

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S IDENTITY AND HER ROLE IN PREVENTING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT: This Article explores the processes of constructing the identity of African women, highlighting their role in preventing COVID – 19, especially in the cultural context of their experience. The central objective of the study is to reflect on how, through her maternal vein, associated with cultural issues, African women, conduct the prevention process during the pandemic, taking into account the configuration of principles, values, norms and practices of their daily lives. communities. Through the methodology adopted, it was possible to understand that African women, as they are the creators and educators of the family and therefore, of society, constitute a great strategy for inducing a change in the lives of the population to prevent COVID 19. interaction of knowledge and ways of expressing oneself in the community is fundamental for quality of life and pandemic prevention. Therefore, it is time for governments at all levels to recognize the greatness, importance and intelligence of women in changing societies.

Keywords: African woman. Prevention. Society.

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RESUMO: Este Artigo explora os processos da construção da identidade da mulher africana, ressaltando seu papel na prevenção do COVID – 19, especialmente no contexto cultura de sua vivencia. O objetivo central do estudo é refletir sobre como por via de sua veia maternal, associada a questão cultural, a mulher africana, conduziu processo de prevenção durante a pandemia, levando em consideração a configuração de princípios, valores, normas e práticas do cotidiano das suas comunidades. Por meio da metodologia adotada, foi possível compreender que as mulheres africanas, por serem as criadoras e educadoras da família e portanto, da sociedade, constituem uma grande estratégia para a indução a mudança de vida da população para que se previna a COVID 19. A interação dos saberes e das formas de se expressar na comunidade é fundamental para a qualidade de vida e prevenção da pandemia. Portanto, é momento de os governantes de todos os níveis de facto reconheçam a grandeza, importância, inteligência das mulheres na mudança das sociedades.

Palavras-chave: Mulher africana. Prevenção. Sociedade.

INTRODUCTION

The health and humanitarian crisis installed globally by the Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the debate on ways of caring for the health and identity of African women, despite the limits of biomedical and hospital approaches based on provisional and contingency knowledge about the virus causing the disease (Sars-Cov-2). It also highlighted the role of women in preventing Covid-19 and social fractures and inequalities deepened by the neoliberal dismantling of public policies, having, among many effects, the weakening of the capacity of health services to respond to the crisis due to historical problems such as underfunding of the Health System and the consequent precariousness of the structure and organization of these services. With repercussions on social protection, in this context, women, with their care, linked to their maternal genes, played an indispensable role in fighting the fight against Covid-19 (Alves et al., 2022).

Africa is the second most populous continent in the world behind Asia, with more than 1,308,064,176 inhabitants. 8% of its population lives in rural areas, 40.3% is illiterate and close to 50% of the total population are women (519,058,499).

Before we examine women's role, we must examine a fundamental pillar: the construction of subjects' identities.

The construction of identity is characterized by a process of tensions that are asserted by the intervention of policies and systems that establish classifications, such as racial, regional, tribal, sociocultural, and ethno-linguistic.

Identity is indeed a process of self-recognition that the subject or group of people acquires and consolidates within a continuous process of recognition of singular

elements of that collective. This process occurs in the interaction with other collectives or people. The person consciously and allows the recognition of plurality in relation to the collective of equals; that is, one lives with the awareness of being different, of being socially unique, and of being the individualization of the Social “ME.”

In this way of constructing the social “I”, African women do not isolate themselves from this sociocultural, political, regional, tribal and racial process that affects Africa and Africans in general.

The construction of African identity is embedded in a set of elements that, in a certain way, make Africans unique and different from others. This identity is a path to individuality, but it is also a way of integration into a community, national, gender, class or race/ethnicity.

Thus, identity ends up being a collective singularization and, at the same time, a unique and plural identification that shows the objectification of the socialization process in the formation of the social subject and the search for continuity to substantiate the numerological system in the construction of identity (Cowger et al., 2020)

The construction of identity is based on the idea that human beings form their individuality through a set of temporal and spatial relationships in everyday interaction, where past and present actions and reactions are their modifying elements (Miller, 2007).

Actions are socially conditioned and depend on the historical moment experienced; they can also provoke the reconstruction of identity amid social, historical and cultural environments that exert enormous influence on relations, especially gender.

Therefore, having an identity means differentiating yourself from the community to which you belong and equalizing yourself through projects, aspirations, obligations, and positions in that social structure. It also means being aware of belonging individually and collectively (Buday, 2023).

To do this, the subject assimilates norms, values, aspirations, feelings, emotions, expectations or knowledge from the reference community. Uses sensations and symbolic representations or references to identify himself within the structure of a

relational identity and as part of this collective from which he imposes his personal-different mark (Owen, 1971; Lewis, 1976; Browning & Browning, 1999).

