

# MASCULINITY SEIZED IN CHILDHOOD/ADOLESCENCE OF MEN IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS FOR MARITAL VIOLENCE

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## MASCULINIDADE APREENDIDA NA INFÂNCIA/ADOLESCÊNCIA DE HOMENS EM PROCESSO CRIMINAL POR VIOLÊNCIA CONJUGAL

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## LA MASCULINIDAD INCAUTADA DE LA INFANCIA/ADOLESCENCIA DE LOS HOMBRES EN LOS PROCESOS PENALES POR VIOLENCIA CONYUGAL

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**Objective:** to understand the constitutive elements of masculinity that permeated the childhood and/or adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence. **Method:** qualitative study using the methodological framework Oral History of Life. Interviews were conducted with 13 men in criminal proceedings for marital violence linked to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Court of Justice for Home Peace in the municipality of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. The data were interpreted in the light of the theoretical framework on masculinity. **Results:** men's childhood/adolescence was permeated by masculinity constructs, mostly influenced by the father figure. They are: the distancing of female games, affective dullness, infidelity, family provision and dominance and family violence. **Final Considerations:** even though it is not possible to affirm that these patterns have influenced the development of aggressiveness, it is inferable that observation, encouragement, imposition and conviviality with the elements of masculinity have contributed to delineate the character of the participants and reflected in their conducts in adulthood.

**Descriptors:** Men's Health. Masculinities. Gender Violence. Parent-Child Interaction. Social Behaviour.

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*Objetivo: compreender os elementos constitutivos da masculinidade que permearam a infância e/ou adolescência de homens em processo criminal por violência conjugal. Método: estudo qualitativo utilizando-se o referencial metodológico História Oral de Vida. Foram realizadas entrevistas com 13 homens em processo criminal por violência conjugal vinculados à 2ª Vara de Justiça pela Paz em Casa do município de Salvador, Bahia, Brasil. Os dados foram interpretados à luz do referencial teórico sobre masculinidade. Resultados: a infância/adolescência dos homens foi permeada por constructos da masculinidade, na sua maioria introjetados pela figura paterna. São eles: o distanciamento de brincadeiras femininas, embotamento afetivo, infidelidade, provisão familiar e domínio e violência intrafamiliar. Considerações Finais: mesmo não sendo possível afirmar que esses padrões tenham influenciado no desenvolvimento da agressividade, infere-se que a observação, o incentivo, a imposição e o convívio com os elementos da masculinidade tenham contribuído para delinear o caráter dos participantes e refletido em suas condutas na vida adulta.*

*Descritores: Saúde do Homem. Masculinidades. Violência de Gênero. Interação Pais-Filho. Comportamento Social.*

*Objetivo: comprender los elementos constitutivos de la masculinidad que impregnaron la infancia y/o adolescencia de los hombres en los procesos penales por violencia conyugal. Método: estudio cualitativo utilizando el marco metodológico Historia Oral de la Vida. Se realizaron entrevistas a 13 hombres en procesos penales por violencia conyugal vinculados a la 2ª Corte de Justicia por la Paz en la Casa del municipio de Salvador, Bahía, Brasil. Los datos fueron interpretados a la luz del marco teórico sobre la masculinidad. Resultados: la infancia/adolescencia de los hombres estuvo impregnada de construcciones de masculinidad, en su mayoría introyectadas por la figura paterna. Son ellos: el distanciamiento de los juegos femeninos, la atonía afectiva, la infidelidad, la provisión y dominación familiar y la violencia familiar. Consideraciones finales: aunque no es posible afirmar que estos patrones hayan influido en el desarrollo de la agresividad, es inferible que la observación, el estímulo, la imposición y la convivencia con los elementos de la masculinidad han contribuido a delinear el carácter de los participantes y se han reflejado en sus conductas en la edad adulta.*

*Descriptorios: Salud del Hombre. Masculinidades. Violencia de Género. Interacción Padre-Hijo. Comportamiento Social.*

## Introduction

Being a man in our society is based on gender inequality, since some teachings attributed to the male figure, when used destructively and founded on patriarchy, bring harm to the whole society, including men themselves<sup>(1)</sup>. This context refers to the need for reconstruction of this hegemonic model, which has been seized over the generations and remains resulting in health and social problems, such as homicides, traffic accidents and domestic and marital violence.

