



ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at <http://www.journalijdr.com>

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research

Vol. 12, Issue, 10, pp. 59632-59634, October, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.25556.10.2022>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED BY MOTHERS OF A STILLBORN BABY: REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL AND FAMILY INFLUENCES

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 27th August, 2022

Received in revised form

19th September, 2022

Accepted 28th September, 2022

Published online 30th October, 2022

Key Words:

Emotions, Mothers, Fetus and Death.

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy and later childbirth are moments that present a range of events in a woman's life, promoting new experiences and feelings, as well as challenges, usually culminating in positive feelings and a state of happiness. However, negative feelings may arise as a result of unexpected and adverse events, which may determine the fetal life. Stillbirth causes unprecedented suffering, since the situation expresses feelings of frustration in all aspects of the parents, especially as a result of the pregnancy interruption. The study aims to reflect on the feelings experienced by these mothers and to transcend a reflection related to family and society participation in this mourning process. This is a study of the narrative literature review type, with a theoretical and reflective aspect, of qualitative approach and exploratory bias, it was carried out through data obtained from the BDEF, LILACS via Virtual Health Library, and SciELO portal, using the descriptors combined with the Boolean operator And "Emotions, Mothers, Fetus and Death". The following inclusion criteria were adopted for the studies in the research: articles published in scientific journals, books and book chapters, theses and dissertations in English, Spanish and Portuguese, related to the theme. Studies available in paid form were excluded. Fourteen studies were included. No temporal clippings were used. The results were organized into two categories: family benefits related to the experience of mothers of stillborn children and the influence of social aspects on the well-being of mothers of stillborn children. The family understanding of the maternal loss is characterized as a fundamental action in the improvement of the coexistence with this bereaved mother; poor family coexistence is related to the emergence of negative feelings and isolation behaviors. Mourning has a strong social role, because the bereaved person, in society's perception, must correspond to some pre-established criteria of social recognition. Society has a great relevance in the experiences of bereavement understanding. A good social relationship provides many benefits to these mothers, and the welcoming offered promotes happy moments, transmitting security and comfort to the mourners. Therefore, with the present study it was possible to report that there were several challenges faced by mothers of a stillborn child, being mainly the family and social influences the sovereign ones in the interference in the quality of life of these mothers. In this perception, there is an emerging need for more scientific research that seeks to understand the grieving process of mothers of stillborn children, seeking to raise awareness among health professionals and citizens about the importance of caring for these people.

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Citation: Allan Bruno Alves de Sousa Santos. 2022. "Feelings experienced by mothers of a stillborn baby: reflections on social and family influences", *International Journal of Development Research*, 12, (10), 59632-59634.

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy and later childbirth are moments that present a range of events in women's lives, promoting new experiences and feelings, as well as challenges, usually culminating in positive feelings and state of happiness. This phase generates peculiar experiences in the universe of the woman and her partner, which also involves the family and society (Gesteira, Barbosa & Endo, 2006). For pregnancy to be a period that generates positive feelings for the couple, it is necessary that there is monitoring and thorough evaluations, in the realization and reading of a well attended prenatal, in which all involved demonstrate dedication and commitment throughout this gestational context. The pregnancy and puerperal cycle is characterized as a phase in which emotions are triggered with intensity in the life of the pregnant woman and her partner, and may be positive and negative feelings (Filho & Montenegro, 2013). However, negative feelings may arise as a result of unexpected and adverse events, which may determine the fetal life. All positive feelings and future plans are converted into pain and sadness, in which all plans and expectations are undone, leaving deep marks and physical and emotional traumas present (Ampese, Perosa & Haas, 2007).

Fetal death is defined as the loss of a stillborn baby at 22 weeks or 154 days of gestation, with weight equal to or greater than 500 grams or height greater than 25 cm, that is, fetal death is the loss of a fetus that was being conceived in the mother's uterus before birth, regardless of fetal status or gestational age. Fetal loss and grief are intense generators of negative feelings and trigger the grieving process, which can be divided into five phases: denial, anger, negotiation, depression and acceptance. The stillborn baby brings unprecedented suffering, since the situation expresses in parents feelings of frustration in all aspects, especially as a result of the pregnancy interruption (Oishi, 2014). Therefore, the relevance of this research emerges, which applies to the fact that the theme enables a critical reflection, based on scientific research, for a description of the feelings experienced by mothers of stillborn children. Thus, it aimed to reflect on the feelings experienced by these mothers and transcend a reflection related to family participation and society in this grieving process.

