



A SOCIOLOGICAL LOOK AT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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SUMMARY

When the World Health Organization (WHO) declared in early 2020 that the world was experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic, a health, social, economic and political crisis began. Considering the sociological bias of the relationship between individuals and society in the context of the pandemic, it became necessary to write this article. Societies are going through an intense crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The measure of social isolation represents an unparalleled effort on the part of individuals. Social ties were broken and from there a series of sociological processes began, because human beings are social beings and there is no society that can remain completely disconnected from social relations. In order to better understand the impacts caused by this crisis, this work, prepared with bibliographical research, addressed the sociological aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic, conceptualizing topics of sociology and analyzing how this epidemic disease entered the social environment and harmed interactions between individuals..

Keywords:Pandemic. Sociology. Society. Social relations.

ABSTRACT

When the World-wide Organization of Health (WHO) stated in early 2020 that the world was experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic, a health, social, economic and political crisis began. Considering the sociological bias of the relationship between individual and society in the context of the pandemic, it became necessary to prepare this article. Societies are going through an intense crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The measure of social isolation reflects an unparalleled effort on the part of individuals. Social ties had their regularity started and from there a series of sociological processes began, because the human being is a social being and there is no society that remains in the total disconnection of social relations. In order to better understand the impacts caused by this crisis, the present work, prepared with bibliographic research, addressed the sociological aspects of the covid-19 pandemic, conceptualizing topics of sociology and analyzing how this epidemic disease was inserted in the social environment and impaired interactions between individuals

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sociology is a science that studies human behavior in relation to the environment in which it is found, that is, it studies social phenomena in an attempt to explain them. In this broad area, human beings are analyzed in their relationships of interdependence. The objective of sociology is to study, understand and classify social formations and human groups. In this sense, nothing has been more studied and discussed recently than the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), mainly in terms of the radical change in social relations between individuals in society.

Covid-19 is a disease caused by a virus from the coronavirus family. As it spread throughout the world and affected millions of people, it caused the 2020 pandemic and changed the lives and habits of all individuals. In order to try to combat the spread of this virus, some measures were taken by government authorities. Among these measures, social isolation stands out, which ended up changing the routine of human beings in all spheres: personal, emotional, professional and family. Since sociology is concerned with human behavior, it finds a vast field for discussion in the theme of this work.

Social isolation, as a measure to preserve life, has reduced face-to-face social relationships and, as a consequence of this change, has led to the emotional impacts of being separated from loved ones, financial losses, among others. Because humans are social beings, dependent on interactions with others, discovering to what extent this pandemic has affected human development with drastic social consequences is a sociological problem discussed in this paper.

The first chapter of the development introduces the Covid-19 pandemic and relates some sociological aspects of this disease, which are presented and discussed, with the aim of highlighting the global crisis caused by it. The next subchapter presents sociology and its relationship with society and the process of socialization, which are fundamental to understanding the general context. The second subchapter specifies the object of study of sociology: the social relations of human groups, demonstrating the importance of these interactions for the maintenance of a society. Finally, the third subchapter explains the impact of the pandemic on social interactions, an area of interest for sociology.

To prepare the bibliographic research work, authors of books, scientific articles, theses and academic dissertations from the areas of social sciences - sociology, psychology and law - were used, both with thematic relevance for the development of this article, whose object of study is the sociological bias of the Covid-19 pandemic in all its social nuances.

2 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Pandemic is a term that indicates an epidemiological trend. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is a new disease with a worldwide incidence and indication of many simultaneous outbreaks across different continents. These outbreaks vary in intensity and severity, and can even become a global event, which is the case of Covid-19, the coronavirus pandemic that began in mid-2020 and continues to this day.

Regarding the spread of and measures to combat the coronavirus in Brazil, the geographic area and the evident presence of social inequalities in Brazil must be taken into account, where the structural precariousness of many homes makes it impossible to adequately combat the pandemic and hinder its prevention, since many families had to innovate when adopting measures to combat the coronavirus, since their homes did not even have basic sanitation and did not have the financial means to purchase masks and alcohol gel. In this sense, Quinzani (2020) states:

The global crisis caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic will push millions of people into poverty and is expected to leave a greater mark on social inequality. Given that, in order to contain the spread of the pandemic, governments have adopted social isolation policies, which have consequently triggered the paralysis of global economic activities. These measures have favored the weakening of global supply chains, creating impacts between supply and demand, which in turn have generated uncertainty about income and employment. As a result, global economies are vulnerable to the rise of poverty, significantly increasing social class differences, especially in developing countries.

