Resilience in Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Brazil

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Abstract

My secondary analysis of qualitative data focuses on resilience in women survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Brazil. This research addressed the structural, cultural, and social complexity of resilience and IPV. The study aimed to explore the experiences of women who have suffered from IPV; identify the systemic, institutional, and cultural factors contributing to resilience; and assess individual women's responses. I selected, listened to, transcribed, translated into English, and coded 15 interviews. Using the social ecology model of resilience as my guiding framework, I analyzed the data from the interviews and identified eighteen subthemes along with eight key themes. The study found that women utilized resources that increased their resilience. Relevant socio-demographic information was accessed, while a feminist intersectional approach was adopted in the analysis. In conclusion, investigating how women reorganize their lives after experiencing IPV contributes to developing better empirically based policies and interventions in developing world contexts.

August 18, 2023

Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to the loving memory of one of my best friends, Adsson Magalhães, whose life was marred by the pain of enduring gender-based violence. His unwavering support and belief in my abilities have been an endless source of inspiration. While his untimely loss during this thesis journey left me heartbroken and paralyzed for almost a year, his memory and words of encouragement also fueled my determination to complete this work. I honour his memory and pledge to continue the fight against the injustice of gender-based violence. May our friendship be a guiding light as I strive for a world where everyone can live with dignity, respect, and safety.

Secondly, this thesis is dedicated to the resilient participants of this study. Your bravery in sharing your stories and shedding light on the complexities of intimate partner violence has left an indelible impact. Your strength and courage serve as an inspiration to us all. May your experiences contribute to a deeper understanding and greater support for survivors everywhere.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to all human beings who suffer from gender-based violence. You are not alone. I hope our collective fight raises awareness and fosters change in our world.

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
BWS	Battered Women Syndrome
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa Economic Bloc
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DV	Domestic violence
GBV	Gender-based violence
HR	Human Rights
IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics]
IFT	Intersectional Feminist theory
IPEA	Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada [Institute of Applied Economic Research]
IPV	Intimate partner violence
PTG	Posttraumatic growth
SAQD	Secondary analysis of qualitative data
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SV	Sexual violence
TA	Thematic analysis
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
VAW	Violence against women
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been acknowledged by the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) as a grave infringement upon human rights and a significant public health concern (World Health Organization, 2021a). The UN further recognizes GBV as a crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent measures of social isolation (United Nations, 2020). GBV serves as a broad term encompassing various forms of violence rooted in gender inequality, including intimate partner violence (IPV).

IPV is a ubiquitous and complex issue that affects women worldwide, causing significant physical, psychological, and social harm (World Health Organization, 2021a). Brazil, in particular, grapples with high rates of IPV, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's resilience in the face of such violence. This master's thesis in Global Development Studies aims to contribute to this understanding by examining the socio-ecological resilience of women survivors of IPV in Brazil. "Women survivors" encompasses those who self-identify and align with the societal role and gender of women while having experienced intimate partner violence. In my research, the concept of sex is understood as extending beyond the confines of a binary system that solely recognizes fixed biological categories (female and male). As far as gender, I adopt a constructivist perspective that considers not only the social role and expectations attached to binary sex categories but also the subjects' identity choices, which are dynamic and continuously evolving. In practical terms, the determination of gender was established through the participants' self-identification.

The primary objective of this qualitative research was to explore the experiences of women who have suffered from IPV, identify the systemic, institutional, and cultural factors

contributing to IPV, and assess individual women's responses to it. The research utilized an anonymized secondary analysis of qualitative data obtained from the NOSSAS non-profit organization (NGO), which provides free legal and psychological services to survivors of gender-based violence in Brazil through professional volunteers. A total of 15 interviews were selected for analysis, transcribed, translated into English, and coded.

By investigating how women reorganize their lives after experiencing IPV, this master's thesis aims to contribute to developing empirically based policies and interventions that can support survivors in Brazil and other developing world contexts. Understanding the nuanced dynamics of socio-ecological resilience in the aftermath of IPV is crucial for designing effective interventions and promoting long-term recovery and empowerment for survivors. By examining the structural, cultural, and social complexities of resilience and IPV, this research addressed a literature gap and contributed to the broader discourse on GBV, sustainable development, and social justice. Furthermore, this research endeavours to contribute to ongoing efforts to address IPV and promote gender equity within the broader scope of global development.

This thesis explores first Brazil's demographics, contextual factors, and existing national and international policies and laws. Subsequently, the literature review on resilience and IPV and the methodology are presented. Afterwards, the findings derived from the thematic analysis are presented, offering a comprehensive examination of the factors that influence socio-ecological resilience among women who have experienced IPV in Brazil. Lastly, the conclusion chapter summarizes the key insights gathered from the research.

Brazil Demographics

To understand Brazil's specific contexts and dynamics of IPV, it is essential to examine the country's demographic composition. As a geographically expansive nation, Brazil has a population of 203.1 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2023), culturally diverse with significant regional variations. The country is organized into twenty-six (26) states and one (1) Federal District (DF). These subdivisions are further grouped into five (5) distinct regions: North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, and South, as illustrated in Figure 1. Notably, the Southeast region is home to almost half (42%) of Brazil's total population, encompassing four (4) states: São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Espírito Santo. The biggest city in Brazil is São Paulo, followed by Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Brasília (DF).

Over the course of a decade, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of the Brazilian population identifying themselves as Black or Pardo[1], reaching a current representation of 55.9% of the total population (Figure 2) according to the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE). This trend is particularly pronounced in the North and Northeast regions of the country, which exhibit the highest concentration of individuals identifying as Black or Pardo (G1, 2023). This demographic shift signifies a compelling observation regarding Brazil's racial landscape, wherein the phenomenon of the "blackening of the Brazilian population" (Fundação Cultural Palmares, 2008, p. 1) reflects changes in societal perceptions rather than purely demographic factors. Brazil is progressively embracing its identity as a nation predominantly composed of Black

[1] Pardo is a term historically used in Brazil to refer to individuals of mixed racial backgrounds, specifically those of mixed Indigenous, European, and African ancestry.

individuals. This transformative development has become increasingly apparent over the past three decades, primarily influenced by the impact of the *Movimento Negro* (Black Movement) in the country (Fundação Cultural Palmares, 2008).

Figure 1

2022 Demographic Census (First Results)

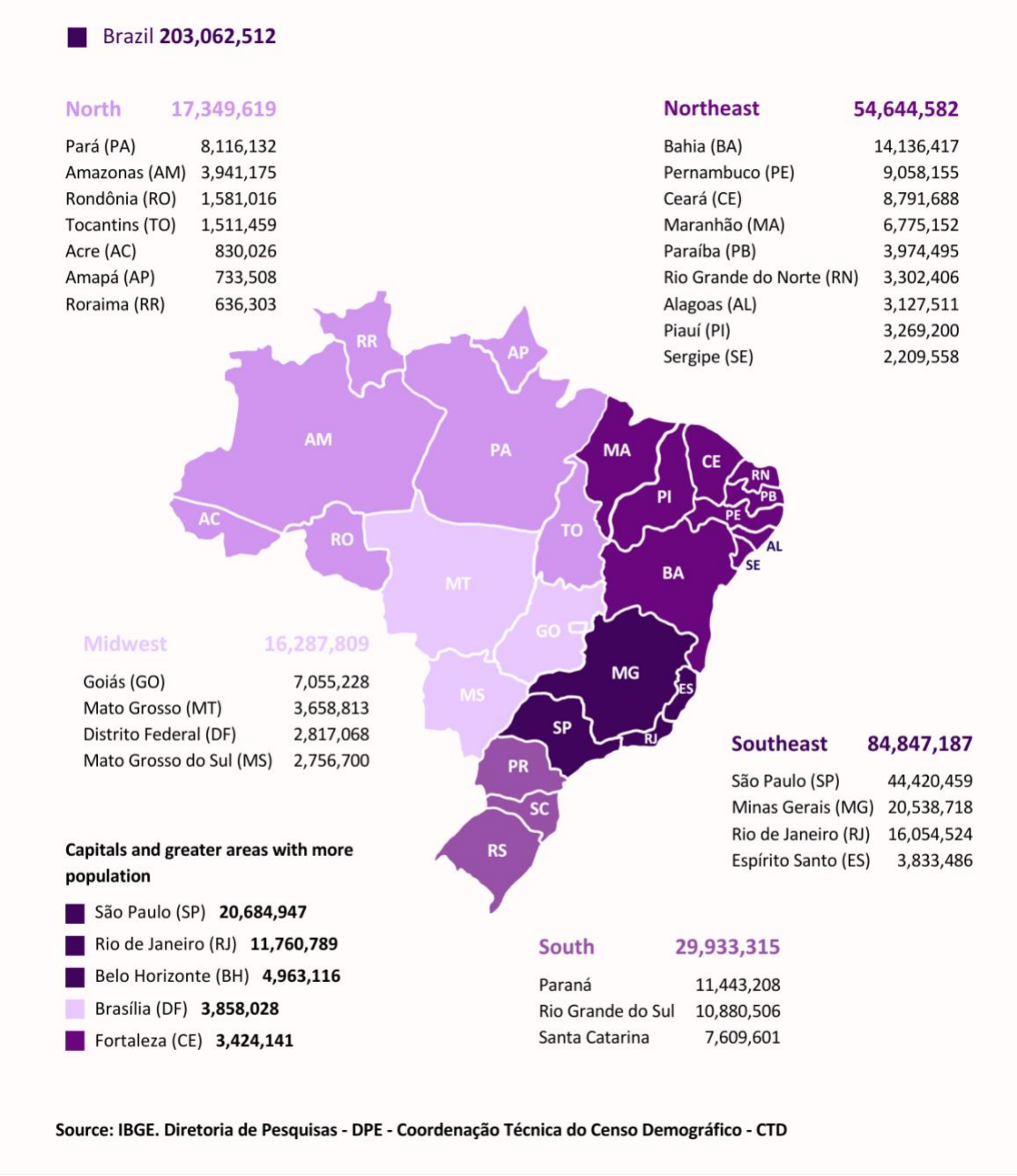
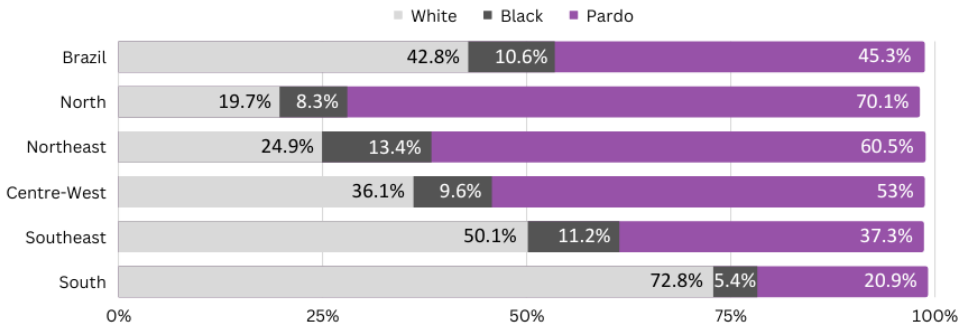


Figure 2

Distribution of The Brazilian Population According to Race in Brazil and Major Regions.



Source: G1 | IBGE

As for the Indigenous population within Brazil, the most recent report from the 2022 Census reveals a substantial increase of at least 89% over the past 2010 Census, resulting in a population approximately of 1.7 million individuals. However, this population still represents less than 0.83% of Brazilians. This notable rise can be attributed to broadening the approach, involving community leaders directly in gathering data and encompassing additional indigenous areas beyond the officially demarcated territories (IBGE, 2023).

The social inequality that exists in the country is also recognized internationally. According to IBGE (2022), the concentration of people living in extreme poverty in the Northeast is the biggest among the five Brazilian regions having a proportional value of 53.2%, while 44.8% live in poverty of total Brazil poverty concentration. Notably, this region is characterized by predominantly Black and Pardo populations (Figure 2). Overall, northern states have poverty rates 2.7 times higher than southern states, with an average income per capita approximately 52 percent lower (The World Bank, 2022).

Despite significant gains in earlier decades, deep economic disparities persist in the country. According to The World Bank (2022) recent report, vulnerability remains high among historically poor population groups. Almost three out of every ten impoverished individuals are Afro-Brazilian women residing in urban areas. Poverty affects three-quarters of children in rural areas. These economic disparities significantly impact individuals from an early age, hindering their human capital accumulation. Mothers with lower education levels are less likely to attend prenatal care visits compared to those with higher education. Only 39% of mothers with no formal education attend seven or more visits, while 85% of mothers with 12 or more years of schooling do. Moreover, Intergenerational education mobility progresses slowly in these most vulnerable groups; at the current rate of progress, it is projected that after three generations, only 12% of people with low incomes will have attained tertiary education.

Gender inequality continues to have a significant impact on social and economic outcomes. Although there has been progress in increasing women's access to the labour market, with women over 20 years old having their own income growing from 35% to 76% between 1976 and 2013, women still face lower labour market participation compared to men. This issue is even more pronounced among impoverished women. Overall, only 42 percent of women participate in the labour market. One key factor contributing to this imbalance is the persistent gender pay gap, which unjustly compensates women despite comparable or higher qualifications. Limited access to daycare and preschool facilities also hinders female labor force participation, as evidenced by Brazilian women spending nearly twice the time on caregiving and household chores compared to men in 2019 (21.4 hours vs. 11.0 hours). Regional disparities are evident, with the Northeast Region displaying the greatest inequality and the

Southeast Region offering higher time allocation for women (22.1 hours). Additionally, Black or Pardo women dedicated more hours (22.0) than white women (20.7), whereas men's indicators remained consistent irrespective of color, race, or region. Furthermore, women are more susceptible to domestic violence, further curtailing their agency and economic opportunities (The World Bank, 2022).

Racial inequality is responsible for one of the most abysmal gaps, traced back to the enduring legacy of slavery spanning 354 years in the country. Following this extended period of enslavement, the Black population did not receive equitable opportunities for inclusion compared to the immigrants who arrived during industrialization. Despite lacking formal training, these immigrants were afforded access to gainful employment and land, in contrast to the limited avenues available to the Black community (Ribeiro, 2018).

In light of the historical circumstances, Black and Pardo individuals constitute 73.7% of the country's impoverished, Whites constitute 25.4% and others 0.9% (IBGE, 2022). These disparities were also observed in poverty and extreme poverty rates: in 2021, 11% of Black and Pardo individuals were extremely impoverished compared to 5% among White individuals, and 37.7% were living in poverty compared to 18.6% of White individuals. Among Black or Pardo women, these percentages of impoverishment and extreme impoverishment were even higher, reaching 11.6% and 39.0%, respectively. The household arrangements headed by Black or Pardo women, without a spouse but with children under the age of 14 experienced the highest incidence of poverty: 29.2% of residents in these households had a per capita household income of less than US$1.90, and 69.5% had less than US$5.50 (IBGE, 2022).

Limited social mobility plays a significant role in perpetuating this historical problem. When comparing parents to their children, about 15% of Afro-Brazilian children achieve a tertiary education degree or higher, more than double the rate of their parents (6%). In comparison, the average rates for the overall Brazilian population are 22% and 10%, respectively (The World Bank, 2022). Regarding labour income, the average income of White workers was R$3,099, which far exceeded that of Black (R$1,764) and Pardo workers (R$1,814). More than half (53.8%) of workers in the country in 2021 were Black or Pardo; however, these groups, together, occupied only 29.5% of managerial positions, while Whites occupied 69.0% of them (IBGE, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Intimate Partner Violence, Global Development, and Intersectionality

For almost three decades, the United Nations and women's health and rights organizations have recognized GBV as a severe violation of human rights and a matter of public health (United Nations, 2020). At the international level, calls for action to address VAW can be traced back to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, along with numerous other global and regional agreements and official statements (United Nations, 2020; World Health Organization, 2021a).

GBV is a general term that describes all types of violence related to unequal genders, such as VAW, IPV, and sexual violence (SV), to mention a few. IPV, in particular, is understood as a "behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and

controlling behaviours” (World Health Organization, 2021b, p. 1). The term "domestic abuse" or "domestic violence" (DV) is commonly used in older literature and legislation. It is used as synonym of IPV, but it also involves harmful actions within a household, which can affect not only partners but also children, the elderly, and other family members. Furthermore, SV is defined as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and other non-contact forms" (World Health Organization, 2021b, p. 1).

GBV can be in the form of physical, psychological, sexual or socio-economic violence. It can take shape as IPV, child sexual abuse, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and the trafficking of individuals for sexual exploitation, entailing sexual slavery, domestic servitude, and servile forms of marriage. Prominent examples of GBV comprise rape, sexual assault, physical assault, forced marriage, denial of resources, opportunities, or services, as well as psychological or emotional abuse (United Nations, 2020).

GBV transcends social strata, cultural boundaries, and diverse contexts. Unfortunately, it remains significantly under-reported for several reasons. These encompass apprehension regarding retaliation from the perpetrator, who is often known to the victim, concerns over the gruelling trial process following the report, and a lack of confidence in the efficacy of justice and public security institutions (Souza & Adesse, 2005). The UN deems it has become a crisis that has intensified further with the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation, with a possible increase in underreported rates (United Nations, 2020).

Shiva (2013) asserts that “violence against women is as old as patriarchy. Traditional patriarchy has structured our worldviews, mindsets, and social and cultural worlds, based on domination over women and denying their full humanity and right to equality” (p. 249). GBV is the vehicle by which gender inequalities are being reinforced and gender discrimination consolidated (United Nations, 2020).

Latin American and global feminist scholars emphasize the pivotal role of historical colonial[2] processes intertwined with capitalism and patriarchy in shaping the foundational structures of contemporary violence against women. Saffioti's framework intricately analyzes how class, gender, and race/ethnicity interplay in Brazilian society, revealing their symbiotic link as expressions of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism (Saffioti, 2004). Federici's seminal work reinforces the idea that violence, originating from capitalist primitive accumulation, is inextricably interwoven with colonialism, racism, and patriarchy, perpetuating the ongoing erasure, persecution, and degradation of women. Her analysis highlights the integration of gender hierarchies and the devaluation of reproductive labour within the capitalist paradigm (Federici et al., 2019). Segato's (2016) concept of "minorización” ["minorization”] (p. 91) unveils the relegation of women's concerns to the private sphere due to colonial modernity's imposition, thus underlining the persistent structural gender violence rooted in colonial histories. This relegation implies considering women's issues inferior, confined to the intimate and specific realms. Factors contributing to women's marginalization are tied to the shift from

[2] The period of colonization in Brazil and Latin America lasted from the late 15th century to the early 19th century, culminating in the early 1800s with the independence of several Latin American countries from European colonial rule. Including Brazil that remained a Portuguese colony until 1822 when it declared its independence and became the Empire of Brazil under Emperor Dom Pedro I.

communal to modern societies, particularly in Latin America's transition to colonial modernity. This transition, initiated by conquest and colonization, was then administered by Creole[3] elites.

