perception of young couples, new ways of being a couple and the different stages of married life cycle. Studies using this approach may contribute to the work of professionals who meet couples, families and individuals who are suffering due to the presence of conflict in marriage and family relationships.

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