



## Maternal care in a prison environment: representation by story drawing

*Cuidados maternos em ambiente penal: representação por meio de desenho-estória*

*Cuidados maternos en la cárcel: representación de la historia a través de dibujos*

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to understand mothers' feelings about caring for their children in prison. **Method:** the participants in this qualitative study were women in the seventh to ninth months of pregnancy, and mothers with children in the nursery, at a Prison Unit in Aquiráz, Ceará, totaling 17 participants in the 9 meetings held. Data were collected between June and October 2018 using the story-drawing technique. The drawings were analyzed individually with each prisoner and categorized by the researchers. The study had research ethics committee approval. **Results:** the story-drawing activity made it possible to understand how the mothers' felt about caring for their children and, from that, it was possible to specify measures seen as care inside the prison. **Conclusion:** from analysis of the experience of motherhood in prison, it is possible to comprehend the feelings running through the role of motherhood.

**Descriptors:** Nursing Care; Child Health; Maternal-Child Nursing; Prisons.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** compreender os sentimentos maternos em relação ao cuidado com o filho dentro da unidade penal. **Método:** a pesquisa tem abordagem qualitativa. Participaram do estudo gestantes a partir do terceiro trimestre e mães que se encontravam com os filhos no berçário de uma unidade Penal em Aquiráz/Ceará, totalizando 17 participantes nos 9 encontros realizados. A coleta se deu entre junho e outubro de 2018. Foi usada a técnica de Desenho-Estória. A análise dos desenhos foi feita de forma individual com cada detenta e categorizada pelas pesquisadoras. O trabalho obteve aprovação do Comitê de Ética. **Resultados:** a atividade de Desenho-Estória possibilitou a compreensão do sentimento materno em relação aos cuidados com os filhos e, a partir disso, foi possível a definição de ações vistas como cuidado dentro da unidade. **Conclusão:** a partir da análise da vivência da maternidade na prisão, é possível a compreensão de sentimentos que perpassam o desenvolvimento do papel materno.

**Descritores:** Assistência de Enfermagem; Saúde da Criança; Enfermagem Materno-Infantil; Prisões.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** comprender los sentimientos maternos respecto al cuidado con el hijo dentro de una cárcel. **Método:** la investigación tiene enfoque cualitativo. Se analizaron mujeres a partir del tercer trimestre de embarazo y madres cuyos hijos se encontraban en la guardería de una prisión en Aquiraz/Ceará, totalizando 17 participantes en los 9 encuentros realizados. La recolección de datos se hizo entre junio y octubre de 2018. Se usó la técnica de historia a través de dibujos. El análisis de los dibujos se hizo de forma individual con cada reclusa y fue categorizado por las investigadoras. El trabajo obtuvo aprobación del Comité de Ética. **Resultados:** la actividad de historia a través de dibujos permitió la comprensión del sentimiento materno respecto al cuidado con sus hijos y, a partir de ello, se hizo posible definir acciones consideradas como atención dentro de la cárcel. **Conclusión:** a partir del análisis de la vivencia de la maternidad en la prisión, se posibilita la comprensión de sentimientos que atraviesan el desarrollo del rol materno.

**Descriptores:** Atención de Enfermería; Salud del niño; Enfermería Materno-infantil; Prisiones.

## INTRODUCTION

The high rate of incarcerated women brings about reflections on the structure of the prison system and the laws that govern these facilities. In their historical context, prisons were built for a predominantly male population and, over the years, the female population was added in the same locations. Likewise, the laws that governed these facilities referred to a masculinized context, not considering women's needs, such as motherhood.

The development of the mother's role in childcare in prison is reflected upon in this context, as well as the consequences of indirect incarceration for children. The purpose of this study is to understand maternal feelings towards childcare in prison. Understanding the environment and the subjects' vision helps to outline strategies for implementing effective care and improving the quality of life of the people involved.