GBV is understood as a form of violence that occurs due to structural inequality between men and women. On the one hand, this violence is perceived as a force that structurally solidifies gender relations, as if both the victim and the aggressor possess rigid and defined identities. On the other hand, it establishes itself in a harmful manner, exerting control and facing minimal resistance from both society and institutions (Bandeira, 2017). The etiology of such violence lies within the established norms, stereotypes, and power dynamics that perpetuate the subordination of women while reinforcing the notion of their inferiority to men. IPV and other variants of VAW are sustained by cultural norms that endorse male ownership and dominance over women, in addition to an assortment of gender stereotypes and patterns of patriarchal relationships. It is crucial to recognize that IPV is not an isolated or individual predicament but rather a social phenomenon deeply rooted in the structural power imbalances between men and women (Gonzales, 1984; Ribeiro, 2018).

The distinctiveness of IPV compared to other types of trauma has been noted by several researchers. Unlike traumas that are one-time occurrences, such as natural disasters, IPV is an ongoing and often prolonged event (Ulloa et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals who experience IPV may find themselves in complex social relationships that involve love, marriage, financial dependence, and the presence of children, which can further complicate their decision-making process regarding leaving or staying with an abusive partner (Smith, 2003). The dynamics of

[3] The term "Creoles" historically referred to individuals of European descent who were born in the Latin America and parts of the Caribbean, particularly during the colonial period.

Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS) can also play a significant role in understanding the complexities and challenges faced by survivors of IPV.

BWS is a psychological condition affecting mainly women who endure prolonged abuse from an intimate partner. Although not a formal medical diagnosis, it is considered a legal concept, often invoked in defence cases for abused women, like those resorting to self-defence. The syndrome involves a cycle of abuse and control, eliciting emotional and behavioural responses such as fear, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and helplessness, leaving victims feeling trapped. The cycle comprises tension-building, acute battering incidents, and a honeymoon phase, repeating and further deteriorating the victim's psychological state, making it harder to leave the abusive relationship (Walker, 2006). Important to emphasize that the term has faced criticism for potentially perpetuating victim-blaming and implying psychological flaws in victims for staying in such relationships.

Regarding perpetuating victim-blaming, in popular Brazilian and worldwide discourse, a concerning narrative often arises, suggesting that a woman tolerates abuse because she enjoys it, and if she dislikes it, she would simply leave the relationship. These comments and beliefs not only dismiss and disregard women's autonomy but also overlook their unique circumstances, including the significant cultural and societal differences they face compared to men. This perpetuates harmful attitudes, implying that women are incapable of making informed decisions or somehow deserve the violence they endure. Such discourses are deeply rooted in patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies, serving to justify and perpetuate VAW, including acts like rape, which are wrongly portrayed as something the woman supposedly desires or invites, even if she explicitly says "no."

In intimate relationships, the crimes are driven by various factors, imposed or internalized, predominantly by the aggressor. Motivations behind such violence include feelings of “hatred, anger, contempt, humiliation, the perception of female defiance to male desires, uncontrolled emotions, and the loss of masculine prestige” (p. 22). In patriarchal societies where notions of honour and pride are tangled with the concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” there is a tendency for men to strive for dominance over women's bodies and sexual autonomy. When this sense of male power is questioned or disrupted, resorting to violence emerges as a common reaction. Notwithstanding, a significant portion, approximately 50%, of murders targeting women are motivated by the women's desire to leave or suspicions of adultery. As a result, most of these crimes are classified as intimate feminicides (Bandeira, 2017).

The World Health Organization (2021a) findings indicate that the highest occurrence of physical and/or sexual IPV among women aged 15 to 49 who have ever been married or in a partnership is observed in the least Developed Countries. The report estimates that approximately 37% of these women experience IPV in their lifetime, ranging from 33% to 42%. This report estimates that, on average, 736 million to 852 million women aged 15 years or older (nearly one-third) experienced at least one of these forms of violence in their lifetime in 2018. These findings affirm that physical and sexual IPV, as well as sexual violence more broadly, continue to be widespread issues affecting the lives of women and adolescent girls globally.

According to Shiva (2013), there is a connection between unfair economic policies and the intensified brutality of crimes against women due to merging traditional patriarchal structures with capitalist structures. She also portrays that there are contributory factors from

neoliberalism that produce brutal and vicious violence against women—first, the focus on economic growth, which devalues other forms of contributions. In patriarchal economic models, some types of production, knowledge, and self-efficiency models are considered “non-production,” “non-knowledge,” and “deficiency,” respectively. Family care, household chores and all production for the family, children and communities are considered “non-productive” and “economically inactive.” Furthermore, the limited caregiving roles that are considered "paid" are often associated with low wages, exemplified by professions such as domestic employees, nannies, kindergarten teachers, and daycare professionals. Most of these roles are played by women, who, in this model, have their activities devalued. For Shiva (2013), “the rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked.” The more economically vulnerable a woman becomes, the more vulnerable she is to all forms of violence.

The feminist political position contests “the patriarchal order, the utopia of the free, self-regulating market and the centrally-organized economy” (Wanderley, 2017, p. 94). When confronting the concepts of economics that organize power relations, which have always been based on sexual divisions of labour, feminist theories demand a radical reformulation of the economic model. This reformulation “place[s] human life at the centre of political decision-making” (Wanderley, 2017, p. 94). For feminists, economic reforms must be based on social reforms, as society and the economy are interconnected. These reforms must eliminate gender inequality and respect diversity rather than aggravating and intensifying all forms of injustice, violence and inequality. Inequalities of gender and class become further amplified by other forms of social inequality that exist in different societies, such as race, religion, gender identity,

and so on. For this reason, feminists support a sustainable, peaceful movement and economies that respect diversity (Shiva, 1997; Wanderley, 2017).

Among the diverse currents of feminist thought, the intersectional feminist perspective has been the feminist approach that best explains the complexity of the violence suffered by girls and women. IFT (intersectional feminist theory) as interdisciplinary scholarship, analyses historical patterns of oppression based on race, class, gender, age and sexuality through the lens of ideological, political, and economic power systems (McCann & Kim, 2017, p. 64). Thus, intersectionality as a tool can evaluate contexts and theories, taking into account a perspective that considers the intersections between other categories besides gender, being able to deal with more than one form of oppression and discrimination simultaneously. Since discriminatory processes are complex, it is not possible to understand them in isolation. Valuing differences combined with intersectional studies has the power to produce investigations from a less fixed and dichotomous view in relation to diversities.

To address VAW effectively, it becomes crucial to broaden our understanding of gender beyond its binary categorization. Moreover, it is essential to recognize and value the interconnected nature of gender with other intersecting factors such as race, educational level, and social class. These intersections can only be comprehended holistically by considering the complex interplay of social experiences (Barbosa et al., 2020). By embracing and incorporating intersectional studies, which value and appreciate differences, scholarly inquiries can adopt a more fluid and nuanced stance toward diverse experiences, departing from rigid and dichotomous frameworks.

Intersectionality refers to the intricate interplay of various systems of power that concurrently and synergistically influence our existence and political choices (McCann & Kim, 2017). For IFT, violence against women occurs differently depending on race or class as a consequence of actions mediated by institutions, including the state, public policies and economics. In Brazil, the data shows that Black women suffer more IPV and sexual violence, and most public policies are not accessible to the Black population, the impoverished, and in the countryside or rural areas (Cerqueira & Bueno, 2020). Black feminist in Brazil have been employing intersectionality even before its conceptualization by Kimberlé Crenshaw, exposing the absence of Black women in the political agendas of both the women's and Black movements. Moreover, they highlight that Black women are consistently at a disadvantage when compared to White women and Black and White men (Goes, 2019).

For example, the paper “Racismo e Sexismo na Cultura Brasileira” (1984) (Racism and sexism in Brazilian Culture) by Lélia Gonzalez played a crucial role in introducing “the dual phenomenon of racism and sexism” (p. 224) to Brazilian feminism, advocating for a decolonial and anti-racist approach. She highlighted the specific forms of discrimination and marginalization faced by Black women, who are affected by racism and sexism. Furthermore, Gonzalez emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing the knowledge and experiences of marginalized communities. She advocated for centring Black women's voices and perspectives in feminist theory and activism, challenging the dominant narratives that often excluded or marginalized them. She also critiqued the Eurocentric foundations of Western feminism and called for the decolonization of knowledge production. She argued that the experiences and struggles of Black women and other marginalized groups should be

acknowledged and incorporated into broader feminist discourses to create more inclusive and effective movements for social change (Gonzales, 1984).

Sueli Carneiro (2003), also a Black feminist in Brazil, criticized White feminism for its failure to recognize the distinct experiences and roles of black women in society. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing the diversity within the category of women, particularly focusing on the experiences of Black women who have historically faced intersecting oppressions of racism and sexism. For her, the current Black women's movement in Brazil seeks to address the intersections of race, class, and gender, incorporating historical struggles of black movements and women's rights. By "blackening" the feminist movement, it aims to bring attention to racial issues in shaping policies related to violence, health, and employment disparities faced by non-white women.

Crenshaw (1989) contends that intersectionality elucidates the phenomenon wherein women encounter discrimination stemming from multiple aspects of their identities. In essence, intersectionality serves as a metaphor to convey that individuals may face discrimination due to their race from one standpoint while simultaneously encountering gender-based discrimination from another perspective, resulting in complex and unforeseen repercussions in their lives. It also implies that women might encounter discrimination at different intersecting points while experiencing privilege in other realms (McCann & Kim, 2017).

Within the discourse surrounding intersectionality, a pivotal aspect of the discussion revolves around the definition and conception of "woman," which necessitates the consideration of economic, political, cultural, physical, subjective, and experiential factors. In this regard, the empirical evidence from Brazil aligns with the contentions of intersectional

feminist theorists, emphasizing the imperative of comprehending race, gender, class, and sexuality as components of the social structure. Rather than perceiving these categories as mere descriptors of individual identities, they emerge as crucial mechanisms that perpetuate inequalities and give rise to distinct social groups. In essence, it is fundamental to recognize that individuals situated in different social locations, such as a Black woman compared to a White woman, will inevitably encounter disparate experiences, thereby influencing their engagement with gender dynamics (Hill Collins, 1990).

Importance of Addressing IPV in Brazil

Brazil maintains its systemic significance for the global economy and possesses valuable natural assets. The country contributes to global public goods and serves as a laboratory for policy innovation, offering valuable insights and lessons for other nations. This is exemplified by Brazil's remarkable experiences with initiatives such as “Bolsa Família” (Family Benefits), *the* “Programa de Aquisição de Alimentos” (Food Purchase Program), and “Cédula de Produto Rural” (Crop Bonds) (World Bank, 2023). Moreover, Brazil holds a prominent position within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) economic bloc, which comprises the world's most rapidly expanding economies of its time. The BRICS nations aim to establish themselves as representatives of the Global South, offering an alternative model to the established G7 economies (DW, 2023).

In addition to its economic significance, Brazil must ensure that its social development aligns with the legal frameworks, policies, and institutions internationally. Brazil's adherence to and fulfillment of its international obligations regarding human rights, social justice, and inclusive governance play a pivotal role in achieving this objective. The advancement of social

development encompasses various dimensions, including but not limited to education, healthcare, poverty reduction, gender equity, and access to justice. By upholding these principles and actively addressing societal challenges, Brazil can bridge the gap between its legislation and the livelihood of its citizens, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society that is in harmony with its international commitments and responsibilities.

Researching GBV in Brazil is of paramount importance to improve social development. Overall, research in GBV can provide critical insights into the prevalence, causes, and consequences of these forms of violence, which are pervasive issues in Brazilian society. By understanding the underlying factors contributing to IPV specifically, policymakers and practitioners can design and implement effective interventions and policies to combat these challenges. Moreover, GBV research can shed light on the societal norms, cultural attitudes, and structural inequalities that perpetuate violence against women, enabling targeted efforts to address these root causes. Thus, this present thesis ultimately contributes to identifying gaps in its legal and institutional frameworks, ensuring human rights protection, and working towards creating a society that upholds the principles of equity, justice, and respect for all, regardless of gender.

The Legal and Policy Framework

International Human Rights and Gender-Based Violence

After the atrocities that originated in the Second World War, the UN created and adopted, without any objection, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10th, 1948. The declaration is grounded in the principle that every individual, regardless of their origin, race, gender, sex, or age, is inherently entitled to freedom and

equality in both dignity and rights from birth. Thus, human rights (HR) are understood as every human's universal, equal and inalienable rights (Donnelly, 2013). Human rights are not a privilege and cannot be graded or revoked. Also, human rights are not values. They are rights "traditionally […] thought […] as moral rights of the highest order" (Donnelly, 2013, p. 11).

As the most translated document in the world, the UDHR is also one of the most important documents of the last century. It has a high moral and political significance internationally as it is continuously used by governments, individuals, and non-governmental groups to take action (Welch, 2015). In many cases, HR has become an international and even national legal right and is used as a last resort regarding rights. In other words, in the field of law, human rights are often used in an auxiliary way as a last resort when no other right is available (Donnelly, 2013). Thus, as Donnelly (2013) affirms, "human rights claims characteristically seek to challenge or change existing institutions, practices, or norms—especially legal practices" (p. 12).

Gender equality and women's rights are fundamental elements of the UDHR. Despite being universal and applying equally to men and women, in practice, the denial of women's fundamental human rights is persistent and widespread. Due to the recurring violation, it was later recognized that certain rights are specific to women. The most important instrument internationally was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. According to United Nations Population Fund (2011), CEDAW

> defines the right of women to be free from all forms of discrimination and sets out core principles to protect this right. It also establishes an agenda for national action to end discrimination and provides the basis for achieving equality between men and women.

> It does so by affirming women's equal access to – and equal opportunities in – political and public life as well as education, health and employment. CEDAW is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women. (p. 11)

Although the Convention does not explain the theme of violence against women, CEDAW has adopted a relevant general recommendation No. 19 on this matter, highlighting that:

> Family violence is one of the most insidious forms of violence against women. It is prevalent in all societies. Within family relationships, women of all ages are subjected to violence of all kinds, including battering, rape, other forms of sexual assault, and mental and other forms of violence, which are perpetuated by traditional attitudes. Lack of economic independence forces many women to stay in violent relationships. Men's abrogation of their family responsibilities can be a form of violence and coercion. These forms of violence put women's health at risk and impair their ability to participate in family life and public life on a basis of equality. (CEDAW General Recommendation No, 19, 1992, p. 4)

In the following years, with global conferences and summits, the slogan "Women's Rights are Human Rights" became a meaningful discussion. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the UN in 1993, as well as the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence Against Women (Belém do Pará Convention) in 1994, recognize that violence against women in the public or private sphere is a severe violation of human rights and totally or partly limits the exercise of other fundamental rights.

Decades later, in 2015, the UN established a set of global objectives, the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), to serve as a comprehensive framework that urges collective action towards eradicating poverty, safeguarding the environment, and fostering peace and prosperity for all individuals by 2030. Gender equality is a fundamental component of the SDGs. Goal 5 of the SDGs focuses explicitly on “achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls” (United Nations, 2015, p. 1). It aims to eliminate discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and girls and ensure their full and equal participation in all aspects of society. It addresses issues such as equal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political participation. Gender equity is considered essential for sustainable development, as it recognizes the importance of creating inclusive and equitable societies that promote all individuals' well-being and rights, regardless of gender. Achieving gender equity is a moral imperative and crucial for achieving the broader goals of poverty eradication, economic growth, and social progress (United Nations, 2015).

As universal proposals, the SDGs and UN documents are not exempt from having drawbacks. The UN's recognition of the importance of combatting VAW and its efforts to achieve gender equity are commendable, but certain UN documents reveal a notable limitation in their failure to adequately address the crucial notion that gender equity is a product of deeply entrenched gender inequity perpetuated by patriarchal systems. Additionally, the proposed universal framework of HR, while aiming to promote global standards, encounters resistance in some national contexts due to perceptions of its Euro and Western-centric nature, which can lead to the oversight of local traditions and contexts. This resistance presents a challenge in effectively addressing gender equity and VAW on a global scale, necessitating the

acknowledgment and accommodation of diverse cultural perspectives to develop comprehensive strategies that resonate with and empower all individuals, regardless of their background (Saghaye-Biria, 2018; Shaheed & Richter, 2018).

History of Gender-Based Violence Laws and International Agreements in Brazil

Strong feminist movements have consolidated in Brazil since the 1970s. These non-governmental initiatives were instrumental in creating spaces to assist women in situations of violence. After pressure from feminist movements, in the mid-1980s, the first police stations specialized in serving women were created in Brazil (Ávila, 2018; Bonetti et al., 2016). In addition, only from 1985 that women had their achievements expanded with the creation of the Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher – CNDM [National Council for Women's Rights] and, shortly after that, in 1988, the Federal Constitution equalized men and women in rights and duties to protect women's rights (Silva & Monteiro, 2015). Despite Brazil having signed the CEDAW in 1979 and the Belém do Pará Convention in 1994, the Brazilian legal system has not presented any other gender perspectives until the early 2000s (Ávila, 2018).

Brazilian legislation on domestic violence is recent. In 2001, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights convicted Brazil in the case of Maria da Penha, pointing out omissions and negligence in addressing IPV. After enduring two attempted murders by her husband, Penha became paraplegic. Shockingly, her husband remained free while the case awaited trial for an astonishing 20 years. This ruling, with intense feminist advocacies, prompted the Brazilian Parliament to approve Law 11,340 / 2006, also referred to as the Maria da Penha Law (Ávila, 2018).