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While some authors compare social isolation with increased inequality, others argue that, barring a vaccine, the only effective way to control the unbridled spread of the virus would be exile. Schumann (2020) defends this point of view. According to him:

The discovery of a new coronavirus in China in late 2019, recognized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization in early 2020, changed the global economic and social structure on a scale never before seen in humanity. Due to its high transmission rate and the lack of effective vaccines and treatments, the first countries affected, faced with the rapid spread of the epidemic, were forced to take social isolation measures. These measures had different scopes, with very different results and consequences, opening up a great debate about the possible forms of social isolation. The experience of the most affected countries has shown that horizontal isolation measures represent the most effective way to avoid the collapse of the hospital system, which ultimately determines lower mortality in absolute numbers. The fact is that projections point to a major economic crisis regardless of the adoption of isolation measures, whether broad, reduced or even absent. What sets these measures apart is the reduction in mortality from the pandemic, which is possible through horizontal social isolation. Thus, it is concluded that governments must adopt broad social isolation measures combined with economic recovery measures and broad social protection for the population as a whole, in the trans and post-pandemic period, as a way of minimizing its secondary effects.

The challenges posed by the pandemic are not only health-related. They are socioeconomic, political, cultural, and ethical, and are further exacerbated by structural inequalities and antipathy between countries and populations. The pandemic crisis has shaken social ties and forms of sociability, weakening individuals, who have often developed some type of psychological pathology such as depression and other disorders, which demonstrates that social ties are essential for maintaining the quality of daily life.

The coronavirus pandemic, due to its scope in terms of health and the care measures legitimized in an attempt to minimize its effects, has impacted society in several areas, being the subject of several studies that correlate an epidemic with the social parameters associated with it.

2.1 Sociology and Society

Sociology is the study of social issues, society, or anything related to a group of people. When we talk about the organization of people, culture, communities, or societies, we are talking about Sociology, which is a comprehensive science that studies the causes and effects of the relationships established between individuals organized in society. It is concerned with the description and explanation of social behavior. Social relationships are the subject of Sociology, which studies the fundamental forms of human coexistence: social contacts, cooperation, individualization, social distance, and isolation.

In a certain way, Sociology aims to observe, from a scientific perspective, the facts produced by men in society and, based on these observations, seek clarifications about their origin, their extension and their effects, which can constitute a mechanism for social intervention. Thus, Sociology is understood as the science that systematically studies the relationships that occur in these human groups called society.

Society is defined as a group of human beings who live and build a collective association. Living together, these people share a culture, a language and even ethical values. The experiences that an individual has throughout their life foster society, as they prevent it from becoming stagnant. In this sense, Mallmann (2018) explains:

Each individual is a unit of action, first of all of himself, then of the small family society. As he becomes capable of taking a leading role, his range of action will increase, since he will find an ever greater demand for the actions he takes. This is only possible from the moment in which the individual is inserted in a social environment. The concept of society and the theory about the fact that the individual is a social being has evolved over time, driven by the search of philosophers and sociologists for the most appropriate explanation of society. The theme of “origin of society” and consequently, the individual as a social being, began to be formalized by Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke in the 16th century. They are called contractualists due to the social pact, each having a particular conception of man. These thinkers agree that man, by means of a “contract”, reduces his selfishness in order to live in society. The individual gives up some rights in exchange for security. These three authors are precursors of sociology in that they were already developing a political philosophy.

Socialization is a long-term process that refers to all experiences in a human being's life, guiding their behavior, as it depends on codes, rules, and values. The way an individual interacts within a society is determined by social control mechanisms, which make them behave in a desirable manner according to social rules. Family, religion, school, and work are some of these mechanisms. This process by which, throughout life, an individual internalizes sociocultural mechanisms and internalizes them in their character, in order to guide their actions within the social space in which they exist, is called socialization.

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When analyzing the interactions between members of a society, it is worth mentioning that Durkheim, in his work “The Division of Labor” (1893), considers that “primitive” man reflects, feels and acts according to the group to which he belongs. Individual consciousness, on the other hand, is peculiar to the individual.

Assuming that human beings are social beings, socialization is fundamental for the development of society, since it integrates social groups. It results in a process of identification and assimilation, that is, when a human being is part of a group it is because he or she identifies with it. The process of socialization allows human beings to internalize rules of conduct and worldviews, enabling them to live with empathy, solidarity and compassion for others.

