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ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S SERVICE NETWORKS IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES

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Abstract

This article proposes a critical analysis of women's care networks in the Northeast of Brazil, focusing on support services for victims of violence and the promotion of women's health and rights. The research aims to identify the main challenges faced by care networks in the region and explore possible strategies for improving the effectiveness of these services. The analysis was based on a combination of literature review, secondary data analysis.

Keywords: Women's service networks. Women's rights. Effectiveness of services. Northeast Brazil. Support services.

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1 Introduction

Violence against women is a major social, public health and human rights issue in Brazil. In the Northeast, one of the country's most populous and economically diverse regions, there are specific challenges that affect the effectiveness of the networks providing care to women. It is in this scenario that this research focused. Characterized by profound socio-economic disparities, the region has high rates of poverty and social inequality, which directly impact women's vulnerability and access to support and protection services (IBGE, 2024). The combination of high rates of domestic and sexual violence with structural inequalities highlights the need for an efficient care system adapted to regional peculiarities.

Women's care networks in Brazil are made up of a variety of institutions and services, including specialized police stations, reference centers, shelters and health services. In the Northeast, the implementation and integration of these services varies significantly between states and municipalities, reflecting regional inequalities (DOS SANTOS; BEVILACQUA; DE MELO, 2020). The lack of adequate infrastructure, the shortage of trained professionals and the difficulties in articulating between different spheres of government and non-governmental organizations compromise the effectiveness of care (DUTRA; MARTINS, 2023). In addition, deeply rooted cultural and social aspects in the region, such as traditional gender patterns and stigmatization, make it difficult to report violence and access the necessary support (ONU BRASIL, 2022).

Therefore, this article seeks to explore the functioning of women's support networks in Northeast Brazil, with an emphasis on identifying the gaps and challenges faced by these networks. The analysis aims to provide a critical and detailed overview of the current situation, contributing to the formulation of more effective policies and practices that can strengthen the support network for women in the region (ONU BRASIL, 2022).

The investigation focused on identifying the main gaps and challenges faced by these networks, offering a detailed insight into how these problems impact the effectiveness of the services provided. Understanding the current structure and existing obstacles is crucial to formulating strategies that can improve the response of service networks to the needs of women in the region.

In addition, the study seeks to explore the perceptions of women who use care services, analyzing their experiences and the quality of the support they receive. From this perspective, it was possible to identify strengths and areas for improvement, ensuring that care is more aligned with the expectations and needs of users.

The article aims to propose recommendations for improving the integration and efficiency of care networks. These recommendations were based on a critical analysis of the data collected and aim to strengthen coordination between the different actors involved in providing care to women, as well as promoting a more robust and effective support network. The study's contribution is aimed not only at identifying challenges, but also at offering practical solutions that can be implemented to improve the system of care for women in the Northeast.

2 Material and Methods

The methodology of this study was developed in three main stages: a literature review, secondary data analysis and semi-structured interviews. Initially, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to survey and analyze the existing literature on women's care networks, with an emphasis on the specificities of the Northeast region of Brazil. This stage included the analysis of academic publications, institutional reports and relevant case studies to understand the current panorama and identify gaps in existing research (DOS SANTOS; BEVILACQUA; DE MELO, 2020). The literature review provided a solid theoretical basis and allow existing practices and policies to be contextualized (GIL, 2008).

The second stage involved the analysis of secondary data, using information available in government and non-governmental organization databases. Data were examined on the distribution and characteristics of women's services in the Northeast region, such as the quantity, quality and geographical coverage of services, as well as the availability of resources (IBGE, 2024).

The analysis of secondary data helped to map the presence and functioning of care networks, allowing for the identification of regional inequalities and infrastructure problems. This approach is fundamental for assessing the current situation and verifying the adequacy of the services provided (CRESWELL; CRESWELL, 2018).

The third stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with two main groups of participants: professionals who work in the care networks, such as social workers, psychologists and lawyers, and women who have used the care services. The interviews were conducted with the aim of gaining a detailed perspective on the challenges faced by professionals and the users' experience of the services. This qualitative approach allowed for a deeper understanding of practical difficulties and perceptions about the quality of care (MINAYO, 2014). Collecting and analyzing the interviews provided valuable insights and help identify areas for improvement (YIN, 2015).

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In addition to these steps, a case study was carried out in selected municipalities in the Northeast for a more detailed analysis of the implementation and effectiveness of care services. The choice of cases was based on criteria of relevance and representativeness, allowing for a contextualized analysis of local practices and the solutions implemented. This approach made it possible to obtain concrete examples that can serve as a basis for recommendations for improvement (STAKE, 2013).

