

Suicide Attempts and Gender: A Qualitative Analysis in Cuba

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Abstract : Unlike sex, which is constituted by anatomic-physiological differences, gender is a social construction. Our thoughts and behaviors as females and males are not etched in stone by our biology but rather from how society expects us to think and behave based on our sex assignment in the womb. Social expectations, values, and roles are taken on by individuals and shape the ways considered acceptable and linked to our bodies, feelings, and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, these evolve into dire consequences for those who do not meet these disciplinary, economic, and cultural standards. Then, the social learning of gender identity implies the individual's psychological sense of being, and it might be highly linked to a sense of life and suicide attempts. As a result, suicide has been considered a gender issue with differences in the rates and means used by men and women worldwide. Nevertheless, there has been a misunderstanding of the meaning of being male or female in a particular context and how it becomes a risk process for suicide attempts. For this reason, the general objective of the current research is to explain how this process occurs in Cuba. From a Critical Sociology and Social Psychology, a qualitative methodology was developed through six case studies and qualitative in-depth interviews. The analysis is focused on the sequence and interplay between two dimensions of meaning: signifiers and voices. Findings show that the risk process of suicide attempts in Cuba means some patriarchal beliefs and practices as part of informal educational models and some positivist practices in mental health attention. Findings also show that community relations create a sense of belonging, and it is a protection against suicide attempts in Cuba. Those frames of signifiers and voices explain in both males and females but differently when and how they are suffering from isolation, violence, the normalization of emotional awareness, and emotional distress expression. Suicide prevention programs should take gender learning into account as a cultural process.

Keywords : social constructions, gender identity, meanings, suicide attempt

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