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The prison environment involves multiple limitations on children's development, such as a limited physical environment, the rules for mothers that affect their children, and limitations on contact with other family members. In this context, the mother's presence and care is a way to minimize the factors that have a negative effect on childhood development, making it necessary for mothers to understand these factors and their consequences for their children's health. A study that compared the reality of incarcerated mothers in Brazil and Portugal referred to the difficulty of managing motherhood alone, the challenges of childcare, and the influence of the prison environment on children's life and behavior<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to better understand women's experience of motherhood in prison. Deeper understanding of the reality of these women/mothers allows the development of targeted support to minimize the psychological effects brought about by the conditions experienced. First, it is important to understand maternal feelings toward childcare in the light of the phenomenological method. Schütz's social phenomenology was used for a closer view of these women's reality. This approach deals with questions of an interpretive and comprehensive character, assigning meaning to the everyday world according to the experiences of beings who relate to each other and according to each one's projections of reality<sup>2</sup>. Schütz (1899-1959) was Austrian and, through social sciences and phenomenology, sought to establish the foundations of a comprehensive phenomenological sociology, developing a theory that proposes the analysis of mutual social relations that involve people. There are interactions between consciousness and action in these relationships, which gives unique characteristics and different meanings in each relationship between subjects<sup>3</sup>.

Mothers' feelings about childcare in the prison context can be influenced by a range of new social relationships provided by the environment. These social interactions are limited to children, who become emotional supporters of mothers; inmates, who may become new reference figures for childcare; prison guards, who maintain less friendly relationships for order and safety; and family members, but only on visiting days.

## METHOD

A field study was carried out with a qualitative approach and an exploratory objective. The aim was to become familiar with the study object, namely: What are mothers' feelings towards childcare in a prison environment? This study is part of a larger study, and the information collected here served as a basis for further interventions by the researchers.

The study was carried out in a correctional institution for women (CIW) with the capacity to house 374 inmates. It is the only prison for women in the state of Ceará, located in the municipality of Aquiraz, in the metropolitan region of Fortaleza.

The prison has a common structure to house inmates in general and has a health unit inside. In a structure attached to the prison facility is the nursery, which houses pregnant women in the final stage of pregnancy, and mothers accompanied by children for a period determined by the state and the prison.

The study was carried out with pregnant women and mothers. It included mothers with children in the prison nursery and pregnant women in the third trimester who were in the nursery. They were transferred to the nursery because it is a more peaceful and welcoming environment in which to experience the final stage of pregnancy, compared to the stress experienced in the cells in the common structure.

Pregnant women and mothers who were in isolation during the interviews were excluded from the study for safety reasons. Due to the high turnover of inmates in the nursery, it was not always possible to evaluate the same women, so the study involved 17 participants. Turnover occurs as women leave the facility because they are separated from their children or given provisional freedom, or enter the nursery due to the progression of pregnancy and the need to leave the common wards.

The study participants were selected by means of a probabilistic sample, in which the researcher determined the participants according to their subjectivity, experiences and the study objectives<sup>4</sup>. Four pregnant women and 13 women who were staying with their children in the nursery participated in the study; 2 women (mothers) refused to participate. The main question was observed to be whether the activity would be taken before a judge, which might interfere with their sentence. Data was collected between June and October 2018.

Most inmates in this study were between 20 and 29 years old (70.5%). As for color, 70.7% of the women reported being brown. Also, 82.4% had more than one child, which meant that their sentence of incarceration was breaking their family ties. As for educational level, 64.7% had incomplete primary education, 23.6% had completed middle school, and 11.7% had completed high school.

The drawing-and-story technique (D-E) was used to collect the data so the women could represent the care of their children. Free or thematic drawings demonstrate people's expressions, not in the conscious ways in which they present themselves, but by interpretation according to a number of psychologically preestablished conceptualizations. Blank sheets of A4 paper and crayons were provided to capture these drawings. The following instructions were provided to guide the elaboration of the drawings: Make a drawing representing childcare in prison. Then the mothers' interpretations were discussed individually and, subsequently, the researchers carried out categorized analysis.

The interpretation of drawings took place individually, when the participants showed their drawings to the researchers and explained the reasons for their representations. The interpretations of the inmates' explanations and the subsequent categorized analysis of the drawings defined the themes utilized with the participants in a later study. Two meetings were held to collect the drawings, and seven more meetings were held to develop interventions based on the joint interpretations of the drawings.