As the most critical law related to GBV created in the country, Maria da Penha Law brought essential changes to the traditional criminal justice system. According to Beiras et al. (2012), this law leads to a threefold increase in penalties for domestic violence against women. This change resulted in enhanced protection mechanisms for victims. Additionally, it eliminated the option of alternative sentences for perpetrators, allowing for immediate apprehension during acts of violence. This was a pivotal change, as previously, women victims of aggression were supported by a law that regulated less severe offences, often leading to the aggressor's sentence being converted into community service. The Maria da Penha Law also introduces preventive measures to safeguard women facing aggression, promoting gender-focused studies and research on domestic and family VAW and fostering agreements and partnerships to implement programs to eradicate such violence within households and families.

The Maria da Penha Law uses the broad concept of domestic and family violence against women and covers all intimate affective relations, which include dating violence. Also, the law applies to all gender-based violent actions, such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic or moral. It is essential to mention that the term domestic is very broad insofar as it refers to violence against older adults and children. Therefore, this nomenclature should be rethought when the objective is to denounce VAW (Ávila, 2018, p. 18).

The intervention order was one of this law's most critical new procedures. Now, women have support from the moment they report to the police. The officer must assist her and offer urgent protective measures, such as: “exclusion of the respondent from the residence; prohibition of approaching and contacting the victim, child or relatives; suspension or cancellation of firearms authority; temporary maintenance allowance; or other measures

adequate to the situation" (Ávila, 2018, p. 20). In addition, the complaint cannot be removed anymore. This is different from the past because, in most cases, women suffered threats from their aggressors or regretted reporting for other reasons, suffering many more years of aggression.

In the 2010s, discussions in Brazil about the need to incorporate a gender perspective into legal responses have increased, particularly in cases of intimate partner homicide. Following the National Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry on Violence Against Women in Brazil and similar legislation in 14 other Latin American countries, in 2015, the crime of feminicide – murders of women committed on the grounds of gender – was introduced into the Brazilian Penal Code (Ávila, 2018).

In this new law, when homicide is identified as committed against women for reasons of their gender, the penalty should be aggravated. The Brazilian *Penal Code*, article 121, § 2º. A explains: "There are reasons related to the condition of the female sex when the crime is related to: (i) domestic and family violence; (ii) contempt or discrimination towards the condition of being women." In addition, the penalty is also aggravated when the violence is against pregnant women, children under 14 years old, or elders older than 60 (Ávila, 2018).

In general, initiatives to combat VAW have been isolated actions arising from the creation of The National Secretary of Women's Policies in 2003. This body coordinated the integration of federal, state and local governments to address gender violence. Only in 2011, as expected from the Maria da Penha Law, the Federal Government launched several support network services for women. Among them: Specialized Women's Service Centers, Shelter Houses, Provisional Shelter Houses, Specialized Police Offices for Women, Nucleus or Service

Points for Women in the Common Police Stations, Public Defenders and Women's Defenders (Specialized), Specialized Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women, Specialized and Prosecutor's Offices, House of the Brazilian Woman, General Health Services and Health Services focused on dealing with cases of sexual and domestic violence.

In 2021, the Brazilian legislature passed several crucial changes to expand the legal protections for women facing IPV. On March 31st, Law 14,132 was enacted, adding the crime of persecution to the penal code and increasing the penalty for persecution cases motivated by the victim's gender. A few months later, in June, Law 14,164 was amended to include instructions on violence prevention against women in primary education curricula and established the School Week to Combat Violence against Women, representing a significant step forward in preventing such violence. In July, Law 14,188 established the Red-Light program against IPV to combat domestic and family VAW, modifying the penalty for superficial bodily injury committed against women due to their gender and creating the criminal offence of psychological violence against women. Additionally, Law 14,232/2021 was enacted to establish the “Política Nacional de Dados e Informações relacionadas à Violência contra as Mulheres” [National Policy on Data and Information related to Violence against Women], and Law 14,330/2022 included the National Plan for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women in the National Public Security and Social Defense Policy.

Criticisms of the Law and its Application

Despite Brazil's efforts in implementing public policies and supporting law services to protect women, VAW remains a significant issue in the country. The enactment of Brazilian laws sparked critical discussions on VAW, raising social awareness, leading to new services, and

affecting professional practices. However, the prevalence of DV and feminicide continues to increase annually. Beiras et al. (2012) highlight the criminal justice system's selectivity, which disproportionately affects Black and economically disadvantaged individuals, leading to an overrepresentation of these groups among aggressors rather than middle-class White individuals. As a result, it is argued that the law addressing DV may unintentionally contribute to the structural process of criminalizing poverty and exerting control over marginalized communities.

It is essential to recognize the need for accountability for the act of violence. However, some authors believe that prison is not always the best option, given the complexity of these types of conflict. Because Brazilian defenders and jurists point out that the Brazilian prison system fails to re-socialize the prisoner. In addition, this system has been a form of inequality, perpetuating more violence (Ramos de Mello, 2009). Prison would be recommended for extreme cases as a last alternative (Beiras et al., 2012).

Historically, all the services in Brazil were rendered and acted toward women. Although the law, in a way, recognizes that to intervene in the context of domestic and family violence, from the perspective of gender, it is necessary to implement actions that can also include men. Only in mid-2021, as previously mentioned, the recently amended Law no. 14,164, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, started to include content on preventing VAW in the elementary education curriculum. It is believed that this was a critical step in the struggle against structural violence against women in the country.

For Beiras et al. (2012), working with men, together with work done with women, is a more effective alternative to reducing, containing and preventing violence in conjugality. For

the authors, it is possible to discuss gender, patriarchy, and domination issues, among other themes, with men. In addition, it is vital to consider public policies in this sector that discuss power relations, question the heteronormative and promote integration: actions that contemplate the complexity and diversity of the theme. It is urgent to think about ways to maintain relationships that seek to respect each other.

Intimate Partner Violence and Feminicide in Brazil

Despite underreporting, the rate of GBV in the case of Brazil is alarming: in 2021, Brazil had 230,861 reports of domestic violence and 227,753 reports in 2020 (Cerqueira et al., 2021). This data pertains exclusively to deliberate acts of physical harm inflicted within a domestic setting. In a global context, Brazil's rates of physical or sexual, or both, IPV among women aged 15-49 who have ever been in a partnership are comparable to those observed in countries such as Mexico and South Africa while being relatively lower than the majority of Latin American nations (Sardinha et al., 2022).

Between 2020 and 2021, Brazil witnessed a significant increase in emergency calls to the military police for assistance in domestic violence, with around 23,000 new calls. This indicates that at least one person called per minute in 2021, reporting domestic violence incidents. On the other hand, there was a 5.3% drop in the total number of other 190 calls unrelated to domestic violence during the same period. While the military police's response to domestic violence calls and how victims are assisted requires further exploration, the rise in calls may suggest that either incidents of violence against women have increased or that people have become less tolerant of such violence in the domestic setting. It's worth noting that the

emergency call does not necessarily have to be made by the victim but can be from a concerned neighbour, family member, or friend (Bueno et al., 2021).

According to data from the Brazilian National Council of Justice, gathered in the Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (Brazilian Public Security Forum), there was an alarming increase of nearly 45% in the number of new cases of domestic violence per 100 thousand women, rising from 404 in 2016 to 587 in 2021 (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a). Even more concerning, the number of feminicides surged by 44.3% during the same period, escalating from 929 cases in 2016 to 1,341 in 2021 (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a). This means that in 2021, Brazil experienced one feminicide every 6.5 hours. Additionally, the country recorded 5,789 attempted murders of women and 2,028 attempted feminicides in the same year. As a point of reference, in 2021, Canada's gender-related homicide rate for women and girls was 0.54 per 100,000 population, while Brazil's rate for feminicide was over double at 1.22 per 100,000 women (Sutton, 2023).

The classification of feminicide as a crime raises significant concerns since the Law leaves the typification in framing feminicide cases to government employees based on states' capacities. This leads to challenges in categorizing cases as feminicides, which can vary depending on the institutional capacities of different states. For instance, at the national level in 2021, feminicides accounted for 34.6% of intentional homicides. However, substantial variations exist among states. For example, in Ceará, only 9.1% of homicides of women were classified as feminicides, while in Tocantins and the Federal District, the proportions were 55.3% and 58.1%, respectively. It is believed that police authorities may find it easier to label a homicide as feminicide when it occurs within the domestic context and involves evidence of a

known perpetrator, such as a partner or former partner (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a).

Although the challenges in typification are recognized, the feminicide rates in different states of Brazil provide valuable insights into local realities. In 2021, Acre, Tocantins, and Mato Grosso do Sul reported feminicide rates of 2.6 per 100,000 women, more than double the national rate of 1.2 feminicides per 100,000 women. In contrast, São Paulo had a lower rate of 0.6 female victims of feminicide per 100,000 women. Females of all age groups fall victim to feminicide, with a higher prevalence during their reproductive years. As evidenced in other studies (Meneghel & Portella, 2017), women often attempt to escape violence by ending the relationship, but this moment also increases their vulnerability, leading to a rise in violence. (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a).

The racial difference in feminicide victims is smaller than in other intentional violent deaths. Of feminicide victims, 37.5% are White, and 62% are Black. However, among other intentional violent deaths, 70.7% are Black, and only 28.6% are White. According to the Atlas da Violência (Violence Atlas) these findings suggest a potential underreporting of Black women as feminicide victims. They hypothesized that police authorities may classify homicides of Black women less often as feminicides, despite the killings being motivated by gender. More Black women are categorized as intentional homicide victims, while this happens less frequently with White women. This hypothesis gains support when analyzing the overall mortality of women due to aggression over the last decade, revealing a decrease in murders of White women and an increase in those of Black women, exacerbating the racial disparity in lethal violence. Further research is required to delve deeper into this issue (Cerqueira & Bueno, 2020).

The perpetration of violence against women is a crucial aspect to consider, alongside race/colour and age. In cases of intentional violent deaths, the main perpetrator remains unknown in the majority (82.7%). However, in feminicides, the primary perpetrator is the victim's partner or ex-partner (81.7%), often followed by a relative (14.4%). This indicates that intimate feminicides are more recognizable by the police. Cold weapons are the most commonly used instruments in feminicides (50%), followed by firearms (29.2%). Conversely, firearms are the primary weapon in other homicides of women (65%), followed by cold weapons (22.1%). Studies have shown that the presence of a firearm in a DV situation significantly increases the risk of a woman being killed by her partner. The recent changes in gun control legislation under the Jair Bolsonaro government (2019-2022), resulting in a surge in the number of armed civilians, raise concerns about a potential increase in feminicides. Different studies have already shown that the existence of a gun in the home increases the risk of a woman in a situation of domestic violence being killed by her partner (Campbell et al., 2007; Fleury-Steiner et al., 2017) and a study conducted by Sorenson and Wiebe (2004) in the United States showed that, in the homes of women who suffered recurrent domestic violence, the existence of a firearm was 20% higher than the average, which significantly increases the risk of this woman being killed.

It is known that IPV crimes are underreported. Even so, Brazil has seen an increase in official numbers, indicating improved recognition of these types of crimes by authorities and heightened public awareness. This increase in reporting is accompanied by an increase in the granting of urgent protective measures by the Judiciary, showing efforts to combat violence against women. In 2020, 323,570 protective measures were awarded, and this number rose to

370,209 in 2021, marking a 14.4% increase. Despite these positive developments in legislation and policies, further action is necessary to effectively reverse the growth trend of domestic violence cases (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a).

As mentioned earlier, in 2021, Brazil made significant progress in addressing violence against women by introducing two new criminal types, Stalking and Psychological Violence, into the Penal Code. This move aligns with the approaches already adopted by other countries like the United States, Scotland, and Portugal, which acknowledge the long-term psychological harm caused by stalking and the risk it poses to victims. Stalking is now recognized as a form of VAW and requires recurring behaviour to be considered persecution, while psychological violence can be identified even if it occurs only once but causes emotional harm to the victim. This expanded classification enhances the protection of women within the domestic sphere, including cases of obstetric violence and violence in the workplace. However, the full implementation of these new criminal types is still in progress, with varying recognition across different states and limited awareness among victims about filing complaints. Despite this, in 2021, there were 27,722 reported cases of stalking and 8,390 cases of psychological violence, highlighting the urgent need to address violence against women comprehensively (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a).

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic raised concerns about VAW worldwide, particularly during periods of social isolation. Reports showed alarming data, not only concerning the increase in COVID-19 cases but also the surge in domestic violence incidents. The pandemic exacerbated the vulnerability of women in violent situations, as they were forced to spend more time with

their abusers, typically their partners, due to social isolation measures. This prolonged time at home also added to the burden of housework and caring for family members, increasing the aggressor's control and manipulation over the survivor. As a result, conflicts escalated, intensifying the existing violence. Thousands of women faced worsened conditions during the pandemic (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022a).

The increase in domestic violence cases started to be felt in most countries that enacted quarantine, as UN Women (2020) reported in the first months of social isolation. According to the Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança 2022 (Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security 2022), there has been a decrease in lethal crimes against women. However, overall violence had not decreased, and, in fact, intentional bodily harm reports and emergency calls to the military police hotline had slightly risen. These increases were particularly evident in the context of domestic violence, where cases of threats against female victims had also increased. Additionally, there had been a significant increase in the number of urgent protective measures requested and granted. The available data from March 2020 to December 2021 revealed 2,451 feminicides and 100,398 cases of rape and vulnerable rape involving female victims (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022b).

The monthly data on feminicides in Brazil from 2019 to 2021 reveals an increase in cases between February and May 2020, during the period of stricter social isolation measures. Although there was a 2.4% decrease in the number of victims in 2021 compared to the previous year, the overall trend remained close to pre-pandemic levels, with an average of 110 feminicides per month (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022b). Research by Bueno et al. (2021) conducted on 2,079 women in 130 municipalities showed that during the COVID-19

pandemic, 1 in 4 Brazilian women (24.4%) over 16 years old experienced some form of violence or aggression in the last 12 months. This translates to about 17 million women suffering physical, psychological, or sexual violence during the previous year. Women also reported higher stress levels at home due to the pandemic compared to men (50.9% versus 37.2%), likely because they spent more time at home, taking on traditional gender roles involving household and childcare responsibilities. This increased burden of housework and family care contributes to women's overload and challenges in dealing with the pandemic's effects.

According to Bueno et al. (2021) research, a significant portion of women who experienced violence in 2020 also faced financial hardships, with 61.8% reporting a decrease in family income and 46.7% losing their jobs. These women also reported higher stress levels (68.2%) compared to women who did not suffer violence. Surprisingly, despite the severity of the aggression they faced, 44.9% of the women took no action. Among those who sought help, 21.6% turned to their family, 12.8% sought help from friends, and 8.2% approached the Church. Only a small percentage reported the incidents to the police: 11.8% at a women's police station, 7.5% at a regular police station, 7.1% to the Military Police, and 2.1% called the Women's Assistance Center. A significant portion (32.8%) of women who did not contact the police dealt with the situation independently, while 15.3% chose not to involve the police, and 16.8% did not see it as necessary to file a complaint.

Literature Review

Resilience

Resilience has a complex and dynamic meaning in the literature. The etymological origins of the word resilience carry the idea of a return to what one used to be. The word

comes from the Latin *resilio, resilire*, *resilio*, which according to Charlton T. Lewis English-Latin dictionary (Charlton T. Lewis, n.d.), means to leap or spring back, to rebound, to recoil, to shrink (back again). Beyond its etymology, the concept of resilience raises the interest of researchers from different areas of knowledge, becoming an object of study in the last five decades worldwide. In the early stages of resilience research, the primary emphasis was on psychoanalytic ideas such as the security of attachment between children and their parents, which was believed to improve adaptation during exposure to wartime conditions (Ungar, 2019). Later, in the 1980s, studies on resilience began to gain prominence as an analogy for an individual's ability to recover from exposure to chronic and acute stress (Ungar, 2012). In Brazil, studies on resilience as a human phenomenon began to be documented in the late 1990s (Brandão et al., 2011).

Over the years, resilience in Western psychology and social science has been studied from a variety of perspectives, including as a developmental process in response to adversity (Luthar et al., 2000), a personality trait (Connor & Davidson, 2003), a genetically determined characteristic (Luthar et al., 2000), an ecological construct by Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1989 (Ungar, 2012). The first studies on resilience had an individual-focused view. They tended to focus on the individual as the locus of change, with the environment (such as a family, school, institution, or community) being evaluated for its impact on individual developmental processes. However, the context or environment in which the person was inserted received relatively little attention compared to the individual characteristics researchers have traditionally sought to understand. Also, resilience was often portrayed as an intrapersonal trait in psychological discourse, despite its dependence on the resources and structures of the

broader environment for its expression. While individual qualities associated with resilience have been hypothesized as amenable to protection from the negative influence of environmental stressors and the health-promoting function of support, studies of individual qualities limit our understanding of psychological phenomena to a fraction of the potential factors that can explain resilience within and between population differences (Ungar, 2012).

As mentioned, these studies frequently defined resilience as the capacity to adapt successfully and function well despite experiencing adversity or following exposure to trauma. In other words, they use resilience as a synonym for “positive adjustment” (Anderson et al., 2012; Ulloa et al., 2015). The phrases “adapt successfully” and “positive adjustment” point to an internal characteristic that depends much more on the individual's will to overcome obstacles. One is responsible for coping with adversities or strengthening in the face of challenges. For example, an exploratory Brazilian literature review by Vieira and Oliveira (2017) found that the term resilience was strongly connected to values and skills that were encouraged in the workplace. In addition, they also found that being “resilient” was even considered a requirement for an individual to remain in the market. In the studies reviewed, they noticed that the term resilience was linked with “being flexible,” “being strong,” “being balanced,” and “not being shaken by the anguish of others,” even in a situation of organizational disorder, “being, above all, resistant” to physical and psychological pain and “quickly overcome any adversity” (p. 424). For the authors, the term was often described with a focus on the organizational interests of increasing productivity, being linked to career success, courage, and resistance (Vieira & Oliveira, 2017).

More recently, authors have recognized the danger of theorizing complex phenomena from a more individualist perspective. For instance, Schwarz (2018) argues that the current understanding of resilience perpetuates power imbalances and discrimination in society because mainstream psychology operates within a decontextualized framework that studies the isolated individual. This results in personalizing resilience, reducing it to strengths and weaknesses, and further alienating individuals facing psychological distress and suffering. Schwarz's position aligns with the authors arguing that these studies are rooted in neoliberal capitalism. For example, Dhar and Dixit (2022) affirm that individual responsibility has the same roots and has been romanticized in Psychology. In this perspective, the free market would generate "fair opportunities," leaving individuals to assume their responsibilities and "work hard" to achieve success (meritocracy). However, as we know, there are no "fair opportunities" when there are unfair “starting lines” for different population groups.