The study adopted a qualitative approach, focusing on detailed analysis of the information collected and interpretation of the data in the light of the research questions. The qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring the complexity of the phenomena studied and providing a comprehensive and critical view of the functioning of women's care networks in the Northeast (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2017).

The aim is to provide a detailed and evidence-based analysis, contributing to the formulation of more effective policies and improved care practices.

3 Results and Discussion

An analysis of the distribution of women's services in the Northeast reveals a significant disparity between the states. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* (IBGE, 2024)], it can be seen that states like Bahia and Pernambuco have a greater number of specialized police stations, reference centers and shelters than states like Piauí and Sergipe.

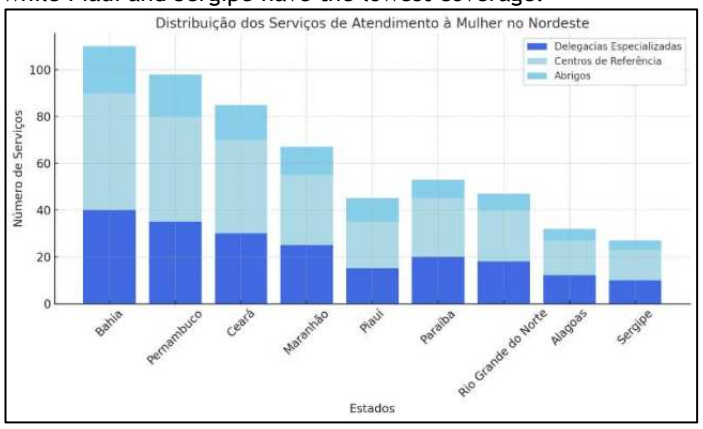
This inequality reflects economic disparities and the concentration of population in certain areas, making it difficult for women who live in more remote regions or those with less infrastructure to access them.

Figure 1 shows a concentration of services in states with a larger population and economic development, such as Bahia and Pernambuco, while smaller states face difficulties in maintaining a robust service network. This concentration can result in greater difficulty of access for women in rural areas or small towns, highlighting the need for public policies that promote a more equitable distribution of resources (DOS SANTOS; BEVILACQUA; DE MELO, 2020).

The quality of women's services in the Northeast also varies significantly between states. Data collected by Dos Santos, Bevilacqua and De Melo (2020) indicates that, although some states have invested in training professionals and in the infrastructure of services, others still face major difficulties.

The lack of financial resources is a constant throughout the region, but it is felt more acutely in states with less economic capacity, such as Alagoas and Maranhão.

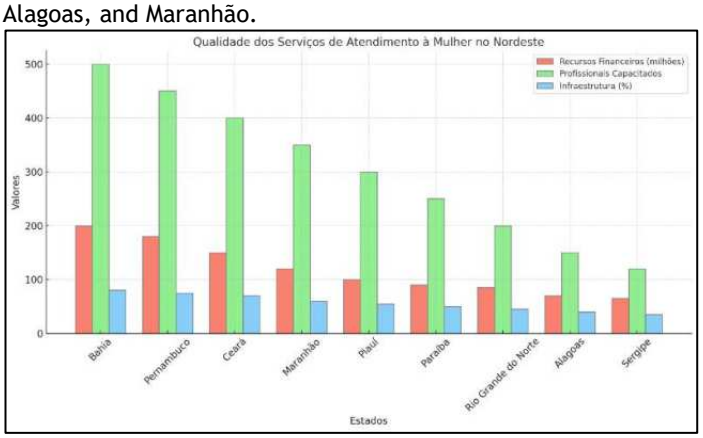
Figure 1. Distribution of Women's Services in the Northeast. Bar graph comparing the number of specialized police stations, reference centers and shelters by state in the Northeast. Bahia and Pernambuco have the highest concentration of services, while Piauí and Sergipe have the lowest coverage.



Source: Data taken from IBGE (2024).

Figure 2 shows that while states like Bahia and Pernambuco manage to allocate more resources and maintain a relatively adequate infrastructure, states like Alagoas and Maranhão face significant challenges in training professionals and maintaining services. This disparity reflects not only the economic differences between states, but also the effectiveness of local public policies and the capacity for coordination between different spheres of government (DUTRA; MARTINS, 2023).

Figure 2. Quality of Women's Services in the Northeast. Bar graph showing the allocation of financial resources by state, the number of trained professionals, and the available infrastructure, comparing states such as Bahia, Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Maranhão.



Source: Adapted from Dos Santos, Bevilacqua and De Melo (2020).