Situated in the field of gender relations, masculinity can be understood as a set of attributes and functions that are expected of men and that serve as a guideline for the construction of their identity. These constructs are incorporated in the way of being masculine through the experiences accumulated throughout their history, mainly through social relations. During childhood and adolescence, this process occurs through the appropriation of what he experiences in his daily life, especially in the family context, with

parents as the reference figures that influence his formation, especially the father figure<sup>(2)</sup>.

When this child or adolescent is inserted in a domestic environment that is configured as violent, he can incorporate patriarchal behaviors into his way of being, thus reproducing these attitudes as adult. This is corroborated in a Brazilian study that affirms the tendency to naturalize and reproduce these models in conjugal relationships, making men more violent than when not exposed to the aggravation<sup>(3)</sup>.

All this context in which men are educated, inclusive in violent environments, reveal the high incidence of violence cases. In Brazil, a study conducted with 1,102 women reveals that one in five Brazilians has experienced some type of domestic or family violence, most often practiced by the spouse<sup>(4)</sup>. Even in developed countries, such as the United States of America (USA) and England, the numbers of marital violence are high, with intimate partners as the main perpetrators<sup>(5)</sup>. These criminal practices, in

which marital violence is included, are anchored in unequal gender education, which reinforces male power and domination, emphasizing female subservience<sup>(5)</sup>.

For the prevention of domestic and marital violence, strategies are necessary to enable the creation of boys and girls based on more symmetrical attributes and roles, providing the reconstruction of the hegemonic masculinity model. Thus, the following research question was adopted: What are the constitutive elements of masculinity that permeated the childhood and/or adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence due to family relationships? In this sense, the study presents the following objective: to understand the constitutive elements of masculinity that permeated the childhood and/or adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence, based on family relationships.

## Method

This is a qualitative study, which used the theoretical framework of masculinities.

The participants of the research were 13 men linked to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Court of Justice for Home Peace, located in the municipality of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. The selection of participants was intentionally, respecting the inclusion criteria: being responding to criminal proceedings for marital violence in the Court and being in visibly stable psychoemotional conditions at the time of the interview. It is noteworthy that this evaluation occurred after the observation of a psychology professional of the Court of Justice itself, who indicated the participants for the interviews. Men who did not attend the interviews after two consecutive appointments were excluded from the study.

The process of approximation with the participants took place after the insertion of the principal researcher in the Reflexive Group of Men (RGM), in which men participated by judicial determination. The RGM meetings took place weekly, with an average duration of two hours, and were mediated by a multidisciplinary team composed of professionals and students in the

area of health and law. These meetings allowed a greater bond with potential collaborators. It is worth noting that there were no conflicts of interest, since such approximation is methodologically recommended with a view to deepening the interviews in Oral History of Life (OHL)<sup>(6)</sup>.

After the end of the meeting cycle, the participants were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study, the objectives of the study were clarified, the right to participate or not in the research, as well as to give up at any time, the guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality of the information. The anonymity of the participants was maintained by replacing the names with alphanumeric coding (H1, H2... H13). The ethical precepts contained in Resolutions n° 466/12 and n° 510/2016, both of the National Health Council (CNS, in Portuguese), were observed. After consent, the participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE in Portuguese). The research was carried out by approval of the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Universidade Federal da Bahia, under Opinion n° 877,905, Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Appreciation (CAAE in Portuguese) 31286414.2.0000.5531. The study followed the criteria of the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ in Portuguese).

The research was composed by 13 interviews. Data collection was performed by the principal researcher and occurred between April and July 2018, at a time and place previously chosen by the participants, such as their residences or open spaces that would allow the occurrence of narratives. Through semi-structured interviews, participants were asked about their sociodemographic aspects (age, religion, race/color, schooling, family income) and answered the following guide question: Tell me what elements of masculinity permeated your childhood and/or adolescence.