In contemporary literature, in addition to resilience, the concept of agency is also commonly emphasized, underscoring the importance of an individual will. Dhar and Dixit (2022) contend that agency is a foundational component of neoliberal morality, which prioritizes individual accountability. For them, “agency” operates with resilience to symbolize an individual’s inherent capacity and interior force over systemic structural violence (Dhar & Dixit, 2022, p. 118). They also affirm that when academia portrays resilience and agency to serve neoliberal interests, it shows how “science” can be exploitative and has “insidious colonial roots” (Dhar & Dixit, 2022, p. 118). The authors affirm that the academic resilience discourse has a dual effect: it validates the claims as scientific and interiorizes intersubjective and collective processes of structural support and systemic security nets as personal resources. This

duality of the discourse on resilience neglects the institutional and sociopolitical factors that undergird these changes (Dhar & Dixit, 2022).

A Social Ecology Model to Resilience

Over the years, researchers have started to shift their focus from the qualities of the individual to processes that reduce risk exposure, develop adequate self-esteem, prevent the negative impact of risk factors on developmental trajectories, and shape the environment to create new opportunities for development (Ungar, 2012). For instance, Rutter's (1987) studies on coping have been influential in identifying a core set of successful coping mechanisms, also known as protective mechanisms, crucial to understanding how individuals develop under adverse conditions. As well as Lerner (2006) and other researchers argue against individualism in child development, emphasizing the importance of context and environment in the scaffolding of human development as reflected in Vygotsky's (1978) work. This shift to an ecological perspective is vital to understanding resilience, building on Rutter's (1987) and Lerner's (2006) process-oriented arguments because these studies have identified that the quality of the environment is more critical than individual competence in achieving positive outcomes (Ungar, 2012).

As one of the most favourable outcomes studied more recently, authors have conceptualized resilience as more than an individual capacity to resist the aversive effects of a stressful situation. Their understanding is based on the idea that resilience is not a static concept but a dynamic process of adaptation and transformation (Ungar, 2012). For instance, for Ungar (2012), resilience is the interaction between the individual and their environment, which optimizes and flourishes their development.

Thus, resilience is based on the ability of people to respond to stressors and disturbances in their context by adapting and transforming their behaviour, resources, and relationships. This includes individual behaviours, such as problem-solving and self-care, as well as collective behaviours, such as collaboration and sharing of resources. Ungar (2011) argues that resilience is strongly influenced by the environment and culture in which it is embedded and that this must be considered when attempting to understand the concept. Therefore, he names this perspective a social ecology model to resilience.

To better define resilience under a social ecological construct, Ungar says:

> Where there is potential for exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity for individuals to *navigate* their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that build and sustain their well-being, and their individual and collective capacity to *negotiate* for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways. (Ungar, 2012, p. 17)

Therefore, both navigation and negotiation are essential components of resilience, as they enable individuals to take advantage of available opportunities and exercise control over how resources are provided. While an individual agency is important, families, communities, and governments also play a role in providing resources in culturally appropriate ways (Ungar, 2012).

According to the social ecology model, the development of resilience occurs at three levels: individual context, the interaction between the environment and the individual, and specific characteristics of the individual (Ungar, 2015). In addition, resilience in the social ecology context is most effectively comprehended by considering trajectory, which pertains to

the creation of meaning that structures the perception of the world and unifies one's experiences in the past, present, and future. In this sense, both the social context – including the culture one is in, and the individual are fundamental to developing resilience. In other words, socio-ecological resilience emphasizes complexity in reciprocal person-environment interactions, recognizing the importance of mesosystem interactions between family, school, and community systems in growth.

Successful adaptation involves demonstrating high fidelity to good development within a specific context and for a particular sample of at-risk individuals. To this end, negotiations for control of meaning and resources that support growth should be integrated into resilience studies and their practical applications. Social-ecological perspectives on resilience emphasize congruence between individual needs and environments facilitating growth, resulting in a focus on the social and physical environment as the locus of resources for personal gain. The individual and ecological perspectives are complementary, emphasizing different aspects of resilience processes. However, resilience depends more on ecological factors than individual traits, although both perspectives are necessary for a complete understanding of resilience (Ungar, 2012).

More recently, the social ecology model of resilience emphasizes the multisystemic understanding of resilience. A systemic comprehension of resilience is beneficial in identifying patterns across systems (human, built, or natural) and understanding how the resilience of one system can influence the resilience of other co-occurring systems. However, creating models to capture the interactions between systems is challenging due to the complexity of resilience across interrelated systems (Ungar, 2021). In a recent literature analysis, Ungar (2018)

identified seven common principles that govern resilience across various research fields. The principles can help explain the functioning of resilience in response to stressors affecting various systems, such as the human, the natural and the built system. These principles are as follows:

> (1) resilience occurs in contexts of adversity; (2) resilience is a process (five distinct processes are identified); (3) there are trade-offs between systems when a system experiences resilience; (4) a resilient system is open, dynamic, and complex; (5) a resilient system promotes connectivity; (6) a resilient system demonstrates experimentation and learning; and (7) a resilient system includes diversity, redundancy, and participation. (Ungar, 2018, p. 6)

In addition to the principles, Ungar identified at least five processes associated with resilience: “persistence, resistance, recovery, adaptation, and transformation” (Ungar, 2018, p. 7). The *persistence* of a system is a slow, steady pattern of behaviour that can only be maintained if external threats are managed by other co-occurring systems, which provide enough insulation to enable the focal system to continue without alteration. The *resistance* is where the focal system actively resists external threats to maintain its behavioural regime. *Recovery* refers to a system's response when its defences are insufficient to withstand disruption, resulting in the system returning to its original state. *Adaptation* refers to a system's ability to change in response to stress, while *transformation* is the process of a system undergoing significant changes as a result of stress (Ungar, 2021).

The principles and processes are essential to consider when researching resilience and formulating public policies, as the degree of interconnectivity between resilient systems is

positively correlated with the potential for mutually reinforcing advantages arising from the sustainable practices implemented by each respective system (Ungar, 2021). This is also valid for in women survivors of IPV. Guided conceptually by this perspective, the comprehension of multisystemic resilience can enhance the knowledge of resilience in women who have experienced intimate partner and gender violence and facilitate the development of resilient systems that provide resources for survivors. In other words, when formulating resilient and sustainable practices to face GBV, we may also develop and strengthen resilience in the participants.

As we can see, resilience is still an ambiguous and emerging construct (Ungar, 2015). More research is needed to better understand the complexities of resilience and how it is expressed across different contexts, cultures, and levels of analysis (individual, interpersonal, community and societal level). Resilience-promoting processes can look very different depending on the context in which they occur (Ungar, 2021). This is especially significant in research on IPV and resilience, as IPV is a very particular type of adversity. It often lasts longer and is endorsed by certain patriarchal cultures, making it challenging to identify, measure and confront.

A Critical Overview of the Literature on Resilience and Intimate Partner Violence

Research in resilience and IPV is relatively new. While studies on IPV used to focus on the adverse effects of violence, research in resilience concentrates on children and their capacity to bounce back from adversities. Only in more recent years have researchers reflected on the strengths of women suffering from GBV. However, there is still an ongoing debate

regarding the most appropriate way to study and conceptualize resilience in IPV research (Crann & Barata, 2021).

Conceptualization and Measurement of Resilience in Studies of IPV

To the present, the literature on IPV and resilience is diverse, without a specific methodology and understanding of the phenomenon. Both quantitative and qualitative studies are found, and despite the increase in this topic among social sciences scholars in the past few years, the research is concentrated on psychology. For instance, the quantitative literature on IPV and resilience is most frequent and tends to conceptualize resilience "as an outcome of protective factors and measured as the absence of psychopathology" (Crann & Barata, 2016, p. 855) or through self-reported measures of resilience (Bordin, 2019; de la Rosa et al., 2016; Kang & Kim, 2011; Renner & Hartley, 2021; Tsirigotis & Łuczak, 2018). As an illustration, past studies have evaluated resilience as low levels or the nonexistence of posttraumatic stress disorder (Machisa et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2010), depression (Carlson et al., 2002; Wright et al., 2010), anxiety (Carlson et al., 2002), suicidal tendencies (Meadows et al., 2005), and as a combination of resilience indicators and evaluations of general psychological distress (Bakaitytė et al., 2021; Buttell et al., 2021; Choi, Lo, et al., 2019; Humphreys, 2003).

The literature recognizes that quantitative studies significantly contributed to understanding some associations between protective factors boosting resilience. Despite the valuable insights generated by this body of research, relying solely on the absence of psychopathology to infer resilience overlooks the influence of the social and cultural context in which resilience develops and manifests. Such an approach oversimplifies the complexity of resilience as a multidimensional construct. It fails to consider that individuals who do not

exhibit resilience indicators, such as a PTSD diagnosis, may still exhibit functional adaptation in other domains, such as work or school performance (Mushonga et al., 2021). In addition, prior quantitative research had been unsuccessful in capturing the nuanced and fluid nature of abuse in its conceptualization and measurement of resilience, thereby excluding the contextualized experiences of survivors and limiting our comprehension of resilience (Crann & Barata, 2016).

While most studies on IPV and resilience are quantitative, qualitative studies are still limited in numbers. Specifically, only four qualitative studies were found using the perspective of a social ecology model to resilience with women survivors of IPV (Aguillard et al., 2021; Crann & Barata, 2016; Schaefer et al., 2021; Scrafford et al., 2020) and none in the Brazilian context and culture. These four studies sought to contribute to the understanding of resilience, understanding the internal and external factors and processes that help or hinder the development of resilience. In these studies, the internal protective factors found were an internal drive, dedication, connectedness, healthy and helpful outlets (Aguillard et al., 2021), motherhood (Scrafford et al., 2020), shifts toward resistance in the experience of control, and toward positivity (Crann & Barata, 2016), and personal growth, enhanced self-esteem, improved attentiveness as a parent and resilience (Schaefer et al., 2021). Regarding the internal drive, for some women, it was due to their disability (Aguillard et al., 2021), for others, motherhood (Scrafford et al., 2020; Trigueiro et al., 2014), the eminence of death (Labronici, 2012; Marcovicz et al., 2014), and the importance of ensuring physical safety first was recognized to empower and provide the shifts of change in women (Schaefer et al., 2021). These studies are an important contribution to a socio-ecological understanding of resilience in the aftermath of IPV.

Regarding conceptualization, qualitative research in resilience and IPV agrees with understanding resilience as a dynamic process to overcome adversities. However, some research still needs to present more definitions of resilience instead of simplifying phenomena to strength, growth and coping. A narrow definition of resilience is criticized by Ungar (2012), who affirms that resilience cannot be merely reduced to resistance to stress/adversity or strengthening effects, in which people strengthen after a bad experience. For example, some authors recognize resilience as part of the same construct of strengths and growth after trauma (Crann & Barata, 2016; Labronici, 2012; Sattler et al., 2014; Trigueiro et al., 2014). Meanwhile, other authors still present a narrow view of resilience despite considering differences between resilience and the study of strengthening effects known as Posttraumatic growth (PTG). For instance, studies led by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) state that resilience is "the ability to cope successfully with stressful events or life circumstances," (p.462) while PTG goes beyond this level. For the authors, PTG is defined as positive psychological changes in the aftermath of traumatic experiences, and these changes can be experienced in three broad categories: relationships with others, philosophy of life, and view of the self (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 456). As mentioned earlier, this simplistic view of resilience is rooted in Western psychology discourse.

The most recent revision of Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2018) theory still presents a neoliberal capitalist perspective, centralizing responsibility on the individual and excluding the context, systemic violence, culture, and public policies in which the individual is inserted. To illustrate, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2018) explain that the onset of PTG is initiated by the centrality of the traumatic event, which indicates its significance to the individual's self-identity.

When the traumatic experience is perceived as central, the PTG process can commence, leading to cognitive processing and the potential for PTG. On the other hand, if the traumatic event can be assimilated into the individual's self-concept and does not challenge their core beliefs, it will elicit emotional distress and not result in resilience without inducing substantial personal transformation or growth (Bakaitytė et al., 2021). As we can see, the onus is placed on the individual's ability to assimilate the traumatic encounter and confront their fundamental beliefs.

Some studies on IPV and resilience extend beyond the correlation between resilience and PTG proposed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2018)—for example, Mushonga et al. (2021) argue that resilience factors contribute to PTG. They reported that women display resilience by accessing both internal and external resources in the wake of IPV, which triggered a pursuit of meaning-making in their lives (growth). Similarly, Schaefer et al. (2021) identified specific strengths as personal character traits demonstrated by women. Resilience was characterized by these women's persistent efforts to utilize unique resources and seek support from their communities. Schaefer et al. (2021) also that understanding the cycle of IPV was essential for women to end an abusive relationship, and seeking help was recognized as an act of strength and courage. Thus, the capacity to overcome the fears and difficulties associated with ending a relationship that involved IPV was identified as a strength among women exposed to IPV. Furthermore, the decision not to return to the abusive relationship represented a transformative shift in the women’s mindset and was perceived as a strength.

As some authors overlap the concepts of PTG and resilience, another common overlap of concepts in the qualitative literature of IPV and resilience is that resilience is often

considered synonymous with coping, and these concepts are often used interchangeably (Burnette & Hefflinger, 2016; Lee et al., 2021; Sánchez & Lopez-Zafra, 2019). The problem with perspectives considering resilience as a personal trait or solely on their capacity to grow after trauma and cope with adversities is that they exclusively emphasize the individual and mental processes, ignoring other aspects of life, context, and culture. Specific individuals face multifaceted challenges encompassing political, economic, historical, and relational dimensions. Importantly, these issues manifest themselves at a collective level. However, the psychological discourse tends to internalize these difficulties. This discourse shifts the focus from collective issues that could potentially be resolved through dialogue and policy changes and instead frames oppression as an internal prejudice within individuals. This internalization detracts attention from the broader social issues at play. Rather than addressing systemic problems at a collective level, the emphasis is placed on individual-level concerns that need to be addressed personally (Dhar & Dixit, 2022).

By emphasizing the need for internal resilience, strength, and agency in the face of trauma, the neoliberal psychological discourse neglects potential intervention points between communities and individuals that could lead to transformative change. Therefore, differentiating and reducing resilience to how the person sees the centrality of the event based on their life history exempts the responsibility of governments and social and cultural structures that influence these individual processes, making the individual responsible by the ability or inability to face and overcome abusive situations. Consequently, our attention should be focused not just on personal prejudice and dysfunctional cognition but also on the

opportunities for revolutionary change between and among people and groups (Dhar & Dixit, 2022).

Thus, my position on resilience embraces a social ecology model backed by robust literature and my own research findings. I believe that resilience research must consider how sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors shape developmental paths, as external resources are fundamental for the individual to develop resilience. Understanding the influence of these factors is essential for comprehending the complex and dynamic nature of resilience in navigating adversities successfully.

Protective Factors and Resilience in the Literature

The literature on IPV and resilience is diverse, with several quantitative and qualitative studies associating resilience with one or a few protective factors. As the primary outcomes of qualitative and quantitative research regarding the understanding of resilience were previously discussed, it is essential to emphasize the value of these studies regarding the understanding of protective factors. Protective factors are understood as characteristics, circumstances, and events that have the potential to modify or even counteract predictions of negative outcomes, allowing individuals to overcome life stressors (Benard, 1991). Although there is a large number of studies that have classified protective factors as individual and community-level, here we consider that "personality and individual outcomes are the result of a transactional process with one's environment" (Benard, 1991, p. 7).

Both quantitative and qualitative research has identified several protective factors associated with resilience. According to the quantitative and qualitative literature on IPV and resilience, common factors that have helped people in the face of adversities to overcome their

challenges were self-esteem and self-efficacy (Bradley et al., 2005; Carlson et al., 2002), spirituality and religion (Anderson, 2012; de la Rosa et al., 2016; Drumm et al., 2014; Fowler & Rountree, 2010), education (Karki et al., 2021), agency and empowerment (Wright et al., 2010), locus of control and hope (Munoz et al., 2017), and motherhood (Fogarty et al., 2019; Lévesque & Chamberland, 2016; Schaefer et al., 2021; Scrafford et al., 2020). Other factors recognized as necessary for successful adaptation include social support (Anderson et al., 2012; Carlson et al., 2002; Choi, Liu, et al., 2019; Karki et al., 2021; Machisa et al., 2018; Roditti et al., 2010), institutional and professional help (Labronici, 2012; Trigueiro et al., 2014), safety (Schaefer et al., 2021), and culture (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015; Mason & Pulvirenti, 2013). Additionally, helping others has been identified as a strategy that can aid recovery and positive adjustment for women who have experienced IPV (Aguillard et al., 2021; Crann & Barata, 2021).

Whereas a vast majority of scholars recognize protective factors associated with resilience, one research project suggests, controversially, that resilience may be a risk factor in IPV victimization among African American women. Anyikwa (2015) found that resilience was a potential barrier to seeking help among African American women, as most participants felt confident handling IPV independently. They assumed that women's confidence in handling IPV on their own comes from their stereotypes from a cultural understanding of resilience as a synonym for strength (Anyikwa, 2015). For them, this level of resilience may perpetuate the stereotype of the "strong Black woman" and put these women at even greater risk. Therefore, some African American women may not perceive resilience as a positive trait (Anyikwa, 2015). However, this finding may be related to a specific understanding of resilience, and it shows how important it is to consider the culture and the context of women survivors. In order to better

understand how protective factors play on women survivors of IPV and how they contribute to their resilience, the following paragraphs will detail the most critical findings in protective factors and resilience in IPV literature.

Self-esteem and self-efficacy. They are common individual-level protective factors in the literature on IPV and resilience. According to studies (Bradley et al., 2005), high self-esteem can provide a sense of security and help individuals to face traumatic events. In contrast, low self-esteem can lead to feelings of helplessness and increased vulnerability to adverse impacts from traumatic events. Studies in this field have also suggested that although IPV may lead to decreased self-esteem, it can also be argued that self-esteem and self-efficacy have the potential to operate as resilience factors, playing a critical role in an individual's resilience (Bradley et al., 2005; Carlson et al., 2002). Also, self-esteem and self-efficacy can be positively impacted by meaning, life's purpose, and life values (Kang & Kim, 2011). Additionally, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to take action and cope effectively with traumatic events. By contrast, those with low self-efficacy may struggle to find the motivation and confidence to effectively address the challenges they face.

