

Being a Nursing Teacher, Woman and Mother: Showing the Experience in the Light of Social Phenomenology

Miriam Aparecida Barbosa Merighi¹

Maria Cristina Pinto de Jesus²

Selisvane Ribeiro da Fonseca Domingos³

Deíse Moura de Oliveira⁴

Patrícia Campos Pavan Baptista⁵

The trajectory of this study was focused on understanding the experience of being a nursing teacher, woman and mother and reconciling work, motherhood and other daily activities. Participants were 11 women, mothers, teachers at higher education Institutions. Social Phenomenology was adopted for the analysis. The context of meanings was evidenced by categories: Difficulty in performing multiple activities; care of oneself and conciliation of social roles. Women give priority to being a mother, so that they have less time to take care of themselves. In spite of desiring to invest in teaching, they expect to have more time available to be in touch with their children and partner. This study showed that the professional and personal worlds need an interface, which allows for co-existence between the different roles women play in society.

Descriptors: Faculty, Nursing; Women's Health; Qualitative Research.

¹ RN, Ph.D. in Nursing, Full Professor, Escola de Enfermagem, Universidade de São Paulo, SP, Brazil. E-mail: merighi@usp.br.

² RN, Ph.D. in Nursing, Associate Professor, Faculdade de Enfermagem, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil. E-mail: mariacristina.jesus@ufjf.edu.br.

³ RN, Doctoral Student, Escola de Enfermagem, Universidade de São Paulo, SP, Brazil. Assistant Professor, Centro Universitário de Caratinga, MG, Brazil. E-mail: selisvane@yahoo.com.br.

⁴ RN, Specialist in Family Health, Assistant Professor, Faculdade Estácio de Sá, Juiz de Fora, MG, Brazil. E-mail: deisemoura@hotmail.com.

⁵ RN, Ph.D. in Nursing, Assistant Professor, Escola de Enfermagem, Universidade de São Paulo, SP, Brazil. E-mail: pavanpati@hotmail.com.

Corresponding Author:

Maria Cristina Pinto de Jesus
Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora. Faculdade de Enfermagem.
Departamento de Enfermagem Básica
Rua: Barão de Cataguases, 303
Bairro Santa Helena
CEP: 36015-370 Juiz de Fora, MG, Brasil
E-mail: mariacristina.jesus@ufjf.edu.br

Ser docente de enfermagem, mulher e mãe: desvelando a vivência sob a luz da fenomenologia social

A trajetória deste estudo voltou-se para a compreensão do ser docente de enfermagem, mulher e mãe ao conciliar a vida profissional, a maternidade e demais atividades do cotidiano. Participaram 11 mulheres, mães, docentes de instituições de ensino superior. Foi adotada a fenomenologia social para análise. O contexto de significados foi evidenciado a partir das categorias: dificuldade no desempenho de multiplicidade de atividades; cuidado de si mesma e conciliação dos papéis sociais. As mulheres priorizam o ser mãe, dispondo de pouco tempo para o cuidado de si mesma; e, embora tenham o desejo de investir na carreira docente, têm a expectativa de ter maior disponibilidade de tempo para o convívio com os filhos e com o companheiro. O estudo mostrou que os universos, profissional e pessoal, necessitam de interface que possibilite a convivência entre os diversos papéis exercidos pela mulher na sociedade.

Descritores: Docentes de Enfermagem; Saúde da Mulher; Pesquisa Qualitativa.

Ser docente de enfermería, mujer y madre: revelando la vivencia bajo la perspectiva de la fenomenología social

La trayectoria de este estudio se dirigió para la comprensión del ser docente de enfermería, mujer y madre, que debe conciliar la vida profesional, la maternidad y demás actividades de lo cotidiano. Participaron 11 mujeres, madres, y docentes de instituciones de enseñanza superior. Fue adoptada la Fenomenología Social para el análisis. El contexto de significados fue evidenciado a partir de las categorías: Dificultad en el desempeño de multiplicidad de actividades, Cuidado de sí misma, y Conciliación de los papeles sociales. Las mujeres le dan prioridad al ser madre, disponiendo de poco tiempo para el cuidado de sí misma; a pesar de que tengan el deseo de hacer inversiones en la carrera docente, tienen la expectativa de tener mayor disponibilidad de tiempo para la convivencia con los hijos y con el compañero. El estudio mostró que los universos, profesional y personal, necesitan de un medio de comunicación que posibilite una convivencia entre los diversos papeles ejercidos por la mujer en la sociedad.

