

SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK AND CHILD CARE: An Analysis of Working Mothers in the Northeastern Region of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new scenario in which inequality is intensified, and significant changes are demanded from all segments. Knowing how mothers who work for pay outside the home form and use social support networks to ensure that their children are safe and get the necessary care is extremely important in view of establishing interventions that uphold the rights of children and teenagers and their well-being. This research aims to analyze how working mothers that belonging to nuclear and single-parent female arrangements access their social support networks in order to ensure care for their children during the pandemic seeking to understand social capital, based on the structuring of social support networks and the exercise of care in this scenario. For this purpose, a qualitative approach was selected as methodology using a semi-structured interview technique via phone with 09 mothers pertaining to the family arrangements subject of this study, remunerated workers with children younger than 18 years of age, who live in a district of the city Belo Horizonte in Brazil. By using a content analysis method, we aimed to learn more about each mother's network structure, its composition, size, and sociability model by exploring their characteristics in order to find out about their conditioning factors, how they act with respect to the care of their children within the context of the pandemic. The findings demonstrate that the pandemic has indeed affected their access to and structure of their social support networks. They were small, consisting of two to eight nodes, mainly composed by links of strong bonds, but nevertheless, they had more members, which allowed a wider reach for the care and a greater social capital. When the pandemic set in, we observed a significant reduction of their components, and in some cases even the collapse of their network, even if only temporarily. The networks maintained their strong bonds, but weak bonds were lost in this context. Upon observing the two family arrangements subject of this survey, we can say that both were affected. However, the female single parent arrangement showed a stronger impact due to its greater family and household responsibilities and workload, linked to the fact that the mothers, as head of their families, need to establish restrictions that provide greater access to a more acceptable work, such as self-employment or in an informal job. The pandemic highlighted and acerbated fundamental issues that were already part of these working mothers' daily life and the care for their children, reinforcing the need to invest in public policies that respond in a broader way and uphold women's rights, such as access to work with equal opportunities; change of the time dedicated to child care by the family; that take into account the diversity of today's family arrangements; that ensure that young children receive the care needed for their development.