Although self-esteem and self-efficacy are often regarded as individual-level protective factors, it is important to acknowledge that these traits are not innate and are heavily influenced by environmental factors (Carlson et al., 2002). This individual-focused view implied that individuals facing disadvantages were expected to exercise personal agency to access opportunities for psychological well-being. However, a growing body of evidence has prompted a shift towards a more contextualized understanding of human development (Ungar, 2012).

Research has found that social support has the potential to mitigate the impact of stress through various mechanisms, such as bolstering self-esteem, shaping perceptions of stressful situations, and fostering the acquisition of effective coping strategies (Carlson et al., 2002). Thus, the development and cultivation of self-esteem and self-efficacy should not be solely attributed to individual characteristics, as the surrounding environments play a significant role in shaping these attributes (Lerner, 2006).

Spirituality and religion. They are frequently mentioned as protective factors for women survivors of IPV (Anderson et al., 2012; de la Rosa et al., 2016; Drumm et al., 2014; Fowler & Rountree, 2010). Although they appear in the literature as individual protective factors, it is undeniable that faith, spirituality, and religion are influenced by the environments in which individuals are raised or with which they come into contact, shaping their beliefs and practices in these areas.

For most studies, spirituality serves as a coping mechanism, provides strength, and is an avenue to resilience (Anderson et al., 2012; de la Rosa et al., 2016; Drumm et al., 2014; Fowler & Rountree, 2010). One's ability to endure and find strength can be influenced by their spiritual or religious beliefs, and some individuals may develop an increased spiritual or religious perspective in response to stressful situations (Yick, 2008). Women’s resilience is seen through their relationship with God and their unique understanding of a higher power or divine presence. Being involved in a religious or spiritual community can also offer greater social support. Research conducted by Watlington and Murphy (2006) showed a positive correlation between religious involvement and the level of social support among African American

survivors of IPV. This increased social support acted as a protective factor against depression and other mental health disorders.

By contrast, some studies have found that spiritual or religious beliefs can contribute to IPV by justifying abusive behaviour. For them, religion can play a role in IPV by making it difficult for survivors to leave abusive relationships or by reinforcing patriarchal or gender-based power imbalances (Anderson et al., 2012). For this reason, it is crucial to understand that the relationship between religion, spirituality and IPV is complex and can vary greatly depending on individual, cultural, and situational factors.

Agency, empowerment, and hope. Studies have found that agency and empowerment were protective factors related to resilience. Haffejee and Theron (2019) emphasize how agency emerges in resilience research in children who have suffered sexual violence. In these studies, agency appears to facilitate overcoming the negative impacts of sexual violence. For the authors, the concept of agency brings the opposite idea of submission, referring to "the capacity of individuals to act independently and shape their life circumstances" (p. 686) and to exercise authority at the micro level, influencing their ecology. This ability deconstructs the idea of girls and women as docile victims who only suffer.

Agency was also strongly correlated with hope. This indicates that individuals who possess a sense of agency, or the belief in their ability to take action and exert control over their lives, are more likely to experience feelings of hopefulness (Munoz et al., 2017). In addition, studies have found that agency expressions emerge or are strengthened with support from at least one person from the environment, such as friends, family members, or social assistants. Of the importance of the environment and culture, Wright et al. (2010) found that

African American women who experienced more frequent and severe IPV than White women were less psychologically distressed and more personally empowered, consequently more resilient. This agrees with what the social ecology model to resilience brings about how important the environment is for strengthening and developing resilience and emotional support.

Education and Employment. Some studies have found that socio-demographic variables such as education and employment associated with other factors have indicated significant relations with resilience (Carter-Snell & Jakubec, 2013; Howell et al., 2018). These factors may operate on individual level, but certainly the outcome of environments. As research in other areas has already pointed out the importance of education, it is unsurprising that higher education attainment emerged as a predictor of higher resilience (Howell et al., 2018). Higher education and employment are related to less or no dependence of women on their partners, promoting their autonomy. This is especially important in many cases where women stay in abusive relationships due to a lack of financial independence.

Motherhood. Maternal and service provider perspectives have documented the endeavours made by mothers to safeguard their children and leave their abusive partners (Kelly, 2009; Secco et al., 2016). Abused women encounter obstacles in seeking support for mothering during and after IPV (Lapierre, 2019). In the context of Western traditions, societal expectations of the “good mother,” driven by neoliberalism and traditional child-rearing theories, can negatively impact women's self-perceptions. The concept of “intensive mothering” enforces the belief that women should prioritize motherhood above all else, disregarding the diverse experiences of motherhood and perpetuating inequalities and judgments among different

groups of mothers. These ideologies of “good mothering” and “intensive mothering” intersect with oppressive aspects of IPV. Women in such situations are often blamed for their circumstances, while society fails to hold abusive perpetrators accountable. The efforts of women to protect their children are frequently unrecognized, leading to feelings of inadequacy as mothers. The partners' isolation and control hinder reaching out, in addition to the societal focus on “good mothering” combines with mother-blame, pushing women to see themselves as at fault, which often contributes to women staying in abusive relationships (Buchanan, 2019). In addition, scholars have also recognized that women fear leaving abusive partners due to potential violence escalation or child custody issues (Lapierre, 2019).

Only a few studies considered motherhood a protective factor that serves as a source of resilience for women’s decision to leave (Fogarty et al., 2019; Lévesque & Chamberland, 2016; Schaefer et al., 2021; Scrafford et al., 2020). Scrafford et al. (2020) found that women’s decision to leave was a positive parenting choice, often motivated by the desire to protect their children. Mothers draw on various resources across their social ecologies to overcome adversity, including nurture, compassion, protectiveness, work ethic, and parental discipline. In addition, mothers use these resources to navigate the various barriers related to partner violence, unhelpful institutions, inner trauma, stress, and intergenerational violence patterns to parent their children effectively.

Social Support and helping others. The literature on IPV and resilience tend to agree that social support is the primary potential community-level protective factor for women survivors. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate how women survivors of IPV develop or access their networks to offer them effective social structures. Social support can act as a buffer against

stress by enhancing self-esteem, influencing perceptions of traumatic events, increasing coping strategies and resilience, and reducing trauma symptoms (Carlson et al., 2002; Carter-Snell & Jakubec, 2013; Crawford et al., 2009; Rodenhizer et al., 2021). Even having a confidante available to discuss one's problems is beneficial (Carlson et al., 2002). Although some research reports the lack of support from family and friends (Rodenhizer et al., 2021; Wilcox, 2006) in the context of IPV, women recognize the importance of social connection to overcome their abusive relationship (Rodenhizer et al., 2021). Even minimal social support may have a buffering effect, directly moderating their sense of well-being or mediating the abuse–mental health relationship (Thompson et al., 2000).

In addition, through their social support, women have reported experiencing an "altruism born of suffering," where their own experiences of violence fueled a desire to help others in complex circumstances (Aguillard et al., 2021). This pro-social behaviour can manifest in some individuals who have undergone traumatic life events, where negative experiences create motivation toward altruism (Anderson et al., 2012). Prior studies have also indicated that survivors' engagement in advocacy was instrumental in their comprehension of IPV and facilitated their recognition of their own experiences as abuse. This process of acknowledging and making sense of these traumatic encounters not only heightened their sense of control and empowerment but also emerged as a protective factor in the context of IPV, playing a crucial role in their journey of recovery and resilience (Crann & Barata, 2021).

Professional and institutional support and safety. These are also recognized in the literature as community-level protective factors. Scholarly investigations have revealed that the critical constituents of resilience comprise favourable support structures (both formal and informal), as

well as the understanding or support of the legal process (Carter-Snell & Jakubec, 2013). In the literature, psychological support was found as fundamental to boosting women's resilience (Aguillard et al., 2021; Bakaitytė et al., 2021; Labronici, 2012) as well as the support of front lines in hospitals and clinics, such as nurses (Labronici, 2012; Trigueiro et al., 2014). In addition, other studies have underscored the importance of establishing physical safety as a pivotal factor in enabling women to leave abusive relationships (Schaefer et al., 2021). This includes housing, as women describe the role of housing as extending beyond its material function, as it has provided them with a sense of safety and freedom from violence (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015). In addition, economic security was found to play a particularly crucial role in mitigating the adverse impacts of abuse on women, which has important implications for interventions aimed at supporting this population (Crawford et al., 2009; Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015). Besides, multiple protective factors were found to modify the relationship between experiences of abuse throughout one's life (Carlson et al., 2002). Therefore, understanding how institutions and professionals can help women survivors of IPV develop resilience is vital for building more assertive public policies.

Culture. Previous research has recognized how cultural norms can increase or decrease resilience in women survivors of IPV. For instance, a qualitative investigation of former refugees highlighted that IPV might remain concealed due to its perceived potential to harm and "destroy" their community and members (Mason & Pulvirenti, 2013). Additionally, cultural norms may engender a lack of awareness among community members regarding the unacceptability of IPV. Latino cultures strongly emphasize family and maintaining close and positive relationships among family members (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015; Roditti et al.,

2010). It is also considered collectivist and highly machismo (Campos et al., 2008). Communities that tolerate this violence often lack the incentive to acknowledge it as an injustice or to challenge the notion that it is a reasonable behaviour and may not develop strategies to bolster resilience against it. Such communities implicitly sanction the maintenance of silence regarding the problem, thus masking it and shielding the community from public scrutiny and censure (Crawford et al., 2009; Mason & Pulvirenti, 2013). By contrast, a study conducted with Australian and Mongolian women revealed that women from more collectivist cultures demonstrated greater resilience (Oke, 2008). Moreover, research on Chinese women has shown that victim-blaming attitudes can result in secondary victimization of women, perpetuating the cycle of violence (Tang et al., 2002). To comprehend women's resilience, it is crucial to acknowledge how culture affects their beliefs and how their communities provide either support or blame. Thus, resilience research must consider sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors that shape developmental paths (Ungar, 2012).

Understanding how people overcome stressful events and how they grow after these experiences is a challenge. As noted in the literature, the concept and ways of studying resilience are plural, complex and often divergent, with no agreement on how to define, evaluate, measure and report. My qualitative study represents an important contribution in research on resilience and IPV, which include women's perspectives. This study aims to extend the feminist, social-ecological approach to IPV and resilience in the case of Brazil, by centering on the Brazilian women’s perspectives on IPV. Recognizing the individual, community, institutional and societal protective factors and understanding how they affect women’s experiences contributes to explaining how resilience is developed and strengthened in women.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to an increased understanding of resilience and that it will ultimately guide policy development that will help women survivors of gender-based violence.

Methodology

Purpose of Research

This thesis engaged in a secondary analysis of qualitative data (SAQD) to understand how resilience is built and strengthened among women survivors of IPV in Brazil. The study aimed to explore the experiences of women who have suffered from IPV; identify the systemic, institutional, and cultural factors contributing to resilience; and assess individual women's survival responses to it. Thus, this research addresses the structural, cultural and social complexity of IPV and resilience, thereby contributing to the literature gap in the field.

Although resilience research has increased recently, how to conceptualize resilience and boost it up to empower individuals remains debatable. In studying resilience, it is essential to understand the structural, cultural, and social factors in place that may support individuals when faced with challenges such as IPV. Specifically, I wanted to know if the support network, concrete support provided, and the options for a better future can strengthen resilience in women survivors of intimate partner violence.

Data Collection Method

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that focuses on understanding the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals and groups. It is a flexible approach that allows researchers to explore complex and nuanced phenomena in-depth and to generate rich and detailed descriptions of social phenomena. Qualitative research can be particularly useful in

areas where little is known or understood or where quantitative methods are inappropriate, such as exploring the social and cultural dimensions of health and illness or investigating marginalized groups' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Given the limitations of quantitative academic research in capturing the intricate nature of IPV and resilience, qualitative research is considered to provide a more comprehensive understanding of resilience within this context (Crann & Barata, 2016; Luthar et al., 2000). Qualitative studies offer researchers the opportunity to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences, including their specific contexts and manifestations of resilience throughout the research process. Through a qualitative methodology, women's voices can be heard and expressed, offering the potential to empower silenced women to share their own stories in their authentic voices (Lapierre, 2019). Moreover, qualitative scholars can address conceptual and methodological considerations inherent in resilience research, as well as acknowledge the influence of their own values, thereby avoiding the constriction of resilience into essentialist constructs (Crann & Barata, 2016). An essentialist construct of resilience refers to a rigid and fixed understanding of resilience as a singular and inherent quality or trait that individuals possess. Thus, resilience can only be studied effectively through qualitative study as this methodology allows us to explore the interrelatedness, complexity, and intersectionality that are crucial to understanding how resilience operates.

A substantial body of qualitative research has explored the experiences of women leaving, surviving, and managing abuse and recognized the impact of sociocultural factors (Crawford et al., 2009). Although there has been a notable increase in qualitative research over the past decade, there remains a relative scarcity of qualitative investigations specifically

focused on the resilience of women within the context of IPV (Aguillard et al., 2021; Crann & Barata, 2016; Drumm et al., 2014; Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015; Scrafford et al., 2020). This dearth of literature is particularly pronounced in the Brazilian context and culture (Labronici, 2012; Marcovicz et al., 2014; Trigueiro et al., 2014), with limited research addressing IPV from the social ecology model of resilience.

Secondary Analysis of Qualitative Data & Ethical Considerations

Secondary analysis of qualitative data (SAQD) is a methodology that encompasses the re-use of data initially collected in primary research. These data can include but is not limited to semi-structured interviews, responses to open-ended questions in questionnaires, field notes and research diaries. SAQD can be utilized to examine new research inquiries or validate outcomes from previous studies (Heaton, 2008). According to Heaton (2008), there are three ways to access qualitative research data for secondary use. First, researchers can re-use the independently collected data in formal data sharing or archives. Second, investigators can share their data directly with other researchers in informal data sharing. Third, scientists may re-use their own datasets to explore new or additional questions to expand the preliminary study or verify their findings. For my study, I am grateful to the Nossas NGO[4] research team, which generously shared the semi-structured interviews' anonymized audios from their project *Mapa*

[4] NOSSAS is a NGO dedicated to enhancing democracy, promoting social justice, and advancing equality. With a track record of over a decade, they have been actively engaged in designing and implementing projects, tactics, and strategies to foster mobilization and solidarity across Brazil. For more information, visit their website: https://www.nossas.org/en/about

do Acolhimento[5]. Subsequently, I will elucidate the primary research conducted by the organization, as well as outline the procedure employed in my own study.

In the past decade, secondary analysis, a well-recognized methodology in social sciences, has seen increased application, particularly driven by survivor-led advocacy groups representing survivors of sexualized and gender-based violence during conflicts. These groups advocate for prioritizing the use of previously collected narratives and survivor testimonies to avoid repeated reinterviewing, which can cause various forms of re-traumatization and further harm survivors (Murad Code, 2022). While some researchers have acknowledged the benefits of reusing qualitative data (Chatfield, 2020; Heaton, 2008; Murad Code, 2023; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019), published studies on secondary analysis of qualitative data remain relatively scarce. Central to the debate are discussions about the epistemological, practical, ethical, and legal dimensions of reusing qualitative data. Key issues, also present for my present study, include determining if data collected for one primary aim can be reused for a different secondary aim, obtaining informed consent from research participants for data retention, sharing, and reutilization beyond the original collection purpose, preserving data confidentiality and integrity through anonymization, and adhering to copyright and data protection laws (Chatfield, 2020).

Using the secondary analysis methodology offers several essential advantages, especially when dealing with sensitive and challenging topics shared by hard-to-reach

[5] *Mapa do Acolhimento* is a solidarity network that facilitates connections between people who have experienced or are currently facing GBV and psychologists and lawyers who offer voluntary assistance. This initiative, incubated by the NGO NOSSAS, aims to provide support and resources to those in need within a framework of solidarity and compassion. For more information, visit their website: https://www.mapadoacolhimento.org

participants. This approach reduces the burden on research participants, allowing them to contribute more effectively to the research process (Chatfield, 2020). Additionally, Heaton (2008) points out that secondary analysis also lightens the load on community partners involved in identifying, accessing, and recruiting participants for the study. These benefits align with the principles of the Murad Code Project, which prioritizes respecting survivors' autonomy and control over their narratives and aims to create a safe and respectful environment for survivors of systematic and conflict-related sexual violence during the research and documentation process (Murad Code, 2022).

Furthermore, it is well-known that secondary analysis can save time in sampling, data and collection processes, as well as in ethics review by most institutional research boards, as it qualifies for exempt status or accelerated review process, which was my case. According to Saint Mary's University's Research Ethics Board (REB File #22-308), the present research qualified as exempt from the research ethics review requirement per the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2), Article 2.4.

In the case of my thesis, I was only allowed to access the interviews with the women who attended the *Mapa do Acolhimento* project. The study conducted by the organization received approval from its local Ethics Research Board, and all twenty women who participated in their program provided informed consent, either signed or verbally agreed. In this informed consent, it was explained the purpose, risks and benefits of participating in the research and the statement that anonymized interview data would be shared for secondary use of qualitative research for my research. The NOSSAS NGO provided me access to their anonymized interview

audio files through their safe folder on the cloud. My research guaranteed the anonymity of research participants.

After carefully considering all pros and cons, and upon approval from Saint Mary's University's Research Ethics Board for exemption, we decided to proceed with the SAQD. The decision to undertake this research as a SAQD was primarily motivated by the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. My supervisor and I recognized the sensitivity of my topic for conducting remote interviewing from another country, the burden of participants and the risk for re-traumatization, and considering limitations on travelling. With this in consideration, I initiated communication with NOSSAS NGO, specifically reaching out to inquire about the possibility of collaborating with their program, *Mapa do Acolhimento*, for the purpose of partnering with this research. After a meeting with the NGO and another with the REB officer and my supervisor, we concluded that the secondary use of anonymized data would be a feasible way to access sensitive data for my MA thesis research.

Primary Research

In 2020, NOSSAS received a grant from the Sexual Violence Research Initiative SVRI – a South African Organization and the World Bank Group. Their research aimed (primary research) firstly, to analyze the impact of *Mapa do Acolhimento* interventions on the women's mental health and to explore ways for preventing violence; and secondly, to provide data on the nature of the women's needs and requests in situations of violence, the obstacles they face and, finally, the processes that mobilized them to seek assistance.