Descritores: Docentes de Enfermería; Salud de la Mujer; Investigación Cualitativa.

Introduction

Women have conquered their economic independence, which entails a range of functions they had not assumed until then. In other words, while women used to be responsible for educating children and housekeeping, today, they still perform these functions in combination with the job world. In addition to the conquest of professional space, women bear the responsibility of reproducing the human species, independently of the conditions permeating their social world. It is known that motherhood is an important event in any woman's life but, sometimes, the different roles she assumes – mother, woman and professional – can generate conflicts,

in which sometimes one role prevails and sometimes another, obliging her to conciliate them⁽¹⁾.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that technological advances do not only entail benefits, but also collaborate with certain health problems for humanity⁽²⁾. In this perspective, mental fatigue and nervousness are manifestations that frequently cause emotional exhaustion among women active in teaching, which is a highly stressful activity with evident repercussions in mental health⁽³⁾.

Among the roles women assume, the mother's role stands out. In this sense, symptoms of intense emotional

suffering are perceived among women with children younger than five years, characterizing difficulties to simultaneously conciliate various roles⁽⁴⁾. In this situation, difficult moments emerge that are loaded with doubts and questions.

The professional role of nurse teachers is consolidated amidst different activities. In public schools, these activities occupy countless hours per week, spent on meetings and participation in boards, commissions and sub-commissions. In addition to these activities, there are requirements for scientific production, participation in and paper presentation during events, besides the demands of graduate programs to increase faculty productivity, expressed through the publication of articles in journals qualified by the coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel. In the context of private schools, nursing faculty are responsible for a considerable hour load in class, besides practical classes and training, extra-class meetings, community service projects, advice of Course Monographs, among others.

The broader spectrum of teaching activities is a factor that has made it more difficult to conciliate professional and family activities. The specificity of theoretical-practical nursing teaching should be taken into account, which demands teachers' multidimensional efforts, including direct and individualized follow-up of students in practicum scenarios. For this follow-up, teachers need to assemble knowledge, which demands a constant search for updating in their activity area.

Nursing teaching requires, besides diversified knowledge, continuous learning, considered fundamental in the professional carrier, supported by the teachers' knowledge contribution⁽⁵⁾. In the teaching context, one cannot ignore the extent to which this knowledge contribution needs to be legitimized through complications that transport private knowledge to the scientific community.

As nurse teachers, experiencing our teaching activities, we perceive a job overload that distinctively affects women's lives. The interaction between home and paid work is fundamental to understand this distinguished impact of work on the health of men and women⁽⁶⁾.

The following concerns guided this study: what is it like to be a nurse teacher, woman and mother? What is it like for these women, nurse teachers and mothers, to conciliate their professional life with domestic activities? Which would be the difficulties they face in professional life, in motherhood and domestic activities? What do

they expect from professional life, motherhood and domestic life?

This research aimed to understand what it is like to be a nurse teacher, woman and mother, when conciliating professional life, motherhood and domestic activities. The meaning of this experience constitutes knowledge that can contribute to the re-elaboration of what these nurse teachers experience in view of the different activities they are submitted to in daily life, affecting not only their personal, but also their professional life, which involves knowledge production, care and nursing teaching.

Method

Qualitative and phenomenological research was chosen for this study, conceived in the light of social phenomenology. This approach permitted the investigation of this social group of women who experience a given typical situation – women, mothers and active in nursing teaching.

The concepts intersubjectivity, social world, social action, biographical situation, knowledge baggage and typification were used as a guideline for the comprehensive analysis of discourse obtained from this social group⁽⁷⁾.

Intersubjectivity is a premise of social life and experience is the source of human meanings. Meaning indicates the subject's peculiar attitude towards the flow of his/her own conscience. Hence, meaning takes form for the person to the extent that he/she experiences it, which makes it visible to reflexive looks. Social action is considered the interpersonal relation in which one acts on the other, establishing a subjective meaning. As individually experienced meanings are contextualized in the intersubjective relation, they gradually configure a social sense⁽⁷⁾.

To capture the subjective viewpoint, the interpretation the subject attributes to the action in terms of projects, available means, motives, meanings needs to be referred to. Social action is a conduct directed at the accomplishment of a certain goal, and this action, the reasons to, can only be interpreted through subjectivity, as it is only the person him/herself who can define his/her action project, his/her social performance. The reason why is related with past experience, with available knowledge, and is an objective category (explanation after the event⁽⁸⁾).