The women and the three researchers were present in the meetings, not mentioning the presence of the prison officers, given their hostility toward these inmates. The collection tools included a field diary for notetaking, sheets of paper and crayons to capture the drawings. As a rule, prison management did not allow the use of audiovisual devices or sharp objects that would present any risk to the inmates and researchers. Each meeting lasted an average of 45 minutes, and there was no need to revisit the content at this stage of the drawing-and-story process.

The study complied with the norms of Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council, respecting the principles of bioethics (autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice and equity)<sup>4</sup>. It was approved under number 2,468,623 by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony. All participants signed informed consent forms.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The drawing-and-story projective technique comes from clinical psychology and encourages dialogue and collection of non-verbal content about a given social object. Its application allows for insight into the subjectivities experienced in the multiple facets of relational contexts and the expression of statements linked to updated facts and events<sup>5</sup>.

The approach was carried out cell by cell, to present researchers and the objective of the study to a smaller number of women, facilitating their understanding. Due to the low educational levels and difficulties with writing, inmates were asked to explain the drawings verbally instead of writing the explanatory stories.

Individual (when the same drawing provides a variety of information or deals with a specific subject) or categorized analysis (when the drawings have many common points) are presented below.

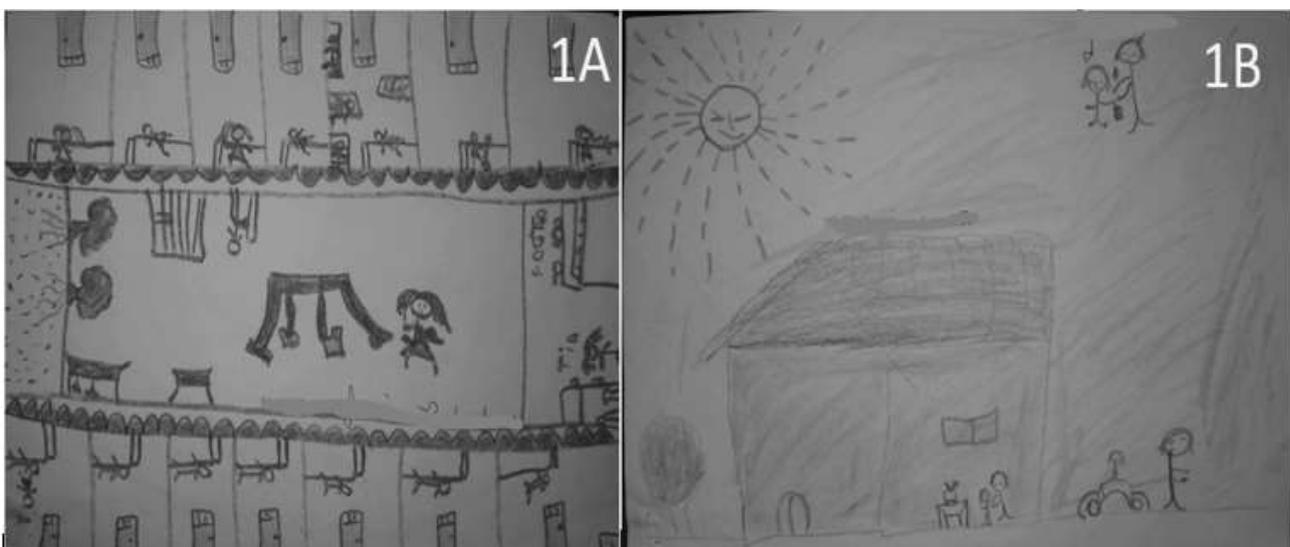


FIGURE 1: Representation of the inside and outside of the nursery, Aquiraz,CE, Brazil, 2019.



In Figure 1, Drawing A, the inmate explained that this is the prison nursery. There are children lying on the beds in each cell, because they share beds with their mothers. The woman's description highlighted the presence of the prison agent.