The primary research aimed at triangulating methods of study, including quantitative and qualitative approaches. The participants were their own team (*Mapa do Acolhimento*

team), the beneficiaries (women survivors of GBV), and the volunteers (professionals that provided legal and psychological support). The quantitative method consisted of an online questionnaire with beneficiaries and volunteers. The qualitative procedure consisted of organizational, ethnographic, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the beneficiaries and focus groups with volunteers.

In order to access participants, the primary research methodology conducted by NOSSAS NGO research team involved four phases. In the first phase, NOSSAS emailed all program participants, explaining the research and asking who would be interested in participating. From over 5000 beneficiaries, they had the first pool with over 300 interested participants. For the second phase, the first criteria for selecting participants for their study were how long the women were served by their volunteer professionals, which included participating in the project for at least six (6) months, as their primary goal was to analyze their program efficacy. The second criterion was initially based on race, and the third criterion was the region where they live in Brazil.

Their final selection for research participants consisted of twenty (20) people who self-identified as women beneficiaries of their program whose interview audios would be shared for my study and nine (9) volunteers who were psychologists and lawyers. As the COVID-19 pandemic delayed their study, all the interviews were conducted in 2021 by the NGO research team.

The profile of the beneficiaries for their research included women who had received support from the project during the period between July 2018 and July 2021. The participants were over 18 years old, residing in Brazil, and had experienced various forms of gender-based

violence, such as psychological, physical, and financial abuse. They came from five different states in Brazil. In terms of racial diversity, the participants self-identified as 51.4% White, 12.3% Black, 32.9% Pardo, and 2.8% Yellow[6].

Research Procedures

The first step was to listen to the twenty (20) interviews of women survivors of GBV from the research team from NOSSAS NGO. It is essential to note that the interviews were in Portuguese, my mother tongue. From the twenty interviews, five (5) were excluded as they referred to different types of GBV, such as violence perpetrated by family (parents mainly) and/or violence against transgendered persons. The detailed profile of the fifteen (15) selected participants is described below under "Women's Profile." I listened again and transcribed the fifteen intimate partner violence interviews. Using thematic analysis as a method, some ideas for codes and themes came from the literature, while the vast majority emerged during the transcription process.

Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely used method for analyzing qualitative data, which involves identifying and structuring patterns of meaning into distinct. It is unique among qualitative analytical methods because it offers a tool or technique rather than a theoretically confined methodology (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In other words, TA provides researchers with a flexible and adaptable approach to analyzing qualitative data, allowing for a systematic examination of themes and patterns without being confined to a specific theoretical framework. This does not mean that TA lacks theory; instead, this flexibility enables researchers

[6] In Brazil, the official classification IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística) uses five categories to classify race and colour. The categories used are Black, Pardo, White, Indigenous and Yellow. Yellow refers to the person who declares himself of oriental origin: Japanese, Chinese, Korean.

to apply TA to a wide range of research questions and contexts, making it a versatile and widely used method in qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Emphasizing an organic approach to coding and theme development, TA requires an active role on the researcher's part, which I described below. In addition, TA aims to identify and interpret critical characters of the data relevant to the research question rather than simply summarizing the data and social complexity of resilience and IPV, thus, contributing to the literature gap in the field (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

After transcription, I translated the interviews into English and uploaded them to *QDA Miner*[7]. The process of my own translation and uploading to the software offered one more opportunity to review the interviews and see the emergence of themes and subthemes. The process of TA involves two main stages: coding and theme development. In the coding stage, researchers identify and assign codes to specific units of analysis that capture interesting aspects of the data. These codes serve as the building blocks for the analysis. In the theme development stage, the codes are reviewed and grouped together based on their similarities and relationships. This process allows for the identification of larger patterns of meaning known as themes. These themes are underpinned by a central organizing concept that provides coherence and structure to the analysis. Through this iterative process of coding and theme development, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the data and uncover key insights and patterns within it (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

[7] QDA Miner is a software developed by Provalis Research that offers a mixed method and qualitative data analysis.

As TA has built-in quality control procedures to ensure rigour and quality, such as a two-stage review process where coded data and the entire dataset are (Clarke & Braun, 2017), only after all fifteen (15) interviews were coded and a careful revision of the codes, subcodes and themes discussed with my supervisor we achieved the final classification. Using the social ecology model of resilience as my guiding framework, I analyzed the data from the interviews and identified eighteen (18) subthemes along with eight (8) key themes. These findings were subsequently organized into five (5) thematic categories. Under the category of "meaning of resilience," two themes emerged: "navigating adversities" and "enduring unshakably." at the category “individual-level factors,” I found three themes: "motivation to leave," "rediscovering themselves," and "goals and projects." Moving to the "interpersonal-level factors" category, "social support" stood out as a theme. In the "community-level factors" category, "institutional support" emerged as a theme. Lastly, in the "societal-level factors" category, considering broader societal influences and systems, "patriarchal culture" was identified as the theme. The Analysis and Discussion of Findings section describes all categories, themes, and subthemes that emerged during this process.

Women's Profile

All fifteen (15) participants who suffered from IPV selected through *Mapa do Acolhimento* primary research self-identified as cisgender women. Fourteen (14) interviews were completed, and one (1) was cut off in about 40min of the interview. Despite the interruption and missing some information, this interview was selected as it had a rich story and enough content to be analyzed. Of all women, only one remained in their abusive relationship during the interviews, while fourteen (14) had left their relationship for at least

about a year at the time of the interviews, with an average of 3 years. Eleven (11) participants left their abusive relationship between the years 2016 to 2021, while three (3) have gone between the years 2010 to 2015. Their average age was 36 years old, aged from 19 to 51 years old.

The experiences of women survivors of IPV are influenced by various sociological factors, including purchasing power, employability, race, and region. These factors play significant roles in shaping their experiences. In the context of Brazil, it is important to consider the purchasing power, which in 2021 was 2.53 NCU (National Currency Units) per U.S. dollar. To provide further context, in October of 2021, 1 Brazilian real was equal to 0.18 U.S. dollars, which was the month when the interviews for this study were conducted. These economic factors contribute to the overall understanding of the socio-economic landscape within which these women navigate their experiences.

For this present research, among the five (5) participants identifying as Pardo (table 1), four had at least one child, including one of them who had a newborn dead as a consequence of physical and psychological abuse in her relationship. Three women held postgraduate degrees, one held a bachelor's degree, and another completed secondary education. Three participants hailed from the Southeast region, while the other two were from the Northeast. According to the IBGE[8] classification, two participants were classified as class E, one lived with

[8] The IBGE (2023) uses the Criterion by Minimum Wage Ranges. It is a method that classifies classes based on income brackets; more specifically, for monthly minimum wages. The monthly minimum wage in Brazil in 2021 was R$1,100 (Brazilian reais) which was $255.75 (Canadian Dollars) at the same year. For reference, 1 Brazilian real was equal to 0.2325 Canadian dollars in 2021.

Class	Familiar income in Brazilian Reais
Class A	22.000,01
Class B	11.000,01 to 22.000,00

her parents and had a household income classified as class C, and information regarding income was not available for the other two participants.

Among the three (3) self-reported Black participants (table 1), all of whom were mothers, one had experienced physical aggression resulting in an abortion, while the other two had two children each. Two (2) of them possessed higher education qualifications, and one was currently pursuing a university degree. Additionally, all three were employed, with two earning wages above the minimum wage in Brazil (income information for one participant was not available). One participant belonged to class D, signifying a slightly higher income level, while the other participant belonged to class E, representing the lowest income bracket.

Out of the seven (7) participants who self-identified as White (table 1), three had one child, while two had two children. The two participants without children had the highest educational degrees, with one pursuing a Ph.D. without employment or a scholarship, and the other holding a master's degree while working two jobs (class C). Another participant had a specialization and worked as self-employed (class C). Three participants held bachelor's degrees (classified as class D and E), and one was a university student fully dependent on her parents. During the interviews, one of them emphasized facing financial difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite having previously earned a higher income. All White participants resided in the Southeast region. The table below provides an overview of the most significant information about all the participants.

Class C	4.400,01 to 11.000,00
Class D	2.200,01 to 4.400,00
Class E	Up to 2.200,00

As mentioned previously, the indigenous population comprises less than 0.83% of Brazilians (IBGE, 2023). Thus, it is important to note that this study had no representatives of the indigenous populations. Given the comparatively small size of the indigenous people and their concentration within indigenous reserves, it is recognized that accessing this population poses challenges beyond the scope of the current research. Consequently, this study does not directly address the issue of IPV within indigenous communities, thereby presenting a potential limitation in comprehensively examining this specific population's experiences.

Table 1

Participants Profile

Pseudonym	Age range	Race	Children	Education Level	Class	Region	Years together	When left relationship
Andrea	26-35	Black	1	Bachelor	D	Southeast	4 y	2016-2021
Lorena	26-35	Black	2	Bachelor Student	E	Southeast	15 y	2016-2021
Mariana	36-45	Black	2	Bachelor	No info	Midwest	14 y	2016-2021
Aline	36-45	Pardo	1	Postgraduate Diploma	E	Northeast	3 y	2016-2021
Joana	36-45	Pardo	1	Postgraduate Diploma	C	Southeast	3 y	2016-2021
Luiza	36-45	Pardo	2	Postgraduate Diploma	No info	Southeast	15 y	2016-2021
Paloma	26-35	Pardo	1	High-School	Zero	Southeast	15 y	2016-2021
Sonia	36-45	Pardo	0	Bachelor	E	Northeast	1.25 y	2016-2021
Ana Carolina	26-35	White	0	Ph.D. student	Zero	Southeast	1.4 y	N/A
Cristina	36-45	White	2	Postgraduate Diploma	C	Southeast	16 y	2016-2021
Débora	36-45	White	2	Bachelor	D	Southeast	11 y	2010-2015
Érica	46-55	White	1	Bachelor	E	Southeast	5 y	2010-2015
Fernanda	36-45	White	0	Master	C	Southeast	3 y	2010-2015
Ingride	16-25	White	1	Bachelor student	Parents	Southeast	1.5 y	2016-2021
Sandra	26-35	White	1	Bachelor	D	Southeast	6 y	2016-2021

For my study, the participants were predominantly from the Southeast region, comprising twelve (12) participants, while two (2) hailed from the Northeast region and one (1)

from the Midwest region. All research participants were exclusively from urban centers characterized as either major cities, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, Salvador and Belo Horizonte, or metropolitan areas. Although the *Mapa do Acolhimento* research group intended to achieve a broader representation from various areas within the country, it is essential to acknowledge that the research was conducted amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and primarily relied on online interviews. This approach likely limited the participation of individuals residing in rural areas or economically disadvantaged regions.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Informed by the social ecology model of resilience and guided by an intersectional theoretical approach, this study employed a thematic analysis to explore the experiences of women participants in the primary study by NOSSAS NGO. The analysis aimed to understand how resilience was fostered and focused on examining the social factors that influenced the participants.

A comprehensive analysis was conducted, taking into account the socio-demographic background of the participants, including factors such as race, age, economic status, education levels, and their stories. By considering these contextual elements, a more nuanced understanding of resilience development within the specific social and demographic contexts of the participants was achieved.

Guided conceptually by the social ecology model of resilience, I was able to identify in my data several key themes (8) and subthemes (18) that emerged from the interviews. These findings were subsequently classified into five (5) different thematic categories, as presented in

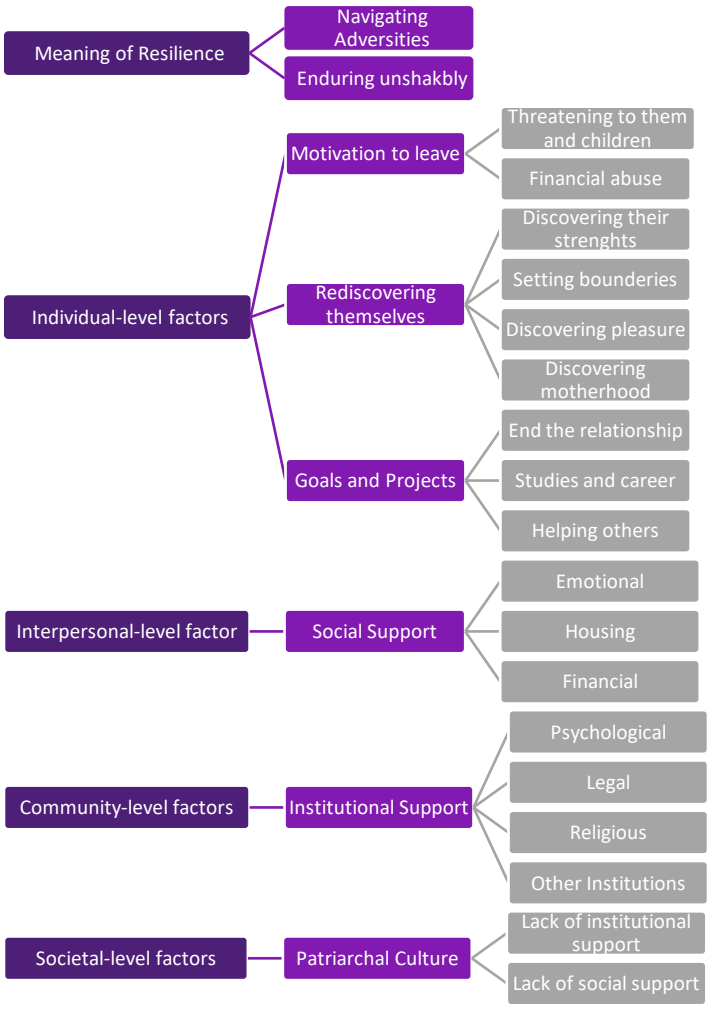
the chart below (Figure 3). This thematic process and analysis effectively underscore the complexity and multi-faceted nature of resilience within the given context.

As seen in Figure 3 below, the categories were the “meaning of resilience” and the four levels of factors that strengthen resilience: the individual, interpersonal, community, and societal-level factors. Within the category of "meaning of resilience," I identified two themes from the interviews: "navigating adversities" and "enduring unshakably." At the individual level, which pertains to inherent characteristics and attributes, I identified three themes that emerged from the fifteen interviews, namely: "motivation to leave," "rediscovering themselves," and "goals and projects." Moving to the "interpersonal-level factors" category, these factors involve social interactions and relationships. In this regard, the theme that emerged as a significant fortifier of resilience was "social support." Shifting the focus to the "community-level factors" category, which encompasses characteristics and resources within the immediate community, the observed key theme was "institutional support." Finally, within the "societal-level factors" category, encompassing broader societal influences and systems, the key theme identified was "patriarchal culture."

The relationship between the different levels in the context of resilience among women survivors is complex and ever-changing. Influence flows from the macro to the micro levels, encompassing societal, community, interpersonal, and individual dimensions and vice versa (Figure 4). While participants in the study reclaimed their agency and empowerment through various means, a comprehensive understanding of resilience from an ecological perspective highlights the intricate interactions between individuals and their environments (Ungar, 2012).

Figure 3

Horizontal Hierarchy of Thematic Categories, Themes and Subthemes.

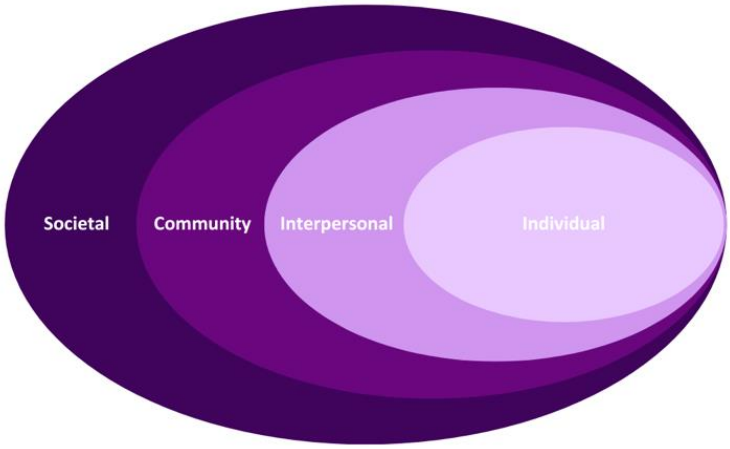


When viewed in this intricate and multidimensional manner, resilience is not solely reliant on an individual's agency in recovering from risk exposure. Instead, it becomes equally, if not more, dependent on the capacity of the individual's physical and social environment to facilitate positive development under adverse circumstances. Embracing a broader ecological understanding of resilience enhances the development of interpretive models that elucidate how individuals navigate through adverse environments over time (Ungar, 2012). The following

illustrates the interview participants' perspective on resilience, showcasing how they confronted challenges, asserted control over their lives, and engaged with their networks.

Figure 4

Four Level Factors that Influence Resilience



Thematic Category 1: Meaning of Resilience

The first thematic category explores participants' understanding and perceptions of resilience. In many instances, research focusing on resilience neglects to incorporate the participants' own perspectives and understandings of the phenomena. However, adopting a feminist perspective from the standpoint of a Global South country, I contend that considering participants' knowledge offers a valuable and multifaceted insight into their diverse views.

During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on what resilience meant to them. Out of the total sample size, fourteen (14) participants responded to this question, while one (1) interview was interrupted before completion, resulting in incomplete data for this specific inquiry. During the analysis of this category, it became evident that resilience encompasses both emphasizing their achievements as a testament to their resilience while also shedding light on the nuanced and occasionally critical perspectives regarding utilizing the term

itself. This range of perceptions and opinions generated two (2) themes: “Navigating Adversities” and “Enduring Unshakably.”