The interviews were conducted by the principal researcher and lasted an average of two hours and thirty minutes. They were recorded, transcribed, transcribed (logical organization of the text) and textualized (organization of discourse in the first person of the singular, excluding unnecessary elements),

as recommended by the methodological framework of the OHL<sup>(6)</sup>. It is noteworthy that, because we value the narratives emanating in the data collection process, this reference allows the delimitation of the number of participants based on the saturation of the content of the statements, with no need for a large number of people to integrate the study. At the end of the process of organizing the textual corpus, it has become available in full for reading and validation by the research participants, who signed the letter of assignment of rights, authorizing the use of the interviews for analysis.

Thus, after exhaustive reading, exploration of the material and categorization of the data, these were interpreted in the light of the Hegemonic Masculinity framework<sup>(1)</sup>. It is noteworthy that the categorization process was provided by the NVIVO®11 software, which favors the systematization of qualitative data. It is worth noting that the data analysis was performed by peers, avoiding the interpretation scans. Six categories emerged, namely: distancing from female games, affective dullness, impulsivity, infidelity, family provision and dominance and family violence.

## Results

The 13 participants of the study were between 27 and 54 years old. The majority declared themselves black (11), religious, catholic and evangelical (12), with higher education (6) and with family income of two to ten monthly minimum wages (8).

The constitutive elements of masculinity that permeated the childhood and/or adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence were presented in the following categories:

### *Distance from female play*

As a construct of masculinity, the historicity of the research participants was permeated by the reinforcement of stereotyped boys' games. The concern on the paternal part to ensure the child-man was clear, through the child's distancing from the games of the female universe.

*My father has always been very conservative about masculinity because of my grandfather, who never accepted certain situations coming from man, such as playing doll, bouse, such things. All my childhood, they wouldn't let me play with my sisters and cousins. (H01).*

*My father always told me that I should play soccer and video games [...] he wouldn't let me play with the girls, because they played of doll and bouse, and that wasn't a man's play. (H06).*

### *Affective dullness*

The orality of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence has been seen as male characteristics present in their daily infantile introspective personality traits, expressed by the non-externalization of emotions and limited social interaction. These, which configure affective dullness, were taught to them as an inherent attribute of being man.

*My father is a closed man, he hardly interacted with family members, seemed to like to be alone [...] during my childhood, I never saw my father cry for anything, always said that man does not cry. (H07).*

*When I was a child, my father told me that it is better to live alone than poorly accompanied [...] He didn't cry, he moved on [...] he taught me that this is being a man! (H05).*

### *Impulsivity*

Impulsive attitudes, without measuring their repercussions on family and social relationships, were pointed out as a constituent element of men's masculinity. This behavior was also experienced throughout their lives, as illustrated by the statements:

*He [father] was so impulsive that in the face of any conflict, whether familiar or not, he was already with a gun in his hand [...] he never thought about the consequences of it for him and our family. (H13).*

*My father was always very reckless and impulsive, acted without thinking, without reflecting. He made decisions hastily and then suffered from the consequences. (H02).*

### *Infidelity*

Male infidelity was also revealed as a constituent of the masculinity construct of the research participants. This was witnessed by observing paternal behavior in situations of marital betrayal, marked even by the discovery of a new family constitution.

*When I was a child, my father got a mistress [...] he even started a family and this was very marked in my memory. I think it's normal!* (H03).

*My father had other relationships, other children, even the same ages as ours. Everyone knew that, and even my mother accepted this situation.* (H13).

### Family provision

Throughout their lives, the interviewees lived with the overvaluation of work by the male figure, a condition that enables family provision. This responsibility, which has been instilled in them since childhood, is perceived as a constitutive element of being man.

*He [father] told me that work dignifies man. I thought 24 hours of work, because I didn't like anything missing indoors [...] he used to say that was the man's responsibility!* (H01).

*My grandfather always taught us to work hard to support the house, pay the bills, provide the food.* (H04).