The inmate represented the entire prison nursery. The representation of children sleeping and moments of fun with nursery toys could be observed. During visits to the unit, it was noticed that several children are often in the yard, where the toys are, and sometimes one of the mothers takes care of these children, as represented in the drawing. Children rest in the same beds where their mothers sleep, as shown in Figure 1. However, all the mothers reported sleep impairment, because they preferred to favor the children's comfort in the small spaces. A notable fact in the drawing is the overcrowding in one of the cells, which was also observed as a reality in all the cells during visits to the unit for health education meetings.

When asked about who was in the kitchen, the inmate said that she drew herself in the unit's kitchen, that she is one of the oldest inmates in the nursery. She said that the other inmates call her *aunt*, explaining that she is a reference figure to support the other women in the nursery (this inmate was granted parole before the end of this study).

Figure 1, Drawing B represents the external view of the nursery. The inmate explained that she drew moments of playing with her son and preparing food.

Representations similar to those already analyzed in Figure 1, Drawing A can be noticed, such as the leisure moments in the nursery courtyard and the trees around the structure. The upper part of the drawing illustrates the mother's care about the child's feeding.

The representation resembles a home environment, with windows and doors without bars and a TV room. This is reinforced by the absence of the prison guard in the drawing, which can be justified by the greater affection between nursery agents and inmates, making the view of the environment less hostile. A study carried out with prison guards showed that they develop positive feelings toward the mothers who have babies with them in prison. However, even though they developed positive ties with inmates, professionals still tended to embody the government's legal role. Inmates were missed when they were transferred, but this feeling was accepted because it was specifically about the babies, making it socially more understandable<sup>6,7</sup>.

Despite the instructions to represent childcare in the prison, women felt the need to express themselves about freedom and about their feeling toward their other children who were outside the prison, as shown in Figure 2, drawings C, D, E and F.

The inmate who drew Figure 2, Drawing C said this was the family home. She mentioned the neighborhood it was located in and that her other two children still lived there with their grandmother. This was a fun time with the children.

Figure 2, Drawing D shows the inmate, the daughter who was with her in prison, and the two children who were with her family. She wrote on her drawing, *"I care for my children as a loving mother, I bathe them, feed them, play with them, all at the right time. I'd kill and die for them."* She talked about the hope of being with all her children soon, and the desire to make no more mistakes so as not to be deprived of living with them again. It is evident that even in adverse conditions, these women's lives underwent restructuring after motherhood, as they met their own needs with their children.<sup>8</sup>

Before the end of this study, her case with the state advanced and she was freed. She was an ally in inviting other mothers to attend health education activities while she was in the facility.

Figure 2, Drawing E, shows the inmate and her three children. She said it would be a time for a walk with them, and that she enjoyed those moments of fun with her children. She explained that the youngest daughter was drawn with a ball in her belly because she is "chubby," and everyone says that she is obese.

Figure 2, Drawing F shows the inmate and her four children in moments of fun. She wrote: *"Freedom for us. We are coming,"* referring to the desire to be at home with her other children.

After the initial orientation, the activity was carried out without intervention by the researchers. The drawings showed that motherhood transcends prison bars, because when they referred to maternal care, all children were represented with the same proximity, whether inside or outside the prison.

This reference to children outside the walls may occur because many women were responsible for raising their children and maintaining the houses before being arrested. Incarceration worsens the family's financial situation, weakens bonds with children, and promotes new family organization. Despite the weakening of emotional bonds, studies have shown that the pain of the absence of their children is eased by the knowledge that they are better if kept away from the prison environment. External maternal functions are outsourced<sup>9,10</sup>.



FIGURE 2: Representation of the external environments of family life before detention. Aquiraz, CE, Brazil, 2019

The drawings demonstrate a positive perspective regarding the future outside prison walls and close to their children, a feeling that was mentioned by mothers in their explanations of the drawings and observed in all subsequent contacts with inmates. This perception corroborates the results of another study that found that the main motivation for women to get out of prison was the reestablishment of emotional bonds with their children<sup>10</sup>. This desire motivates work and good behavior in prison and makes them capable of facing the adversities experienced in prison<sup>11</sup>.

Another factor common to all the drawings was the representation of fun, with elements such as swimming pools, amusement parks and the presence of sunny and lively environments. This representation was related to the hope for freedom, a feeling that could also be perceived during contact with the inmates and was represented in 44.4% of the drawings.

