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Can gender-based violence result in a process of social exclusion? A quantitative-qualitative analysis

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Abstract

In this paper I analyze the interrelation between gender-based violence in intimate relationships and social exclusion, a subject virtually ignored by literature. More concretely, I study the mechanisms that lead battered women to social exclusion. In this way I discover that an experience of violence can easily result in exclusion from labor market and housing as well as social isolation. These findings induce me to call public institutions´ attention to this matter, and to underline the importance of reinforcing the existing economic aids for battered women but also of the necessity of introducing new job placement programs and other activities.

1. Introduction

In this paper I analyze the interrelation between gender-based violence in intimate relationships and the processes of social exclusion, a point which is virtually ignored by current literature. To understand the depth of this theoretical whole, we can observe one of the worldwide most famous bibliographic databases: Scopus. It contains more than 15.000 articles about gender-based violence and almost 5.000 about social exclusion, but only 26 of them analyze the

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interrelation between these two phenomena. This fact clearly denotes that there isn't almost any research about this matter.

I cannot find any satisfactory for this lack of interest, even more if I consider that in the last eight years we have been living a deep economic crisis, in which the levels of poorness and social exclusion have enormously grown: in this context the relevance of the question is bigger than ever before.

These are the reasons why I have decided to focus my research in the analysis of this interrelation. In actual fact, with my work, as a first step I tried to discover if such a relationship exists or not. Secondly, once discovered that it does exist, I tried to understand which mechanisms lie under it that can explain its existence: in this way I found out that there is not a unique causality relationship between violence and exclusion. On the contrary both can act as cause (or, better, as triggers) and effect, strengthening each other. Finally I especially focused on one side of the relations: the dynamics related to the experience of violence that can lead women to a situation of social exclusion.

2. Theoretical frame

In order to analyze the interrelation between gender-based violence and social exclusion we have to define these concepts, and to clarify the exact meaning in which they are used in this paper.

2.1. Gender-based violence

As many authors underline, gender-based violence is a product of gender inequalities and patriarchy (Moreno, 2003; De Miguel, 2005; Vives 2011; Marugán, 2012). It is the highest manifestation of sexist domination (Delgado et al., 2007) and it exists because patriarchy gave men an enormous symbolic and material power, a power that has been taken away from women (Gimeno & Barrientos, 2009). This violence is a consequence of the construction of masculinity in patriarchal societies. Firstly, in fact, hegemonic masculinity includes violence as a very important element in the structuring of identity (Kimmel, 2001; Bonino, 2002; Cortés 2004; Hernández et al., 2007), and, secondly, it considers women as inferior subjects and turns them into legitimate targets of this violence (Bonino, 2002).

On the other hand, gender-based violence is not only a product of inequality, but also a fundamental part of the mechanism that perpetuates patriarchy (Fernández, 2004; Izquierdo, 2007; Lorente, 2007). In this framework, gender-based violence can be defined as an instrument used to maintain men's power over women, a tool that takes the shape of physical, sexual and psychological aggression, both in private and public spaces (Rodríguez, 2008). In this paper, however, I will focus only on the violence that takes places in intimate heterosexual couples.

In conclusion, we can affirm that gender-based violence is a phenomenon that limits the freedom of women (Falú, 2011) and can therefore be defined as a violation of human rights that prevents the achievement of equality, peace and development (Krantz & Moreno, 2005; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010).

2.2. Social exclusion

The concept of social exclusion was formulated for the first time in France in the first half of the Seventies (Rubio, 2012; Allman, 2013); in the following decade it was introduced in European political language, in order to substitute the idea of poorness, criticized for its exclusively economic orientation (Subirats, 2004; Laparra et al,. 2007). Nowadays, in the analysis of social inequalities, it is the most commonly used concept, even if the precise meaning in which it is used varies a lot (Paugam, 2000; Laparra et al., 2007). For this reason it is so important to state explicitly the exact meaning in which it is used in this paper. In Laparra's words, social exclusion is "a social process characterized by a loss of integration that includes not only lack of incomes and distancing from labor market, but also a drop in social participation and for these reasons a loss of social rights" (Laparra, 2001 en Laparra et al., 2007 p. 27).

This definition indicates that the phenomenon of social exclusion has three fundamental characteristics: structural origin, multidimensional character and evolving nature. Structural origin means that if we want to discover the causes of exclusion we do not have to look at individual behavior but at social structure. In real terms, it is in the contradiction