METHODOLOGY

This is a narrative literature review type study, with a theoretical and reflective aspect, qualitative approach and exploratory bias. The narrative review describes and discusses the development of a certain theme, and allows readers to acquire knowledge about a certain subject (Rother, 2007). The development of this study was carried out through data obtained from the bases, Database in Nursing (BDENF), American and Caribbean Literature on Sciences and Health (LILACS) via the Virtual Health Library (VHL), and the portal of the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO),

using the descriptors combined with the Boolean operator (And) "Emotions, Mothers, Fetus and Death". The following inclusion criteria were adopted for the studies in the research: articles published in scientific journals, books and book chapters, theses and dissertations in English, Spanish and Portuguese, related to the theme. Studies available in paid form were excluded. Eighteen studies were excluded for being off-topic in the databases, 10 duplicates, and 14 studies were included. No temporal clippings were used. From the analysis, the following categories emerged The family benefits related to the experience of mothers of stillborn children and the influence of social aspects on the well-being of mothers of stillborn children. Since this is a theoretical-reflexive review study, it was not submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP), and the guarantee of ethical precepts in the construction of the study is reaffirmed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Family aspects related to the experiences of mothers of stillborn children

The bereaved mothers, when relating to family aspects, relate the emergence of negative feelings during their coexistence. According to the research of Petro (2015), the feeling of loneliness is intensely present even in family life, showing that sometimes the family does not understand the feelings experienced by mothers, and when help is offered, it is not always appropriate. The family understanding of the maternal loss is characterized as a fundamental action in improving the coexistence with this bereaved mother. According to Heazell et al (2013), an important point to help the mother and the family in the restructuring after death, and ease maternal suffering, is the explanatory dialogue with the parents about the reasons for the death, thus, the action of health professionals together with family members becomes essential. The lack of dialogue between family members and the bereaved mother is an intense promoter of family and social isolation. The lack of conversation among family members and the misunderstanding of the situation are strongly related to the emergence of negative feelings and isolation. The adequate dialogue and family support are fundamental for the adequate support to this mother (Paris, Montigny & Pelloso, 2017).

It is extremely important that the mother has a family support network. According to the research of Lemos & Cunha (2015), there is a need to prepare these families to experience mourning and provide support to this bereaved mother, and the training of a health professional is essential for these families, thus seeking better living conditions for mothers in mourning. Focusing on family participation in the care of bereaved mothers, Gold, Dalton & Schwenk (2007) obtained as a result of their research that some families showed dissatisfaction with the non-participation in issues related to the place of delivery and types of hospital care, reporting the lack of interaction between family members and health professionals, which culminated in declines in the quality of life of the

bereaved mother. The impact of a fetal loss affects the whole family, however, not all families are able to recover, while some are able to move on, other families have their bonds emotionally and physically disrupted, causing impact on the lives of all members, focusing on the parents of the stillborn baby (Melo, 2004).

The influence of social aspects on the well-being of mothers of stillborn children: Mourning has a strong social role, because in the perception of society the bereaved person must correspond to some pre-established criteria of social recognition. According to Doka (2002), the silence related to the action of avoiding talking about the events provides the emergence of behaviors that are harmful to the social life of the bereaved person, causing mainly the isolation of these people. Society has a great relevance in the experiences of grief understanding. A good social relationship provides many benefits to these mothers, and the welcoming offered promotes happy moments, transmitting security and comfort to mourners (Medeiros et al., 2022). The sharing of feelings with friends is an important step towards the improvement of emotional and social aspects. According to Butler (2004), the action of privatizing mourning intensively influenced the emergence of loneliness, in which help from friends was not accepted, which evidenced the emergence of more and more negative feelings and the worsening of the quality of life of mothers of stillborn children. During the grieving process, the bereaved mother may present changes in social identity. According to Manzzine et al. (2008), the redefinition of roles and changes in the female identity as a result of grief can cause physical and psychological changes, generating feelings of anguish, apathy and sadness, besides the need to prove the overcoming of grief to society. The society plays an essential role in the reestablishment of this mother in her daily life, because it plays a welcoming and safety role, providing support to these mothers, so that the suffering and sadness are only a physiological emotional feeling and not a facilitator of the pathological one.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, with the present study it was possible to report that there were several challenges faced by mothers of a stillborn child, being mainly the family and social influences the sovereign ones in the interference in the quality of life of these mothers. As for the process of coping with grief, it was found that family factors influence in a greater intensity, when compared to social factors, showing that there was mainly as a negative point the emergence of pessimistic feelings. Thus, the research contributed to a better understanding related to the needs that these mothers have, and mainly, to emphasize the importance of family and social actions in the care of these bereaved mothers. Regarding quality, it was concluded that both family and social actions were able to interfere in this aspect. In this perception, there is an emerging need for more scientific research that seeks to understand the grieving process of mothers of stillborn children and their relationships with the external environment, seeking to raise awareness among health professionals and citizens about the importance of caring for these people.

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