2.2 The Sociology of Social Relations

The object of study in Sociology is the social relationship between human groups. The term relationship can be defined as any exchange that an individual makes with the environment that surrounds him/her, in order to meet his/her needs. In sociology, social relationships deal with the set of interactions between individuals or social groups in any location in which they are found. These various forms of interaction that occur in different social spaces can occur naturally or through individual interests. In this sense, Zanella (2003) explains:

It starts with the understanding of the individual in his/her double dimension, both active (subject) and passive (subjected), in which he/she is produced by the social environment in which he/she is inserted, but is also capable of transforming it. Therefore, he/she is constituted/constituted in the context of social relations, where he/she appropriates the knowledge and techniques of society among the groups in which he/she participates, occupying different social places.

Many social relationships are developed throughout life and are essential for the evolution of society and human beings, who may present pathological problems if they do not develop these relationships, since they are the basis for the constitution of the social structure. When an individual joins other individuals, forming social groups, he develops a set of social relationships, according to his capabilities and availability, to facilitate the struggle for survival of each of the group's components. The adoption of models of satisfaction of needs common to all facilitates the coexistence of the individual and consequently the survival of all. Thus, the concept of coexistence is linked to the concept of survival.

Studying the network of relationships between members of human groups and the people who build them is the role of Sociology. Culture is a huge network of social meanings, that is, meanings shared by all members of the social group.

Thus, each moment, each element, each object, presents to the member of the group a pattern of thought and a model of conduct. Regarding culture and social interactions, Silveira (2012) clarifies:

The highest level of “social being” is one who is able to relate to others in a balanced way. This “balanced” way of being is presented in different ways in childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and is subject to the social interactions of the environment in which the individual finds himself. Regarding the influences of social relationships on cognitive development, it is essential to consider culture as a factor of great importance. (...) throughout his development, the individual internalizes culturally given forms of behavior, in a process in which external activities, interpersonal functions, are transformed into internal, intrapsychological activities.

It can be said that, depending on the social context, each social group builds its own culture over time. The attitudes and behaviors of the members of this society tend to differ from the attitudes and behaviors of the members of another society. The influence of cultural, historical and political factors produces different configurations in the ways in which individuals interact with each other.

Considering that man is a social being and sociability is the natural capacity of the human species to live in society, there is no need to talk about a total rupture of social relations, under penalty of the collapse of the entire society. Social isolation is characterized by the absence of social contacts, where social attitudes may involve cultural differences, lifestyle habits, language differences, among other factors. Social interaction occurs through the exchange of experiences, knowledge and contacts, through reciprocity and interactivity, and is the environment where socialization occurs. In the group, associative processes generate bonds of solidarity, establishing forms of coexistence and cooperation.

Social relationships with friends, family, coworkers and other people are a prerequisite for life in society. The relationships that individuals establish, according to the degree of closeness and affection that exists between them, are classified into two types: formal and informal. Formal relationships correspond to connections that are established with a certain distance between individuals, where affection is not a priority. On the other hand, informal relationships are marked by the existence of affection between those involved, generally between people who have known each other for a long time.

With the advancement of communication technologies, these relationships often transcend the limitations of space. Currently, with the use of the Internet, social relationships have reached a new possibility of development, as it is possible to search for a vast amount of information and materials of interest in seconds. For years, various

Internet tools and social networks are used, but in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, this use has been intensified and greatly improved.

2.3 The impact of the pandemic on social interactions

It is indisputable that man is a social being. To survive and prosper, human beings depend on the culture and material production of society. However, some measures that directly affected social relations between human beings were necessary to try to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Oliveira (2021) explains:

Law No. 13,979/2020 was published on March 6, 2020 (BRAZIL, 2020b), after the Coronavirus had spread throughout the world, generating a pandemic. Therefore, in Brazil, it was necessary to create a Law that could regulate relations at such a complicated and serious time, aiming to protect the population from contagion by this potent virus. The law provides some modalities to face the Coronavirus, namely: social isolation, quarantine, request for tests and vaccines, exhumation of the body when it is necessary to investigate the cause of death, epidemiological investigation, temporary restriction of freedom of movement, which constitutes a constitutionally provided right, among others. Social isolation occurs in order to prevent people who have not been infected, preventing the spread of the virus. Quarantine, in turn, is a more rigorous form of isolation, since it is applicable to those who have already been infected or who are suspected of being infected. Tests will be carried out to confirm whether the person actually had contact with the virus, as there are cases of asymptomatic people, that is, they are infected but do not have any symptoms.