### Dominion and family violence

The narratives revealed a life story permeated by the father's authoritarian model as head of the family, which did not allow him to be questioned or contradicted in his orders. The power relationship present in the family relationship emerges the meaning of male domination, which authorizes man to have aggressive and violent behaviors towards his wife and children, behaviors experienced by the interviewees in their childhood and adolescence.

*I was raised by my father in this way: the man is the head of the family, who must guide the house, impose the rules [...] My father made sure things were just his way and no one could fight back. He forbade me to tell my mother that he was aggressive with us [children], as I told him, he beat me up. He already threw the pots at my mom because she didn't cook what he asked for. She wanted to split up from him, but he wouldn't take it.* (H08).

*Things had to be the way my father wanted: what he said was law and order had to be fulfilled and no one could say anything. All I lived in my childhood and adolescence was definitely violence. My father beat me with a stick, a rock, handcuffed me. I'd get to the extreme of putting me and my brothers sitting on the couch and shooting over our heads. My mother never thought about splitting up because she was afraid of him.* (H13).

## Discussion

The study points out that one of the constituent elements of masculinity that permeated the

childhood and/or adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence is intertwined in paternal engagement for the distancing of boys from children's games considered intrinsic to the feminine, such as dolls and little house. This trend is shared in a national study that states that children and adolescents are socially stimulated to experience playful activities that favor the construct of gender patterns of men and women<sup>(7)</sup>.

In the case of boys, the conducts frequently adopted by parents in the process of child rearing tend to be removed from games considered feminine, which configures control action in the development of masculinity. This action is often associated with a paternal concern to ensure that the child does not "become" homosexual. Nevertheless, a North American study highlights that sexual orientation is independent of parental control, even if they use a creation based on gender binarism<sup>(8)</sup>.

Another constituent attribute of masculinity is related to the figure of the "provider" man. This element was also present in the family context of the participants, so that their male representations of reference appropriated the position of "head of the house", a condition that placed them in the function of meeting the family's financial needs. In a study conducted in Spain, this male social legitimation of providing financially for their children and wife was pointed out, showing that this is an important value in society<sup>(9)</sup>. This attribute is stilled in the male imaginary throughout childhood and adolescence. This makes him feel valued as a hardworking man, who financially supports his family, but contributes so that many men are not actively present in the creation of children, denoting family leave.

The male valuation under the condition of provider denotes in man a conjuncture of power in relationships, believing that, by meeting the financial and food needs of the house, he must be respected, and may even commit marital betrayal; element present in various family contexts and that permeated the children of the participants. In this perspective, being unfaithful means virility and denotes the condition of being manly, vigorous, powerful. It also has a meaning associated with sexuality, which is anchored to sexual desire<sup>(10)</sup>.

Regarding this, the life history of men is marked by witnessing paternal infidelity, including the constitution of other family nuclei, through the establishment of polygamous relationships, even with the knowledge of the spouse. Such behavior is perceived socially as a behavior inherent to the male, and marital betrayal is popularly considered more propensity for men<sup>(10)</sup>. A national study showed that, of 106 men interviewed, 75% had already betrayed their partners, even reporting their acceptance of this situation<sup>(11)</sup>.

According to the narratives, the male distancing from behaviors seen as feminine is also related to the non-expression of emotions. A national study reveals that, since the initial moments of childhood, it is evident the existence of social pressure so that boys do not cry, posting in the male imaginary that tearing denotes lack of control, cowardice and fear<sup>(12)</sup>.

It is also worth warning that when having his emotions too much, man begins to add introspective traits to his personality, which also limits his social interaction, often leading him to suppress his emotions, which tends to have a negative impact on his mental and physical health. Corroborating these findings, a study conducted in India reveals that the absence of male dialogue in family and conjugal relationships has supported the belief of introspective contemporary man<sup>(13)</sup>, an element of being a man, which also permeated the participants' family context.