The biographical situation allows the person to interpret the world based on the collection of previous

experiences and knowledge transmitted by one's peers – the available knowledge baggage. Typicity permits mutual understanding among people in social interaction and this typification gradually becomes stable to the extent of making them recognize the characteristics of a certain action as social roles⁽⁷⁾.

As an inclusion criterion, it was established that participants should be nurse teachers, mothers of children up to the age of 12 and living with their children and partner. Faculty who were not living with their partner were excluded because it is believed that the social role of the spouse can exert a distinctive effect on the experience of being a nurse faculty, woman and mother. The inclusion of public and private teaching institutions was due to the fact that a distinction was expected in the relation between the teacher and the woman and mother roles, justified by the flexible schedule public institutions offer to perform teaching activities, which is not observed at private institutions.

The research region comprised the life world of 11 women, most of whom had one child, with an average teaching experience of two years. Two women worked in public institutions and nine in private ones. The selected institutions are located in the state of Minas Gerais and were the same institutions where the researchers teach or had already taught. The difference between the number of public and private institutions is justified by the fact that three interviews scheduled at public universities were cancelled. It should be highlighted that the interviewed faculty mainly performed teaching activities.

Data were collected between November 2008 and June 2009 through open interviews, based on the following guiding questions: what is it like for you to be a nurse teacher, woman and mother? Tell me how your daily life is as a nurse teacher, woman and mother. Tell me what it is like for you to conciliate professional life with motherhood and other daily activities. As a nurse teacher, woman and mother, tell me about your expectations. No total number of participants was previously set. Instead, data collection was interrupted when the phenomenon was unveiled. Interviews were identified with the letter "E", followed by an ordinal number according to the sequence in which the interviews were held, i.e.: E1... E11.

Approval for the research was obtained from the University of São Paulo Research Ethics Committee under protocol No 750/2008, in compliance with National Health Council Resolution 196/96 regarding research involving human beings⁽⁹⁾.

Units of meaning were obtained from the reading and description of the actions the women experienced and expressed in their testimonies. This permitted data categorization and the understanding of the research phenomenon in the light of the theoretical-philosophical framework⁽¹⁰⁾. The following categories were unveiled: Difficulty to perform multiple activities; Care of oneself and Conciliation of social roles.

Results and discussion

The context of the meanings the women experience in their daily life was revealed based on the Difficulty to perform multiple activities (reasons why), which constituted category 1.

The nurses who participated in the study considered it a challenge to be nurse teachers as women and mothers and highlighted difficulties to conciliate work and family.

I think it is a challenge (...) because you have to dedicate yourself at home, conciliate the workday. (...) Conciliating that with my family function as a mother and wife is very difficult (E1). In fact, it's not easy to be a mother, woman and teacher. But, nevertheless, I think it is gratifying (...) although it is difficult, a challenge, tiresome, because you wear yourself out (E5). I think it is difficult to work, be a mother, wife. (...) something always leaves to be desired (...) (E6).

In their statements, the women express the difficulty permeating daily life with regard to experiencing the roles of nurse teacher, woman and mother. These roles entail multidimensional requirements that are hard to conciliate. This provokes a feeling that there is always something to do, constituting a cycle of functions and daily tasks that adds a challenging value to the experience.

The baggage of knowledge, values, beliefs and motives configure the way of being and acting in the world⁽⁷⁾. Hence, considering the biographical nature of women's history, the knowledge baggage is consolidated through the sedimentation of what was constructed throughout their existence, which influences their way of being and perceiving the world of meanings.

The roles these women exercise derive from a worldview that joins a range of typifications admitted at the heart of the social group this experience is lived in. This indicates that the fact that they characterize this experience as challenging by itself entails a connotation of coping with a situation that is typical of this social group, instead of deriving from their individual experience only. This predicts that, despite the difficulties experienced,

the motivation to challenge oneself day by day grants this cycle of tasks a bias of satisfaction, incorporated into these multiple activities.

Despite the reported difficulty, it is observed that these women have a support network at their disposal, comprising their partner, relatives and assistants, permitting a better conciliation of multiple activities.

