

THOUGHTS ON MOTHERHOOD IN PRISON CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The number of women arrested has increased significantly. Most of them are mothers already, and others are pregnant whilst in prison. It is because of this that this paper seeks to understand motherhood in a prison system, not only for pregnant women, but for all mothers in a close regime punishment with their children or having them under family or state agencies' guard. Our research was bibliographical and guided by the work of Foucault, Lima, Aguirre, Agra, Badinter, Stella, Assis and Constantino, Vargas and Winnicott. It is also a qualitative research, seeking mapping the conditions of the incarcerated women who are mothers and also imprisoned. To build the task, four visits were made at a female complex prison system at Natal/RN. The applied process to collect data were semi-structured interviews, conversation circles, ludic resources and observation. To better present all the data collected, the results were divided in three aspects, such as: Structural conditions inside the prison, relationship between prison employees and the prisoners, and health care service provided for those who are mothers or who are soon to be. We shall discuss here each case.

First of all, it was found that women go through humiliating and poor hygienic conditions, and so does their newborn children, who are subjected to the same terrible conditions, sleeping on mattresses on the floor with their mothers. According to Costa (2008), since there's no specific politic for treatment of arrested women, the situation of their incarceration becomes more difficult. These are people with inherent rights as humans and, particularly, as women. However, there is no appropriate structure for them. The jail provides a small fan for an average of seven people and a water tap, which they use for everything: personal hygiene, the hygiene of the place, to drink water, etc. For the interviews, a room designated for religion education and school education was used. In two out of four moments with the prisoners, there were also dead rats in the room, as well as loads of trash and a bad smell. We were told, however, that that was the cleanest room.

Secondly, we have the exigence of a different treatment for women in prisons, even more so when they are pregnant or breastfeeding. However, during the visits at the prison, humiliating conditions were noticed. Articulating Brasil (2011), while the woman is pregnant or breastfeeding, they need to receive different treatment conditions due to gestational and nursling factors. It is good to insert also that it is necessary for the State

to see and care for these questions of vulnerability and violence in which pregnant women imprisoned are going through. Since the first contact, which was made with the prison director, it was possible to observe her disregard for these women. We also noticed the indifference towards the work proposals we presented, at the time of the inspection and mainly at the last meeting, in which moments before, it was discussed with the director the possibility of bringing some snacks and hygiene kits for the children, and she authorized, without making any restrictions. However, at the reunion day, every kit was open, and every material was taken out of its original packing, including disposable diapers and swabs, without hygiene care. Something else we noticed was that the prisoners don't have a voice. During the visits for research, they would be released for a moment and instead of paying attention to us, the prisoners would hopelessly try to speak to the agents and they would simply ignore them.

Now the third and last aspect. Even though it was said in conversation with the coordination of the prison that they took care of all the health aspects during pregnancy, performing prenatal ultrasounds, tests, medical care and other essential facts for a pregnant woman, we saw the opposite of that during our moments with the prisoners. We were told there was no such care, and when someone was in labor the agents would always underestimate their pain. One of them told us that one of the pregnant women had health insurance and because of this, to make the ultrasound would not take much, but even so her right was procrastinated. Others said they had never done any exams since discovering the pregnancy, or had had no medical care. Another story that impacted us was of one of the inmates, who had already had a baby in prison. She said she did not have many problems at the time of delivery, she had been taken to the nearest maternity hospital in a police car, accompanied by agents, however, someone who was in the same room felt really sick and due to the movement that took place, the detainee had to be handcuffed in bed with her daughter for some time. Regarding this, the director of the prison once told us the mother has the right to house arrest for 30 to 60 days, so that they could be with their child and family at home. However, some mothers didn't even know about this right, and others said it was something very difficult to get.

Regarding the health of children and breastfeeding, during the period when they are in jail, the majority is fed breast milk, and the mothers avoid other types of milk, so they do not become accustomed to it, since they are difficult to have access. In the case of a mother who had her daughter of four months with her, a baby who hadn't been breastfed since birth, it was the responsibility of the mother's family to provide every single week milk for the child. She reported how anguished she felt every time she saw the milk nearly over, because she didn't know when her family would be able to bring or to afford more milk. It is noteworthy that this case was an exception because in most cases, children are and must be fed only breast milk, since many times there is not a different option. Another difficulty is due to the poor diet of the mothers; they sometimes run out of milk and suffer to feed the children, coming to be fed by other women who produce more milk.

It is known also that it is essential in the first twelve months of a child's life, a monthly follow-up to the doctor. Mothers who have their children with them during the

first six months of life complain of not having this monitoring, since it is possible only if one of their family members picks the kid up and take them to the doctor without the mother's presence. However, there are female prisoners who don't have family in town or available to it, which leads to children with no medical care. Once, one of the mothers said her son was suffering from cramps, she informed that to the agent, and they brought "any" remedy for the child, the mother eventually decided not to use it on the child, afraid it would bring harm instead of relief.

Therefore, it is concluded that there is a deficiency in the care policies in the prison system and it is necessary a more careful look at these mothers and their children who end up being punished more than is to be done by law.

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