Theme: Navigating Adversities

Eleven (11) women emphasized their achievements as a testament to their resilience in navigating the adversities of IPV. They were White, Black and Pardo, and almost all mothers (except one), from secondary to postgraduate diplomas, and diverse economic accessibility. These individuals highlighted their ability to overcome adversity, rebuild their lives, and assert their independence as resilience indicators. Frequently resilience was associated with persistence and resistance for these women. An illustrative example of their resilience is the case of Luiza, who not only shared her experiences during an abusive relationship but also reflected on her journey while growing up. Luiza, a Pardo woman and mother of two, was raised in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in the greater metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro. Despite her father's initial support for her education, he exerted financial control over her mother. Luiza vividly remembers her mother's advice never to be dependent on men, a message that left a lasting impact on her life. As a result, both Luiza and her sister are the only ones in their family to have pursued university degrees, while their brothers did not pursue higher education. When asked about what resilience means to her, Luiza described:

> I think it's a mixture of persistence, patience, with the I don't know, hope, I don't know… Because within these circumstances that I lived, I saw myself several times already punishing myself, thinking I did it wrong; after that, no, it's right… I've cried, suffered, and regretted it, but I've already straightened up and balanced myself, and I think I've gained strength. He knows that I can fight for myself because that way, even though he

> pulled me down, I always had many targets and goals. I never got used to a situation like that, so much so that I had my son. I was still in college; I was in the fifth period of college, and at many moments, I thought I was going to give up. “Am I going to give up?” But I didn't give up. I graduated, and after I did my postgraduate… there are also people around who helped me to have this perspective that “you can,” do you know? (Luiza)

As shown in the example of Luiza above, many women would define the meaning of resilience by sharing their stories of overcoming challenges and navigating them. One other participant even defined resilience as the ability to get out of bed, and more than one emphasized that being resilient was what kept them alive. These words and stories they shared represent their capacity to navigate the adversities present during years of psychological, physical, and economic abuse.

The participants acknowledged their own resilience, highlighting their unwavering determination and capacity for self-reinvention throughout their experiences of abuse and beyond. Luiza expressed this sentiment in two distinct ways: “He knows that I can fight for myself” and “I didn't give up.” These statements underscore the participants' ability to persevere and overcome adversities, ultimately achieving their goals, even when “pulled down” by their former partners.

Luiza's narrative reflects the resilience shared by most research participants, who faced adversities not only during abusive relationships but also while growing up in impoverished neighbourhoods. These women draw strength from their mothers' examples and their ability to overcome and transform their circumstances. Education becomes a pathway to upward

mobility for many of them, and this is a prevalent reality in Brazil, as reported by IBGE (2021), wherein 2019, women, on average, attained a higher level of education (19.4%) than men (15.1%) aged 25 or over. Furthermore, several studies have found significant associations between resilience and socio-demographic variables such as education and employment, along with other factors (Carter-Snell & Jakubec, 2013; Howell et al., 2018).

In addition, based on the illustrations provided by the participants, it became evident that resilience, from their perspective, possessed intricate and dynamic characteristics. Most of them, being mothers like Luiza, expressed the challenges of balancing motherhood with their personal aspirations amid a violent relationship. Many believed they would have to "give up" on their goals and personal lives due to the overwhelming responsibilities of being a mother and dealing with the situation. Thus, their idea of resilience not only underscored their agency and personal efforts in facing violence and motherhood but also highlighted the significance of their social support network. This was exemplified by Luiza, who emphasized the role of supportive individuals in shaping her perspective, stating, "there are also people around who helped me to have this perspective that you can." Overall, the participants' narratives on resilience reveal their remarkable journeys of overcoming the violence they endured, often spanning several years. These accounts demonstrate similarities that transcend differences in race, class, and education within the sample.

Theme: Enduring unshakeably

This theme refers to a subset of participants that conveyed reservations about using the term “resilience” or recognizing themselves as resilient. They viewed resilience as an expectation to constantly exert effort and endure, creating a perception that resilience means

unshakeably enduring hardships without acknowledging its impact on their well-being. These women challenged the notion of resilience as simply enduring. They believed it should encompass the effect of the challenges faced and prioritize one's well-being rather than persisting without proper support. They emphasized the need for a more nuanced understanding of resilience that recognizes the ongoing struggles and promotes self-care and support in the face of IPV. Three (3) women expressly highlighted how their dislike for the word "resilience." Ana Carolina's response to the question about resilience is a representative case of this resilience meaning. Ana Carolina, a White Brazilian Ph.D. student in social sciences with a social justice work background, is a representative example of this perspective. When questioned about resilience, she recounted attending a class led by a research professor that focused on the concept of resilience. Following this class, the term "resilience" became a red flag for her, and she remarked:

> … resilience refers to stretching a structure, and it withstands until you can no longer [hold] like this [referring to the concept of resilience in physics]. And I think that this is a way of saying, so to speak, the suffering that the difficulties of life in general plus the social, political suffering and everything, it is a flirt with liberal ideas, meritocratic thing, that whole thing where if you make an effort, you can do it. No, fuck it. Of course not, right? … I had to increase the pain threshold, right? Increase the threshold of disintegration to the point that before it would be unbearable, it had to put up with more things, right? (Ana Carolina)

Ana Carolina shares her anguish of having to stay in the relationship, enduring increasing levels of pain and personal deterioration due to the absence of viable alternatives.

Compounded by her lack of employment and absence of financial assistance from both institutional sources and her family, she is the only participant that remained in the relationship during the time of the interview. Listening to her interview was particularly difficult as her tone of voice and words conveyed a profound sense of feeling trapped and helplessness. It was evident that she was still caught in the cycle of violence, primarily because of her lack of financial and housing resources to leave the relationship. Her narrative exhibited features commonly associated with Battered Women Syndrome (BWS), which involves a repetitive cycle of abuse and control, resulting in various emotional and behavioural reactions like fear, helplessness, and a sense of entrapment (Walker, 2006).

For Ana Carolina, the concept of resilience works better in the corporate vocabulary and does not work for those who fight against inequalities. In her words, resilience is a word that flirts with liberal ideas. In accordance, Dhar & Dixit (2022) emphasize how much this weight of resilience as an individual capacity to bear comes from a neoliberal discourse that exempts institutions from responsibility and expresses personal accountability, including for tolerating violence. Although being in an abusive relationship and disliking the term resilience, Ana Carolina's story reflects remarkable resilience. She mentioned in the interview that she was making significant progress, nearing completion of her Ph.D., and securing a job that week. In addition, despite the pain and abuse, she found support from friends and the *Mapa do Acolhimento* project, showing her network support and her ability to navigate adversities with strength and determination.

As the example above from Ana Carolina, some women perceive resilience as enduring violence unshakeably, and this perception has tragically bound them to abusive relationships

for prolonged periods. The notion that a woman must bear the weight of everything, enduring hardships to uphold the status quo, reinforces the misguided concept of "resilience." These women and some participants who had higher education and postgraduate degree and who defined resilience as navigating adversities criticized women's and men's social roles and how much they submitted to violence for being “trapped” within societal expectations.

As an instance of these criticisms, participants vehemently highlighted the burden imposed upon them on socially gendered roles, exclusively responsible for homemaking, nurturing, and managing family relationships, often sacrificing their own aspirations for these roles. In stark contrast, men assumed positions as breadwinners, decision-makers, and "protectors," wielding control over women's behaviour and choices. Women often rationalized such behaviour even when subjected to control, offering excuses like "he's just being protective" or "it's my duty to care for our family." This glaring disparity perpetuates gender inequalities, stifling women's autonomy and reinforcing patriarchal norms that inhibit their freedom to realize their full potential beyond societal confines. Interesting and intricate, these women attitudes and reflections implied a shift in these perspectives in order to develop or strength resilience on them. In other words, resilience entails refusing to excuse or justify inappropriate behaviour from a 'loved one'. In addition, they also recognized the complexity of IPV and the need for a system to solve it, including institutional, social and legal recognition. Notably, the participants engaging in this discourse possessed a considerable level of education and experienced regret for not having “woken up” earlier.

Thematic Category 2: Individual-level factors

The second thematic category explores the personal motives, actions and beliefs contributing to the resilience of women who have survived IPV. It is essential to remind that individual attributes do not solely determine resilience but are shaped by the interaction between individuals and their environment (Ungar, 2012). The shift towards comprehending resilience in a contextually relevant manner moves away from considering the individual as the central focus of analysis. Instead, it highlights the significance of the individual's social and physical environment, placing emphasis on identifying coping patterns that are associated with resilience.

According to Ungar (2012), the results obtained from adverse experiences rely more on the environment's quality, specifically its ability to fulfill the requirements of vulnerable individuals rather than individual competence. In numerous studies on resilience, a common mistake is to solely attribute outcomes to personal agency while disregarding the significant impact of sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors that shape development trajectories. It is indisputable that there are individual factors that influence individual resilience; however, what was seen in this study is how much individual elements are also influenced by the social, cultural and interpersonal context of surviving women.

Notably, the social and cultural contexts intertwined with the life of these women. While there were no direct questions about how they grew up, almost half of the participants mentioned growing up in abusive households while sharing their stories. They reported coming from traditional families where male control over women was prevalent. These women recounted how their fathers, as the male figures in their households, abused their mothers.

Consequently, this normalized and ingrained notion of control and violence within their familial and cultural backgrounds made it difficult for them to recognize the moral implications and differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, with some enduring them for over a decade. In this context, a woman who was not deemed to endure such treatment in the name of preserving family harmony was often labelled as weak. Previous research suggests that individuals in abusive relationships often recreate the relational dynamics they experienced in their childhood (Whitfield et al., 2003).

Within this theme, participants' narratives revealed various factors that influenced their resilience, encompassing the following three themes: “motivation to leave or contact the NGO,” “rediscovering themselves,” and “goals and projects.” Below is the description and the primary analysis of themes and subthemes.

Theme: Motivation to leave the relationship or contact the NGO

During the interviews, participants were asked about the moment they realized they were in a violent relationship and sought support, leading to the theme "motivation to leave the relationship or contact the NGO." It became apparent that all participants experienced a progressive escalation of violence, beginning with subtler forms and intensifying over time. They frequently had not recognized psychological, controlling behaviours, and financial abuse as forms of IPV. Previous research find that recognizing and labeling abusive behaviours in their adult lives proves more challenging for individuals who have grown up in abusive homes (Acevedo et al., 2013; Meeker et al., 2020). Among the fifteen (15) participants, only one (1) ended the relationship during the early stages of emotional and psychological violence (first year of the relationship). However, her action led to an escalation, with the abuser resorting to

persecution and making threats when she set boundaries. Overall, for almost all participants, it was only when physical violence escalated to extreme levels, endangering both the woman and her children, that they felt compelled to seek assistance. Furthermore, several participants highlighted the cumulative impact of persistent abuse, particularly severe financial abuse and control, as the driving force behind their decision to seek support.

The experiences shared by the women highlighted common elements of control and diminishing behaviour. As the abuse escalated over time, there came a definitive moment when a line was crossed, leaving the women with no choice but to seek help and support. Within this theme, I identified subthemes that capture the participants' shared experiences of recognizing the increasing violence within their relationships and their subsequent motivation to leave or contact an NGO for assistance. The theme sheds light on the factors that led to their decision to seek support and highlights the commonalities in their experiences of control, diminishment, and reaching a point of no return.

Subtheme: Threat to their life and children. This subtheme refers to a significant subject identified by the participants. It encompasses the experiences and perceptions of individuals who have faced threats and endangerment to their own lives and their children's lives within an abusive relationship. This subtheme explores the multifaceted ways in which intimate partners employ various forms of intimidation, both explicit and implicit, to exert power and control. These threats involved aggressive behaviour or explicit statements conveying an intent to cause harm. Within this subtheme, participants described instances where their abusers have directly threatened physical harm or injury. The subtheme also

includes threats against their children's well-being and safety, which profoundly impacted their experiences and decision-making processes.

Observing the intersectionality of these women, it is worth noting that most participants who reported longer relationships (over a decade) were those with two children, except for one White woman who had children in her second marriage and one Pardo woman who has only one child. Also, most women in longer marriages were predominantly Black and Pardo individuals with low incomes. Among them, physical violence was a common experience, and two women even endured homicide attempts, in addition to the psychological and economic violence they faced. On the other hand, the White participants in this category had higher incomes and suffered exclusively psychological violence until the point of separation, when physical violence occurred. This factor is pertinent to the Brazilian reality, where physical violence is less socially accepted among individuals with higher education, economic and social standing. On the other hand, psychological violence remains largely unrecognized.

Despite the sample being small, another important intersection here seems to reflect the reality of many mothers who have more difficulty leaving abusive relationships. Women with children are three times more likely to experience IPV compared to childless women. According to Buchanan (2019), support for mothering in IPV circumstances often remains overlooked, as mothers are unfairly held responsible for their children's negative actions, poor health, and well-being (mother-blame). Instead of recognizing it as a concern requiring government attention and support, mothering in IPV is treated as a "women's problem," with mothers unfairly burdened with the responsibility for their children's well-being and blamed for any distress they experience. This oversimplified and moralistic view disregards the complexity

of women's relationships to their children, partners, and communities. Instead of holding the abuser accountable, mothers are unfairly blamed for the abuse due to perceptions of "failure to protect" their children, even when escaping the abusive situation is not easily achievable (Buchanan, 2019).

This mother-blame issue was present in this study, as in Brazil the popular discourse blames the women to stay in the relationship and its consequences for their children. However, the mothers here, despite being in abusive situations, had engaged in behaviours they consider protective for their children. These instances challenge the conventional understanding of how mothers in IPV situations behave or respond to protect their children, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach in social support services. By recognizing and understanding these protective actions, support services can be better equipped to provide appropriate assistance and resources to help these mothers and their children effectively navigate and escape abusive environments.

One example of a mother in a long relationship is Mariana, a Black woman who wanted separation from her husband for a considerable period due to enduring years of infidelity and enduring severe psychological and economic violence. The pivotal moment that pushed her towards the irrevocable decision to leave occurred when she confronted him to separate: the danger to her and her children's life was the point of no return after years of abuse, as she said:

> I was faced with a situation where, when I wanted to separate, my ex-husband threatened me; he tried to kill me twice in front of the children … So that; the last time, he tried to hang me; my daughter was very desperate, she was in shock, and I asked God to guide me because I did not know what to do anymore; I could not take it

> anymore, and he put us, me, the children inside the car and said that since I wanted to end the relationship, the family was going to end. He was going to throw the car off the bridge. (Mariana)

Mariana's case serves as a compelling illustration of the profound impact experienced by women when confronted with IPV. Her narrative sheds light on the extent of cruelty and violence endured by both herself and her children, underscoring the turning point when their lives were directly threatened. Notably, the endangerment of her children, rather than solely her own safety, acted as the catalyst for Mariana to take action by contacting the police and seeking support from her network. This internal mobilization was driven by her deep-rooted instinct to safeguard her children, making it a transformative force in her decision-making process.

Feminist scholars recognize that mothering remains invisible to social networks and services, leading to blame when women seek assistance. Positive support, including practical and material aid, is vital during and after separation. Removing perpetrators and ensuring safer father-child contact is essential. Policies should hold men accountable and avoid blame, supporting women in protecting their children (Lapierre, 2019).

Débora, a White woman, now married again with two children (from the second marriage) is another example of a similar motivation for survival, albeit in a different type of violence. During the interviews, she shared that she had been divorced for over 10 years, and at that time, discussions about abusive relationships and IPV were not prevalent. She mentioned that this relationship was filled with a “cold war,” a “fight of nerves” and that today she

identifies how abusive it was. At that time, the driving force behind her decision to leave was an emotional threat, which is illustrated in the following example:

> I left because of the nonconformity, the lack of love, the lack of care, of zeal; at that moment, it was what I identified, right? … when I decided to leave the marriage, it was not because I lived in a relationship [abusive], right? … It was a matter of emotional survival, you know? Red flag, run away, and I followed my instinct; I followed the warning.

At that time, while she did not explicitly recognize her relationship as abusive, she recognized the importance of emotional survival. Her decision to leave was driven by her instinct for self-preservation, demonstrating the importance of listening to one's inner voice and being aware of potential risks, even without widely discussed indicators of abuse. She explained that after successfully leaving the house, she faced a murder attempt from her ex-husband. According to her, up until that point, there had been no previous instances of physical violence in their relationship.

These prevailing narratives, frequently recounted by women, warrant closer examination within the context of patriarchal cultural dynamics and racism. Stories like Mariana and Débora occupy the extreme end of the violence spectrum and regrettably exhibit a high propensity for feminicide. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, Brazil's feminicide rates are alarmingly high, particularly impacting Black and Pardo women. This grave concern highlights that the issue is not solely limited to gender violence but also intertwined with racism and class. As Carneiro (2019) affirms, being a Black woman in Brazilian society entails engaging in a

threefold struggle against exclusion based on the intersections of race, gender, and socio-economic status.

In addition to their motivation and actions, Mariana and other participants in this research have demonstrated resilience, enabling them to navigate challenging circumstances and share their narratives of fortitude and perseverance. Their ability to access resources beyond the individual level provided them with the necessary means to not only survive but also articulate their experiences.

Previous studies on IPV and resilience have identified that threats to the lives of women and their children can serve as a catalyst for their resilience (Kelly, 2009; Labronici, 2012; Marcovicz et al., 2014; Scrafford et al., 2019; Trigueiro et al., 2014). Along similar lines, Njie-Carr et al. (2020) findings highlighted the phenomenon of resilience, both as a dynamic process and an achieved outcome, which emerged as a potential catalyst for empowerment, facilitating the individual's capacity for self-determination in accessing essential health services and requisite resources to ensure personal safety.

Subtheme: Financial abuse. Within the theme of financial abuse, resilience is demonstrated through participants' experiences and their ability to withstand the detrimental impact of financial control and manipulation within abusive relationships. Participants describe various forms of economic abuse inflicted upon them by their intimate partners within this subtheme. This included actions such as withholding money, restricting access to financial resources, manipulating to gain legal custody of properties, preventing employment or education opportunities, controlling financial decision-making, or exploiting their economic dependence.

Financial abuse is a means for the abuser to exert power and control over the victim, making them vulnerable and dependent on the abuser for their basic needs (Sanders, 2007). Frequently participants shared their experiences of feeling trapped, helpless, and unable to escape the abusive relationship due to financial constraints. Financial abuse can contribute to a cycle of dependency and increase the victim's reliance on the abuser, making it difficult for them to seek help, maintain friendship (Ahmad et al., 2013a) or leave the relationship. Previous research confirmed that social services played a crucial role in facilitating resilience among survivors of IPV by providing vital structural support, including assistance with housing and financial resources, among others (Ahmad et al., 2013a).