When I have to be at school, in hospitals or health units in the morning, I leave my daughter at home for my mother to take care of (E7). (...) I don't have family support around. Everyone lives far away and that's very complicated. But, on the other hand, I have two employees who help me a lot (...) (E8). (...) I have my husband, a partner who allows me to share everything. I have my family, who gives me significant support (...). But, if I didn't have my family and my husband, I don't know what it would be like (E11).

The above statements show that women see themselves at the center of the care act in the family context, even if they have a support network. The same evidence was found in a study based on the network of significations that investigated the meanings constructed on motherhood, childcare and the work middle and popular-class women perform. In that study, it was verified that the mother still considered themselves responsible for education and child care, even when they could count on or share housework with a social support network⁽¹¹⁾.

One cannot deny, however, that the active presence of other people to support family care gives women the feeling that the activities they are responsible for are being performed by people they trust.

Interaction with other people, characterized by the support network, allows women to better experience their role performance. This is in line with a Schutzian interpretation, who never conceives the subject alone, but always in a social relation, marked by actions and intentions in a given historical and cultural period, in an intersubjective relation⁽⁸⁾.

The nurses describe the accomplishment of multiple daily activities, which involves, besides teaching work, activities characteristic of wives, mothers and members responsible for the family. The study participants highlight these multiple activities as a work overload, characterized by double workdays, especially when they do not have a support network, causing stress, fatigue and feelings of anguish, due to the need to play the roles of home administrator and nurse teacher.

(...) It is a rush. At one time I have to take the boy to school, another time I am working, at that time the supermarket, pay the electricity bill, water, telephone. Because husbands don't

do that, we have to do it (E4). There is a time for everything. I can't do anything beyond the planning, otherwise things get complicated (...). The thing is organization, management (E5). You have to manage to do so many things, it makes me feel anguished. I have to set the targets of the day, as a mother, as a teacher, as a housewife (...) it is very tiresome (E8).

In a study performed at a public hospital, which involved female nursing workers, it was verified that paid work did not detach them from their housework and care for their children. Despite valuing paid work as a means to maintain their independence, accompanying the development of their offspring still remains intrinsically incorporated in women as part of their functions⁽¹²⁾.

The multiple daily activities make women push Self-care (reasons why) into the background. This meaning constituted category 2. Women in this study describe their life routine, appoint home administration activities, care for their children, studying, preparing and performing teaching activities and emphasize that the job dynamics they are submitted to does not give them time to take care of themselves.

The "woman" ends up being somewhat left aside. I spend most of the time working and, when I am at home, I end up dedicating myself more to my son (E2). (...) there's hardly any time left for me. The "woman" issue is somewhat ignored (E3). (...) you get involved with a lot of things and forget about yourself. You do things for other people (...). I am a human being, I also need some time for me and that bothers me a bit sometimes (E5).

It was observed in the participants' statements that the lack of time to take care of oneself generates intrinsic dissatisfaction. These women perceive that they need care, but emphasize daily activities related to the roles they assumed, to the detriment of themselves. This fact was also observed in a study of female nursing workers, whose statements evidenced that the multiple roles they assume end up making them renounce from their female side⁽¹²⁾.

In their testimonies, the female nurse teachers evidenced that they prioritize "being a mother". Most of them regret not being able to dedicate more time to their children and some highlight that "being a women" remains secondary to dedicate more time to the family.

(...) sometimes, I leave a bit to be desired, not in the mother role because mothers are licking their prole all the time, but in the role of woman actually (E1). I see that I am more mother than professional, more professional than wife and woman (E6). (...) I don't manage to go to a gym at night because I feel so sorry to leave her [daughter]. She becomes the priority for everything (E10). Your child really occupies the first place, but you also need to program class, your commitment to work (E11).

The way women describe their position towards job and family activities constitutes knowledge society conceives as significant and evidences the typification of beliefs and convictions that are part of experience and the world of life in its social dimension.

Women's project is the Conciliation of social roles (reasons to). This category 3 constitutes what is called anticipation of a future conduct previewed through fantasy in the social phenomenology framework. The actor of the social action sees him/herself imagining the future action he/she will accomplish⁽⁸⁾.

The conciliation among the multiple roles women in this study perform rests on the desire to gain more time to dedicate themselves to the family and work, including investments in the teaching carrier, allied with the intensification of family contact.

The expectation of having more time available to take care of the family predominates in the statements of the nurses who participated in this study. Although most of them refer to the need and importance of investing in the teaching carrier by taking a Master's and Ph.D. program, when projecting future actions, they keep motherhood as the center of social action.