In these cases, the narratives reveal actions that are not measured and without measuring their repercussions, both individual and collective, such as the use of firearms in situations of family conflicts. This ideology dictates that men have to defend their reputations, their families and properties against threats and insults. Thus, it is socially expected that they are willing and able to engage in physical aggression when they consider its necessity<sup>(14)</sup>.

This male superiority is also evidenced in the family scenario, given the status of head of the house that gives the man the autonomy to dictate his decisions in relation to other family members. International studies reveal male authority over the family, and the man is the holder of power,

including preventing the children and wife from expressing their opinions<sup>(15)</sup>.

This characteristic of family boss was present in the childhood and adolescence of the interviewees and is linked to the authoritarian model of masculinity. In addition to the status of head of the family, men impose family respect, even using aggressiveness, according to a Spanish study<sup>(16)</sup>. The power relationship present in the family unit emerges the meaning of male domination over children/adolescents, with the adoption of aggressive behaviors, such as the use of stick and stone to commit physical or psychological violence, which affects the conception that such attitudes are part of educational processes, leading to reproduction. Corroborating these attitudes, studies conducted in Africa and South America have identified that the father figure appears among the main aggressors in the family context<sup>(17-18)</sup>.

The narratives also see that the imposition of male power goes beyond the adult-child relationship, being evident also in the conjugal relationship. The participants revealed that they had witnessed scenes of violence practiced by the father against the mother, emphasizing the non-fulfillment of the male desire as a precipitator of aggression. A Mexican study points out that one of the elements that precipitate and intensify violence in family relationships is precisely the non-performance of domestic tasks<sup>(19)</sup>.

In a scenario of male domination, there is no room for female decision-making, even in relation to the desire to remain or not in the marital relationship, as expressed by the narratives. This context evidences the condition of female allegiance regarding deliberations and acceptance of corrective conduct<sup>(3)</sup>. This construct, favoring female objectification, ends up inserting conjugal violence in the family context. Experience reported by the research participants.

Although the study is limited by not investigating whether the constitutive elements of masculinity that permeated the childhood and/or adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence were reproduced in adulthood, it is inferable that, since they constitute the

dominant model, these elements were assumed as an influence for behaviors based on power and domination. Another limitation is the fact that these elements may be configured in different ways by other men who live in communities with divergent customs and social creations.

The study's limitation is to work on historical and subjective aspects of the interviewees, in addition to the regionality of the collection and the unilaterality of the question based on the male point of view.

### Final Considerations

The narratives reveal that the childhood/adolescence of men in criminal proceedings for marital violence was permeated by constructs of masculinity, mostly introjected by the father figure. They are: the distancing of female games, affective dullness, impulsivity, infidelity, family provision and dominance and family violence.

Even though it is not possible to affirm that these patterns have influenced the development of aggressiveness, it is inferable that observation, encouragement, imposition and conviviality with the elements of masculinity have contributed to delineate the character of the participants and reflected in their behaviors in adulthood, since several studies indicate that the individual's education is directed on basis of their experiences as children and adolescents.

Considering that conjugal violence is permeated primarily by hegemonic elements of masculinity that sustain the supremacy of men, putting them at risk for themselves and for others, the need for spaces for valuing education based on genders is salutary, which enables the reconstruction of masculinity, replacing it with a model of formation of the new man.

### Collaborations:

1 – conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data: Andrey Ferreira da Silva, Fernanda Matheus Estrela, Júlia Renata Fernandes Magalhães, Álvaro Pereira, Nadirlene Pereira Gomes, Milena Arão da Silva Oliveira and Vera Lúcia de Azevedo Lima;

2 – writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Andrey Ferreira da Silva, Fernanda Matheus Estrela, Júlia Renata Fernandes Magalhães, Álvaro Pereira, Nadirlene Pereira Gomes, Milena Arão da Silva Oliveira and Vera Lúcia de Azevedo Lima;

3 – final approval of the version to be published: Andrey Ferreira da Silva, Fernanda Matheus Estrela, Júlia Renata Fernandes Magalhães, Álvaro Pereira, Nadirlene Pereira Gomes, Milena Arão da Silva Oliveira and Vera Lúcia de Azevedo Lima.

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