One of the “fathers” of sociology, Durkheim, said that the stronger the social bonds, the more human beings feel this force that hangs over the individuals in society. These bonds unite the group in society, but if they are weakened, it can collapse. In normal times, people would be crowded together in closed spaces, exchanging experiences, affection, and fluids with people outside their routine social circle, as this is human nature and especially that of Brazilians, a very welcoming people. However, this is not the current reality, given the current pandemic.

In this sense, in the family environment, it is worth highlighting that one of the aspects most affected by the coronavirus pandemic was the dynamics between people, as the need for isolation meant that family contact became something continuous. Due to the lockdown, many people began to study and work remotely, via the internet, from their homes, which, combined with the emotional state brought about by the context, ended up increasing the incidence of family conflicts, such as an increase in the number of divorces, domestic violence, femicide, among other cases reported daily in the media. Despite

In spite of these unfortunate findings, this period of greater family coexistence also bore good fruit, as isolated at home, parents ended up strengthening emotional ties with their children, actively participating in their education.

On the other hand, social isolation has become very unpleasant for couples who do not live together. In these cases, communication had to be adapted to safer models during the pandemic, having to be carried out through technological means such as the use of the internet, social networks, apps and telephone. If the couple is mature and well-connected, this distancing may even have been beneficial, but in the case of couples who are not so enlightened, the distancing certainly brought harm to the relationship.

In the professional sphere, there were direct consequences from the isolation. A measure that was already used before the pandemic became widely used. This is home office (teleworking), which was adopted by large public and private companies, especially after the closure of offices, businesses and other professional establishments. Although the changes and challenges imposed by the obligation to work remotely are significant, it can be said that this way of working is here to stay and has generally pleased both employees and employers, given the increased level of satisfaction of employees who can work close to their families and the reduction in costs for the entrepreneur, such as not having to pay for transportation vouchers for employees, for example. Unfortunately, for some people, this new way of working was not enough to keep their jobs, as unemployment levels rose. With the affected economy, there were salary cuts and the relationship between bosses and employees became more tense.

As can be seen, all social spheres have been affected in some way by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has disrupted social connections, a fundamental human need and the subject of study in sociology. Not being able to interact directly with others can be harmful to physical and mental health. The adaptations brought about by the pandemic have changed the way people interact with each other in general, whether they are close or distant. In fact, there has been a profound impact on the functioning of global society as a whole, with a series of challenges being imposed on social life.

3 CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented health, social, economic, and political consequences to Brazil. To prevent hospital capacity from becoming saturated and the health system from collapsing completely, among other measures, a strategy of prolonged social isolation has become necessary. Given this scenario, it is necessary to better understand the impacts of this strategy on people's lives. From this sociological perspective, it has become necessary to question how this isolation has affected the social well-being of human beings.

This work focused on the sociological proposal of the pandemic, with an interest in discussing the social aspects involved in the crisis established by the spread of the coronavirus, such as its impact on social relations, the socialization process, the maintenance of society and other subjects of interest to sociology as a science that studies everything related to the social and a group of people.

According to the concept of "social relationships", individuals continually interact in the same social space, taking into account the social contexts of the environment in which they live. These relationships were harmed by the social isolation measure, adopted to minimize the circulation of Covid-19 around the world.

No less important, the issue of social inequality was also discussed in this work, as the focus of this article was the sociological aspect of the coronavirus pandemic, which did not affect all people to the same extent, given the enormous social inequality in our country. It is worth noting that although the focus of the article is not to discuss palliative measures to combat the pandemic, one of the objectives of this research was precisely to raise the critical spirit of the reader, because when talking about such measures, such as the use of alcohol gel and frequent hand washing with soap, it is concluded that not all people will be able to collaborate in this way, as many do not have the financial means to purchase such products or do not even have access to water in their homes. Therefore, Covid-19 guided different strategies for different audiences.

It is clear that the pandemic has had a direct impact on people's routines, with sudden changes such as restrictions on physical interactions between members of society. These aspects, combined with the large number of deaths from the disease, have impacted the mental health of many Brazilians, increasing the risk of psychological disorders. Covid-19 has been

capable of changing habits, customs and the entire planet. There have been changes in the family, personal, professional and emotional spheres. In this sense, sociology emerges to study the consequences of this global crisis on human relations in society.

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