Reaffirming this idea, a study showed that inmates were involved with their families daily, dealing with the need for financial and solidarity logistics and assistance for inmates, and organization of the care of children and the home "outside"<sup>12</sup>. The emotional need for representations such as those in the previous drawings came from the concern with what was outside prison walls.

Figure 3, drawings G, H and I show the representation of women as nursing mothers and providers of their children's food.

Figure 3, Drawing G, shows the care that the inmate will have to give her child, representing breastfeeding. At the beginning of this study, this participant was pregnant. At first, she refused to participate in the activities, but later decided to join the study after seeing other women participating.



**FIGURE 3:** Representation of the child's feeding and bathing care. Aquiraz, CE, Brazil, 2019

Breastfeeding was represented only once, but all the inmates were seen breastfeeding. Even cross-breastfeeding was observed on the first day of the visit to the facility.

A study carried out in cities in southeastern Brazil concluded that “cross-breastfeeding was more practiced by the most vulnerable populations: adolescent mothers, those with low education, those with lower socioeconomic status, with those with an insufficient number of prenatal and primiparous appointments.” In addition to being on the list of vulnerable populations, inmates have some of the characteristics detected in the general population (low education and low socioeconomic status)<sup>13</sup>.

Figure 3, Drawing H shows the care in preparing food for the child. The drawing sought to better understand the process of dispensing food for the facility. The inmate explained what types of products were made available, how often and estimated a quantity.

Figure 3, Drawing H shows an explicit representation of complementary food. Once a week, foods which are exclusively for the children, such as milk, pasta, vegetables, and ready-made spices, were delivered to the facility. Food for the mothers came from the prison kitchen and was provided daily at predetermined times. However, it was mentioned several times that this food was not enough for a week, describing as the main problem the fact that the mothers themselves consumed the food.

During the explanation of this drawing, the inmate was asked about the preparation of food, and several mistakes regarding the form of preparation for children were detected, such as the use of ready-made spices and not natural ones.



It is important to highlight that the acquisition of good eating habits is greatly influenced by children's interactions with their mothers, the domestic environment, and socioeconomic conditions<sup>14</sup>. Although prison conditions determine the types of food available, it is important for mothers to be aware of providing eating habits as healthily as possible.

Figure 3, Drawing I represents two childcare actions: bathing and sleeping. It was an opportunity to better understand how the bath was carried out, and the inmate showed us the cell bathroom.

The researchers observed that aspersion baths were used with the newborns, due to the lack of an adequate place inside the cells for immersion baths for the babies. Older inmates reported that they bathed the children of younger inmates with newborn children, because they have more ability to hold the children under the shower.

During the explanation of the drawing there were questions about hygiene in general, and doubts about cleaning umbilical stumps came up. Belief in the use of objects on umbilical stumps was observed, justified by their use with previous children. Another study assessed the knowledge of puerperal women housed in a joint accommodation about newborn hygiene and also found that "most puerperal women believed that covering the stump with bandages was necessary and were unaware of the products suitable for this hygiene." The orientation of mothers is essential, even those who are multipara<sup>15</sup>.

The analysis of the drawings, the explanations provided by the inmates, and the researchers' analysis made it possible to delimit the following childcare actions in a prison environment: breastfeeding care; complementary food care; living environment care, sleep and rest; and care for children's hygiene.

### Study limitations

This study's limitations were due to the restrictions of the prison environment regarding material entry. Only paper and crayons could be made available for the women to make the drawings. Some of the women were also resistant about participating in the study. It was observed that it took some time to develop bonds with the inmates. Some of the women felt shy about drawing or were afraid that their drawings would be sent to a judge and affect their sentence. Even after the purpose of the study was explained, some maintained their decision not to participate.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis of experiencing motherhood in prison brought understanding of the feelings that permeate the development of the maternal role, which is limited for most of these women, given that most of them have children outside the prison. For nursing care, it is important to understand the ideas that women have about caring for their children who are under their care in the facility. It is also necessary to know how they see themselves developing this care, in order to provide them with better guidance based on previous knowledge of women and with environment limitation. That is, this knowledge will guide nursing interventions.

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