In the same way, having an identity means differentiating yourself from the undifferentiated, having a name, your own and minimal signs of identity as objective proof of differentiation.

The construction of identities in Africa occurs through differentiation within the same community. It continually manifests itself within groups as an expression of unity and differentiation with the multiple meanings referred to by Olívia Massango, or the basic needs proposed by Ngoenha (Browning & Browning, 1999; Cornelissen & Horstmeier, 2002).

This article aims to reflect on a process of building the identity of African women as well as their role in preventing COVID-19. To this, a qualitative methodology was applied in terms of analysis and compilation of relevant content, the which allowed us to achieve tangible results and a set of lessons deduced from these results.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodology used is qualitative, in terms of content analysis and compilation. Content analysis is defined by Bardin (1997), dos Santos (2012), as being a set of methodological instruments, which apply to the most diverse discourses and aims at induction, deduction and conclusion. Specifically, the methods used to prepare this article were:

Bibliographic and Documentary Research, which essentially constituted a phase of surveying all the bibliographic material that could assist in the creation of this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Cultural an Advantage to Include in Women the Task of Setting up the Life Paradigm with a View to Preventing, Combat and Mitigation of Covi-19.

The cultural issue alludes to the construction of each individual in their context. In this sense, culture fills the spaces of mediation between the “inner” world and the “outer” world, between the personal and public worlds. In this process, while we project our particularities onto the outside world (individual actions of particular will

or desire), we also internalize the outside world (norms, values, language...) (RODRIGUES, 2021).

In this context, women undoubtedly play a fundamental role in shaping the principles, values, norms, and daily practices of their communities. The woman develops pregnancy, and it is from this period onwards that the individual's ways of being are transmitted and subsequently reflected in the education or behavior of individuals within a pre-established context.



Figure 1. Woman creator, caregiver and savior of her children by transforming behaviors.

Women's role primarily as those who generate life, their prominence within the family and in the internal administration of the home, make them an influencer of necessary practices, attitudes, values, and “dreams,” participating and contributing to the establishment of standards of commonly accepted practices. This is combined with the old saying, 'Who educates a woman, educates a nation'

The social role played by women is legitimized in the family; its fundamental principle is in the organization of the family, where it exerts a great influence on the education of children in order to make them respectful and tolerant. Its multiplicity of daily tasks contribute to raising the levels of education, patriotism and improvement of skills of children and young people who will have enormous

responsibilities in building a prosperous society on their shoulders (Lapierre et al.,2020).

2. African Women's Habits/Customs and their Role in Preventing Covid-19



Figure 2. Hand washing as part of the habits to be introduced mostly by women in their daily lives.

Habits and customs are social rules resulting from a widespread and prolonged repeated practice, which results in a certain conviction of obligation according to each specific society and culture (Figure 2).

Ndulo (2011) states that the habits and customs of African women constitute cultural practices that shape ways of living and establish patterns of behavior in African societies and communities.

In this sense, the right to educate and care for children, to participate in the organization of lobola (traditional marriage) ceremonies, cultural festivals and female rituals, such as the female initiation festival, the practice that aims to insert children into society, etc.. which generally promotes the harmonious growth of the child at all levels, constitute practices that are transmitted to society and that lead to a valued continuity, as they consist of central elements preserved by African women.

The awareness of maternal obedience of children in the education process, given the fact that mothers are the ones who spend the most time with their children in social coexistence and the assimilation of specific practices, make African women faithful repositories of values that legitimize a way of being and being of individuals in African societies or communities.

The quality of being a mother translates into their ability to create empathy with others. From her relationship with her children, she begins to put herself in other people's shoes. This is where an incredible power, empathy, is gained that can transform the world. From the moment it creates a life within itself, it begins to change its habits, worrying about food and thinking about the well-being of its children.

Taking care of children, maintaining a better home environment, and practicing empathy in all relationships, whether family or professional, with everyone who crosses your path assumes their role and demonstrates their relevance in society.

African women are more responsible for unpaid care at home than men, and their habits and customs and the influence they exert can lead to an effective response to Covid-19.

When taking care of domestic duties, she places a bucket of soap and water at the entrance to the house to wash the hands of everyone who visits there, even family members.

She carries out this practice in response to the recommendations left by health authorities for the prevention of Covid-19, such as the observance of personal and collective hygiene and social distancing (Renzaho, 2020; Bosch & Gupta, 2023).