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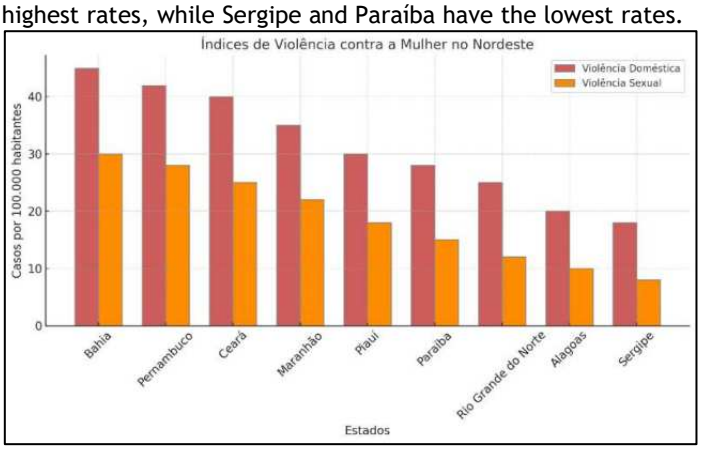
The rates of violence against women in the Northeast remain alarming, with significant variations between the states. Data from the Ministry of Health and the Notifiable Diseases Information System (SINAN) indicate that Bahia and Ceará states have the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence, while states such as Sergipe and Paraíba states have relatively lower figures. However, this data should be interpreted with caution, since underreporting is a common problem throughout the country (ONU BRASIL, 2022).

Figure 3 suggests that although some states have lower rates of violence, this may be related to underreporting and lack of access to support services. The states with more structured care networks, such as Bahia and Pernambuco, tend to record more cases, which may reflect both the greater willingness of victims to report and the greater capacity of the system to record and deal with these occurrences (ONU BRASIL, 2022).

Figure 3. Rates of Violence against Women in the Northeast. Bar or line graph comparing the rates of domestic and sexual violence by state in the Northeast. Bahia and Ceará have the highest rates, while Sergipe and Paraíba have the lowest rates.



Source: Data from the Ministry of Health (BRASIL, 2024).

Analysis of the data collected and the graphs indicate that, although there have been significant efforts to improve the networks of care for women in the Northeast, regional disparities and the unequal quality of services continue to be major obstacles to the effectiveness of these networks. The concentration of services in more developed states, together with the scarcity of resources in less favored states, creates substantial barriers for women in situations of vulnerability, especially in rural and peripheral areas (DOS SANTOS; BEVILACQUA; DE MELO, 2020; DUTRA; MARTINS, 2023).

The data presented and analyzed suggests the urgent need for public policies that promote a more equitable distribution of resources and the training of professionals throughout the Northeast region.

It is essential that women's care networks are strengthened, not only in terms of infrastructure, but also with regard to the continuing training of professionals and the integration of public policies at all levels of government. Only with a coordinated and sustainable effort will it be possible to overcome the challenges and ensure that all women, regardless of where they live, have access to quality services and effective protection.

4 Conclusions

This study shows that, despite the progress made in women's care networks in the north-east of Brazil, significant challenges persist which limit the effectiveness of the services offered. Regional socio-economic inequalities, the scarcity of resources and the lack of a coordinated structure between the different social actors compromise the ability of care networks to provide effective and continuous support to women victims of violence.

It was observed that while states such as Bahia and Pernambuco have better infrastructures and a greater concentration of services, states with lower economic capacity, such as Alagoas and Maranhão, face greater difficulties, which directly affects access to and the quality of the care offered.

The analyses indicate that the concentration of services in economically favored areas accentuates the vulnerability of women in peripheral and rural regions, where support for victims of violence is limited or non-existent. The underreporting of cases of violence also emerges as an obstacle to the effective measurement of the problem and the proper implementation of public policies, especially in places with a poorer service structure. It is therefore essential to develop policies for the equitable redistribution of resources and strategies to expand professional training in order to better meet the demands of the region.

In order for the support networks in the Northeast to be fully effective, an integrated effort between the government, non-governmental organizations and civil society is recommended, with the aim of strengthening policies to protect women. Continuing to train professionals, developing awareness campaigns, improving service infrastructure and creating mechanisms to encourage reporting and support are measures that can reduce regional disparities and improve access to services in all areas.

Thus, it is hoped that this work may contribute to advancing the debate and inspire actions that promote a more fair, accessible and effective support network for women in the fight against gender-based violence in the Northeast of Brazil.

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CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Maria de Fátima Lúcia Ramalho: Investigation: Conducting the research and investigation process, specifically carrying out the experiments; Copywriting - Original Draft: Preparation, creation of the published work, writing specifically the initial draft; Writing - Proofreading and Editing: Critical review.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that might appear to influence this study.

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