I intend to get pregnant again. Between the Master's and Ph.D. program I intend to have another child (E1). I need to wait a bit, feel more secure as a mother... I need time for myself and then think about the [professional] future (E3). (...) I intend to take a Master's program although, for that, I need time for reading and studying and, with my son at this age: 8 months, I know it's difficult (...). (...) I expect to be able to dedicate more time to my children: following them in school, activities, trips (E11).

The importance the subject attributes to his/her life world, interest in objects and contexts is called relevance in social phenomenology. The set of interests and relations in natural attitude rests on the subject's experience of fundamental anguish and is not separated from the pragmatic motive. In these perspectives, fears, hopes, desires and personal projects can emerge⁽⁸⁾.

All nurses who participated in the study intend to invest in the teaching carrier. They want to take a *stricto sensu* graduate program and prepare themselves better for didactic activities, but do not see their professional projection dissociated from the family level.

I want to continue teaching, which is something I chose as soon as I graduated. (...). I want to grow in teaching and keep up managing to conciliate by mother, woman side (E2). (...) I want to study too (...). I intend to take a Master's program now, next year. (...) I want to take a Ph.D. (...). Because, if you grow, you improve your income, improve quality of life, then I'll be able to give my child a better future, my personal life will get better (E4).

Over time, society has imposed the role of mother and wife on women, which are functions related to the family sphere. The participants' statements reveal that, until today, with women's greater role in the job world, these impositions that used to be emerging remain latent in women's subjective universe.

Society's direct charge for women to play their female role as mothers and wives still permeates women's social imaginary, as observed in the participants' statements. The nurse teachers' reveal their desire to be professionally successful and make the investments needed for the teaching carrier. They do not discern, however, that these goals can be achieved without projecting, at the same time, their satisfaction with the roles they play at family level. Moreover, as a means to contribute to the family budget, work makes personal and family projects feasible, turning women into joint family providers⁽¹³⁾.

Thus, like any other female worker who associates work with other daily activities, the nurse teachers need to dedicate sufficient time to their personal interests, so that they can experience their activities as women, mothers and professionals in a serene way⁽¹⁴⁾.

Final considerations

In contemporary society, women are different from who they were some decades ago, when they were anchored in the roles of wife and mother alone. Today, women show advances they could not reach formerly, especially in the professional context. Being a woman, mother and professional constitute facets that commonly outline modern women, who perform multiple functions.

Thus, these functions determine social roles that need to be conciliated in these women's daily reality. This conciliation remits to a daily challenge, to the extent that the association of different action fronts entails considerable exhaustion, deriving from their intense activity routine.

On the other hand, living this daily challenge remits these women to the idea of constant overcoming, motivated by the desire to conciliate the roles they perform, which contribute to the achievement of their accomplishments in all spheres of their lives.

Understanding the being nurse teacher, mother and woman entails a more dimensioned meaning the women in this study attribute to motherhood. In their statements, they underline the feeling of accountability to take care of their families. The mother role transcends

a universe of meanings and constitutes the central axis of these women's social axis.

Despite their expectations for the teaching carrier, it was evidenced that this ascent will only offer these women a feeling of complete accomplishment if associated with the family dimension. This ratifies that the importance of professional life is linked not only with a socially conquered advance, but also with a possibility of women's distinguished insertion in the family core. This insertion adds an economic and affective contribution, as the fruits of work will be valued to the extent they can revert to the women and their families.

The main implication of role conciliation is found in the sphere of being a woman, which is often forgotten in the study participants' daily lives actually. The functions they perform act in a refractory way, that is, they see themselves doing a million things at the same time and nothing for themselves. The other, work, housework and especially children occupy all of their time, which translates into the little attention they dedicate to themselves.

Living the implications and conflicts that may exist in the multiplicity of these roles is considered natural and intrinsic to the moment and context experienced. No evidence was found of women's dissatisfaction with so many functions and social requirements, although such configurations, necessary for being a mother, woman and nurse teacher, are accompanied by a challenging attitude, typical of BEING a woman nowadays.

It should be added that, in phenomenological research, the analysis of the phenomenon is not exhaustive but presents a perspective. In this sense, further research is suggested, involving other social groups of women, mothers and nurse teachers, including those working in *stricto sensu* graduate programs.

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