She understands that it is a woman's duty to create conditions to prevent the pandemic within her family, at work, on the street, looking at herself and other members of the family and society and also understands that it is her duty as a mother, aunt, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandfather, teach your children to constantly wash their hands with soap and water and maintain a distance from others.

Due to the attention she has for children, family and as a domestic helper, she realizes that as a mother she has to be careful with the pandemic, teaching children to maintain basic hygiene, and if it is to play, it should only be in the backyard, without permission for children to enter. other children.

Women's leadership is crucial to success, as they are important in preventing Covid-19. As a mother who manages the home, she is the one who has the power to raise awareness and effectively mobilize mechanisms for inclusion and collaboration (Coscieme et al., 2020).

As already mentioned, women traditionally carry the majority of caregiving responsibilities and monitor their children's education, in addition to providing assistance to the elderly in the family. This places them at the forefront of the Covid-19 response in families and society (Coscieme et al., 2020).

Even when faced with the challenge of an unprecedented pandemic, African women resorted to approaches similar to other epidemics and dealt with their patients). In the scenario of an Africa without robust hospitals and health systems, cutting-edge technologies, sufficient medical and testing equipment, patients infected with the lethal flu are sent back to home hospitalization under the care of women and women have become protagonists in the line of front of the fight against covid-19 (Windsor et al., 2020).

African women felt compelled to activate their cultural knowledge regarding issues of healing the sick (which include leaves - the breath - roots, flowers, fruits, and vegetables that are important in the treatment of treating diseases). Not a few times, women found themselves involved in keeping an infected family member at home without the possibility of taking him to the hospital but having to go out of their way to search for a cure, with churches closed and healers unable to assist people in compliance with their Covid-19 prevention measures.

In the context of the fight against the pandemic, African women have stood out with particular emphasis, as they have doubled their role as caregivers, educators and family protectors. Women ensure the presence of water inside the house so that the family has to wash their hands continuously, but as we all know, the average distance for families to access water is more than 7km [4]. The woman is exposed when going to get water (Windsor et al., 2020; Huang, 2021).

According to Afonso, “African women, especially in the Bantu ethnic group, privilege women as a symbolic figure responsible for the formation of their communities of origin. However, despite this privileged conception, actual practice is very contradictory.” Such is the case that the First Lady of Mozambique abandoned her philanthropic programs and joined the fight against COVID-19 in an active and

decisive way so that, together with other Mozambican mothers, they could fight to prevent this emerging evil (Francisco, 2014).



Figure 4. Dr Isaura Nyusi on another day of work to prevent COVID-19.

The **Mozambican Head of State** says that “the pandemic can only be overcome with the selfless commitment of everyone, **especially women**, who occupy a prominent place in society”. He urges women to take the necessary leadership in disseminating epidemiological surveillance messages and observing preventive measures recommended by health institutions (Mayer, 2023).



Figure 5. An example of a mother who, for example, teaches her children to prevent contamination by Covid-19

And it is no coincidence because, in the African reality, it is known that women without thermometers know how to identify that a child “is sick” and immediately look for measures to cure the child, whether by resorting to green medicine or going to a nearby hospital (Kallings, 2008).

This position is supported by the **Angolan Head of State, João Lourenço**, who says he is “convinced” that the “strength” of Angolan women “will continue to be decisive in the arduous and long battle to rescue civic and moral values and in the relentless fight against social injustices and discrimination”(Ferreira, 2020).

“Our government adopted preventive measures to reduce the negative impact of this pandemic on health and people, the national economy, and social well-being. It is time for all of us to unite and act with perseverance so that this disease does not shake the Mozambican nation. Women, the source of life, once again have the great task of shouldering the great mission of ensuring the survival of hygiene and safety measures within the family. It is a vision and task for everyone, but for the woman, mother and home manager, educator and family caregiver, the responsibilities are increased” (Nuvunga et al., 2021; Muitana & Amato, 2023)

CONCLUSION

Once the research on construction of african women's identity and its role in preventing covid-19 has been carried out, it can be concluded that: African women constitute a great strategy for inducing changes in society's lives to prevent COVID-19; The African woman, in her role as creator and educator of the family at the end of society, must be the basis for transforming the habits and customs of societies to incorporate the elements of Covid 19 prevention; Women must once again unite to take advantage of positive self-affirmation both in the family, in the community, in society in general and in the public sphere, in science and as a leader; Women must commit to sensitizing and raising awareness in communities so that women do not become victims of this pandemic both as mothers, grandparents, wives and educators; It is time for governments at all levels to actually recognize the greatness, importance and intelligence of women in changing societies; It is important and urgent to encourage girls to join research teams” as there are many things that science still does not know about the presence and participation of women in science.



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