It is well-known in the literature that IPV is closely linked to economic factors, such as low income, unemployment, career stress, and poverty (Matjasko et al., 2013). Unemployment has been identified as a risk factor for perpetration (Stith et al., 2004), and victims often face health challenges resulting from IPV that can negatively impact their employment (Logan et al., 2007). In contrast, the literature I reviewed did not address situations where women who were already economically empowered still faced extortion from their husbands. Nonetheless, I encountered cases during my study that exemplify this phenomenon, as described in the following paragraph. An interesting intersectional observation is that the women who experienced extortion despite their economic independency were White, one of them without children and holding a graduate degree. On the other hand, all the women who reported suffering from financial abuse typified as withholding money, restricting access to financial resources, blocking employment or education opportunities, and controlling financial decision-making, were Black and Pardo mothers.

An illustrative case of a financially independent White woman is Fernanda, whose abusive partner's behaviour escalated when it involved actions such as transferring property titles or attempting legal measures to gain financial control. This became a pivotal moment for her and highlighted the gradual intensification of economic violence and the deterioration of her relationship. Throughout the interviews, Fernanda revealed the total control, cancellations, and manipulation inflicted by her husband. Despite previous arguments and temporary improvements, the cycle repeated itself. Below, she reflects on the extent of her abuse, stating:

> Like, my salary was just to pay the bills, he bought clothes, I had to pay, his family, everyone on top of me… He was killing me like that, psychologically. My credit card would stay with him, right? I worked three shifts and doubled my salary because I can double, for example, right? … I doubled shifts in my permanent position and worked a night shift on a term contract. It was during this time that I purchased the apartment, which [the apartment ownership] ended up in a legal dispute [over the separation of property]. (Fernanda)

In the example above, Fernanda vividly describes the extent of her financial exploitation, such as her salary being solely used to pay bills. At the same time, her partner freely spent money on himself and his family. Remarkably, her resistance is evident through her determination to break free from the abusive relationship. She mustered the strength to express her desire for separation, despite the psychological torment inflicted upon her by her partner's cyclical patterns of violence. Fernanda and most women faced legal battles to guarantee their minimal rights, underscoring their resilience and unwavering commitment to reclaim their rights and establish a life free from abuse. During the legal action, she offered a

financial settlement as a means of buying her freedom. This highlights her agency and resourcefulness in seeking autonomy.

Overall, within the context of financial abuse, resilience was demonstrated through participants' endurance of economic manipulation, their recognition of the abusive dynamics, and their active pursuit of emancipation from financial constraints. Despite the exploitative tactics employed by their partners, these individuals exhibited remarkable strength and resilience in their journey toward reclaiming financial autonomy and escaping the cycle of abuse.

Theme: Rediscovering themselves

This theme captures the process through which participants rediscover and reclaim their identity after leaving their relationship. Over time, women's perceptions of themselves and their experiences of abuse underwent a transformative process, which aligns with findings from previous research on violence and resilience (Aguillard et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2012; Crann & Barata, 2016; Howell et al., 2018; Humphreys, 2003). There were distinct pathways through which these women rediscovered themselves. For this reason, this theme encompasses aspects that I categorized as four (4) subthemes, such as discovering their strengths, learning how to set boundaries, discovering sexual pleasure, and rediscovering motherhood. Through these different paths, women could reconnect with personal values and interests and re-establish a sense of autonomy and control over their lives. During the interviews, twelve (12) women brought up how the experience of abuse and overcoming the violence was a process of rediscovering themselves.

Subtheme: Discovering their strengths. This subtheme highlights the transformative process of self-discovery and self-confidence where women survivors recognized and embraced their strengths. It involves realizing and acknowledging personal qualities and capabilities that contributed to their ability to overcome the adversities they had faced. Women survivors uncover hidden strengths through their recovery journey, such as determination, courage, and adaptability. They reflected on their experiences and recognized how they had demonstrated strength in navigating the complex dynamics of IPV. One clear example is Fernanda, a single White woman with a master's degree and the highest individual income among the participants, who expressed:

> My life has completely changed in a sense, eh… first as a person, as a woman, I aligned my emotions, and I found a force I did not know where I had, right? I say it's even a … courage, you know? … I understand the law, you know? … Today, I'm a person in everything I do; I'll read the Constitution, Penal Code, and Civil Code. It changed everything, right? I rebuilt myself; I'm Fernanda, who was born in the countryside, who grew up in the country, who took care of animals, only today [after this experience] I say that I fight, [before] I did not fight [referring to fight for her rights]. (Fernanda)

As demonstrated in the excerpt above, Fernanda placed significant emphasis on the transformative nature of her life and the profound impact this experience had on her individuality and identity, both as an individual and a woman. Now she feels stronger and brave to face adversities and fight for her rights. These realizations were happening during and after the separation. In addition, Fernanda's acquisition of legal information equipped her with the necessary resources to confront the abuse she endured. New knowledge and the

acknowledgment of their inner strength and capacity to face challenges reinforced their resilience and fortitude, enabling them to navigate difficult circumstances and strive for a better life.

Fernanda and other participants felt validated and empowered by their educational achievements, which gave them the strength and efficacy to face legal battles during their divorce. This affirmation aligns with existing research on resilience, where academic accomplishments were recognized to serve as a buffer against any devaluing or demeaning messages they may have experienced in their violent relationships (C. Burnette & Hefflinger, 2016).

Across all participants, irrespective of race, class, or economic status, those who had ended their relationships displayed the ability to recognize their strengths. The only exception was the participant who remained in the relationship during the interviews, which is understandable as she had not yet overcome the violence, hindering her access to such insights. Overall, the process of discovering strengths empowers women survivors of IPV, enhances their identity, equips them with coping strategies and problem-solving skills, and facilitates the development of a supportive network. These factors collectively contribute to their resilience, enabling them to navigate the challenges they face during and after the separation as they rebuild their lives beyond the abusive relationship.

Subtheme: Setting boundaries. This subtheme focused on how women survivors of IPV learned how to establish and enforce personal limitations. It explored how survivors redefined their limits, asserted their autonomy, and protected their well-being following experiences of abuse. For Crann and Barata (2016), the process of establishing personal boundaries in women

survivors of IPV, which involved recognizing and understanding warning signs in partners, emerged as a means for women to regain control of their lives. These boundaries served as a tool for women to assert greater control and were closely associated with their experience of resilience.

Setting boundaries involves recognizing and honouring one's own needs, preferences, and limits. Women survivors underwent a transformative journey where they learned to prioritize their own emotional, physical, and psychological safety. They developed strategies to clearly communicate their boundaries to others and assertively enforce them, thereby establishing healthier dynamics in their relationships and interactions. During this process of rediscovering themselves, six (6) women highlighted how positioning themselves was one of the most important lessons learned through this experience of abuse. No correlation was found among women in my study between educational level and race. Still, it was observed that most of them were financially independent or had some informal income even during the abusive relationship, and three did not have children during or after the separation. Débora's experience exemplifies this process of rediscovery as she expressed:

> Imposing limits was very difficult for me, but it was a life changer, right? Because the no, which means no, was not part of my life. So many of the situations in which I found myself in psychological violence because I didn't say no, I didn't know how to say no, or I didn't want to say no. I was afraid of what “the no” would bring along with it. (Débora)

Débora's personal experience highlights the difficulty she initially faced in setting boundaries. However, she emphasizes that this process was life-changing for her. She acknowledges that saying "no," which had not been a part of her life before, played a pivotal

role in her journey. She reflects on how her previous inability to say "no" led to experiences of psychological violence. Débora admits her fear of the potential consequences that would accompany asserting her boundaries. This transformation allowed her to escape the grip of her abuser and find a path toward healing and independence.

The difficulty in establishing boundaries and saying "no" is a common aspect of Battered Women Syndrome. The lack of limits made her vulnerable to experiences of psychological violence within her abusive relationship. However, it is important to contextualize and avoid blaming the survivor for not saying "no." Débora's upbringing, marked by abuse and manipulation from her parents and the lack of support during her separation process, shed light on the complex factors hindering a survivor's ability to assert boundaries. Understanding the broader context of her experiences helps to underscore the significance of providing support, empathy, and resources to those affected by BWS rather than placing blame on the survivor for the challenges they face in breaking free from abusive relationships. This story paints a disheartening picture of the culture of VAW, which is firmly rooted in systemic oppression that hinders their autonomy, dignity, and empowerment (Muniz, 2017).

The subjugation of women in interpersonal relationships and the challenges they face in asserting their boundaries can be traced back to cultural influences and patriarchal societies. These societies have historically rendered women invisible and undermined their agency. As a result, women have been systematically silenced and invalidated (Muniz, 2017). This cultural framework perpetuates a cycle of violence and hampers women's ability to assert themselves and say "no" in various contexts. The journey towards empowering women and addressing this

issue requires a collective effort to challenge and dismantle the deeply ingrained cultural norms perpetuating gender-based inequalities and violence.

As Débora, many women had emphasized the importance of establishing boundaries not only in intimate relationships but also within their familial and social circles. Setting boundaries was fundamental to these women to strengthen their resilience. Firstly, setting boundaries allowed survivors to assert their autonomy and reclaim control over their lives. By clearly defining their limits and expectations, they created a framework that safeguards their well-being and protects them from further harm. Secondly, setting boundaries helped survivors establish healthier relationships. It enabled them to communicate their needs and expectations effectively, fostering open and respectful interactions. In other words, setting boundaries strengthens resilience in women survivors of IPV by fostering self-empowerment, promoting healthier relationships, facilitating healing and self-esteem, and enhancing their ability to detect and respond to potential abuse. It is an integral aspect of the recovery process, supporting survivors in reclaiming their autonomy and rebuilding their lives on their terms.

Subtheme: Discovering pleasure. This subtheme examines how survivors navigate the impact of past abusive experiences on their sexual well-being and embark on a journey of discovery and healing. It refers to the process through which women survivors explored and claimed their sexual pleasure and agency. After experiencing IPV, some participants faced challenges related to their sexual identity, body image, and intimacy. “Discovering pleasure” involves overcoming these challenges and exploring ways to reconnect with their desires, boundaries, and positive experiences of sexuality. Through self-exploration, psychotherapy, education, or engaging in healthy relationships, survivors gradually rebuilt their confidence and

regained control over their sexual lives. They learned to communicate their needs, establish boundaries, and engage in consensual and pleasurable experiences aligned with their values and desires. Aline, a Pardo single mother with a postgraduate diploma and low income, shared how the process of rediscovering herself came through having casual relationships and trying different things, as she said:

> I decided to enter a relationship website that would allow me to go out with several men and do things I had never done before. To get to know me as a woman, right? And I met myself, had the experiences… And then I understood that I am the owner of my own body … Our body is not the man's; our body is ours because there is this patriarchal, sexist culture, and then we keep thinking that our body belongs to the man… I needed to allow myself so I could see that I was alive, and it was very good because when you get into the process of violence, you no longer see yourself as a woman or you see yourself in a way, eh, with some visual impairment, right? With some deformation. (Aline)

As articulated by Aline in the above quotation, the transformative process of engaging in relationships with other men and exploring pleasure played a pivotal role in her journey of self-discovery as a woman, empowering her to reclaim agency over her own body. Discovering sexual pleasure empowered survivors by helping them reconnect with their bodies, desires, and sensual selves. It reinforced a positive self-image and self-worth, counteracting the negative messages and shame that may have been imposed upon them during the abusive relationship. This empowerment and self-validation contribute to their overall resilience. In addition, engaging in a journey of sexual discovery can be a part of the healing process for survivors. As

the example of Aline, it allowed her to reconnect with her body in a positive and consensual manner, fostering self-acceptance and self-love. A purposeful and self-driven exploration of one's sexuality has the potential to empower survivors and facilitate their healing process, ultimately contributing to enhanced overall well-being. However, it is essential to acknowledge that not all survivors may find this approach beneficial, as individual experiences and preferences vary significantly. Each survivor's journey is unique, and what proves effective for one individual may not yield the same results for another.

The provided example also underscores the influence of patriarchal culture on Aline's perception of her identity as a woman, necessitating a process of deconstruction for her to recognize and comprehend that her body is not the possession of a man but rather an embodiment of her autonomy. The process of discovering and reclaiming sexual pleasure can positively impact the resilience of women who have survived IPV. By exploring and reclaiming their sexual pleasure, survivors regained a sense of autonomy and agency over their bodies and desires. This process allowed them to break free from the constraints imposed by the abuser and assert their own sexual needs and boundaries.

The literature on pleasure and personal sexuality in female survivors of IPV is minimal. The only study I found with some relation was that of Tambling et al. (2012), which addressed a comprehensive approach to pleasure-oriented sexuality education in domestic violence shelters. This study found that a Pleasurable Consensual Education Program (PCEP) positively impacted women in IPV shelters. Participants appreciated open discussions on personal sexuality and reported increased knowledge, access to resources, and a safe space to discuss pleasurable sexuality. Similar to the present study, the research conducted by Tambling et al.

challenges the prevailing assumption that survivors of IPV are not sexual beings and emphasize the importance of incorporating pleasure into safe sexual practices. Their findings underscore the significance of integrating pleasure into the framework of safe sexual practices (Tambling et al., 2012).

Subtheme: Rediscovering Motherhood. This subtheme explored the process through which two (2) participants navigated and redefined their roles as mothers. It focused on the experiences, challenges, and transformations that occurred as survivors reclaimed their maternal identity and rebuilt their relationships with their children. Survivors of IPV often face significant disruptions in their parenting due to the dynamics of abuse (Choi, Lo, et al., 2019). Studies have demonstrated the detrimental impact of domestic abuse on children's social, emotional, and behavioural development and mothers' emotional well-being, parenting competence, and responsiveness toward their offspring (Cort & Cline, 2017; Howell et al., 2021). Rediscovering motherhood involves healing emotional wounds, rebuilding trust, and re-establishing healthy parent-child connections. Women survivors embarked on a journey of self-reflection and growth to address the impact of violence on their parenting abilities.

During the interview, Paloma, a Pardo single mother with secondary level of education shared the tumultuous journey she experienced during her marriage, which involved enduring psychological and economic violence. Her husband's emotional instability led them to move to different cities and states across Brazil constantly. Paloma revealed that initially, she did not want to have a child as she already felt responsible and overwhelmed with managing the household, adjusting to a new city, and taking care of her husband, who relied on her for various tasks, including managing his medical appointments and meals. We may reflect that her

decision to resist having a child with this man for six years showcases a unique form of agency and resilience. Her reluctance indicates that she instinctively and perhaps intellectually acknowledged certain shortcomings in his character or behaviour. In reflecting on her experiences, Paloma was asked if there was anything she could take away from the ordeal, and she responded:

> I've matured as a person, as a woman. Today I'm a mother; today, I recognize. Oh, today, I acknowledge motherhood in me. Because until then, I didn't; I hadn't had the maternity yet. Today I even look at my son. I speak, was the best thing that came is my son. That at the time, I thought it was the worst thing. Right? (Paloma)

Paloma's words reflect her journey of growth, transformation and resilience. She expressed how she has matured as a person and woman and has come to recognize and acknowledge her identity as a mother. She reflects on how, in the past, she did not fully embrace motherhood as a consequence of the violence she suffered. Paloma's resilience is evident in her ability to navigate the adversities posed by the violence she experienced. Through this process, Paloma was able to reframe her relationship with her son, undergoing a transformative journey. This transformation serves as one of the testaments to Paloma's resilience, demonstrating her strength and determination in the face of adversity.

It is noteworthy that, according to Paloma, embracing motherhood is a significant aspect of her journey toward maturity as a woman. From her narrative, her distance from her child was the result of the daily violence she had been living with, as well as the burden of being the homemaker, responsible for tasks related to housekeeping, cooking, and childcare, as well as the caretaker of the family, being considered the emotional center of the family. Her story

also serves as an illustration of the gendered division of labour that confines women to unpaid domestic roles. This division is enforced by a binary, patriarchal, heterosexual, and androcentric order. As mentioned earlier, in patriarchal economic models, activities such as family care, household chores, and production for the family, children, and communities are deemed "non-productive" and "economically inactive" within this framework.

In patriarchal contexts, women are objectified, reduced to the status of someone's property, and seen merely as complements in social life, existing solely for the satisfaction of men. As a result, women are trapped in a life that lacks personal meaning, is confined to serving the needs of others, and is limited to domestic responsibilities. In Paloma's case, even her relationship with her child was affected as her ex-husband demanded so much from her. Her opportunities for self-expression and subjectivity were hijacked by patriarchal structures of power that perpetuated her exclusion, subjugation, and domination (Muniz, 2017).

Furthermore, societal inequalities, including class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, racism, socioeconomic status, and poverty, shape women's experiences in mothering within intimate partner violence contexts. In the case of Paloma, a Pardo woman with a secondary education level and no income from her informal business, it also shapes the oppression that she was in and her gendered roles as a homemaker and caretaker. These multiple intersections contribute to the oppression faced by women in such situations. Therefore, understanding the motivations for women to leave their relationships in search of a better life for themselves and their children is vital to address policies for mothers, explicitly supporting them under these circumstances (Buchanan, 2019).

Theme: Goals and projects

This theme refers to the aspirations and ambitions of the women survivors. These goals provided a sense of purpose and direction, fueling their resilience in the face of adversity. During the research interviews, participants were asked about their goals when seeking support from *Mapa do Acolhimento* and their personal goals and projects. The primary motivation for all women who sought participation in the program was to seek help in either terminating their abusive relationships or managing the aftermath of separation. Additionally, the participants in the study shared their dreams and aspirations, demonstrating a remarkable sense of hope and perseverance. The analysis of women survivors' aspirations yielded two prominent objectives: reengagement in studies or careers and contributing to others. As a result, this theme was further subcategorized into three distinct subthemes: “Ending the relationship or dealing with consequences,” “back to studies or careers,” and “helping others.”

Subtheme: Ending the relationship or dealing with consequences. This subtheme represents all participants' goals and aspirations. It refers to the women survivors' determination to either leave the abusive relationship altogether or confront and navigate the potential consequences associated with leaving. Some participants' primary goal was to end the abusive relationship when looking for the NGO’s support, recognizing that it was necessary for their safety, well-being, and personal growth. They sought to break free from the cycle of violence and create a life free from the constraints of the abusive partner. For these women, ending the relationship frequently came with its own challenges and potential repercussions. These women reported consequences such as legal battles, financial instability, emotional turmoil, and retaliation from the abusive partner. An illustrative case is that of Sandra, a White

mother who experienced feelings of isolation while simultaneously navigating a legal battle after 6 years of relationship and assuming responsibility for her own and her son's well-being. Sandra expressed her aspiration for emotional regulation as she sought assistance through the *Mapa do Acolhimento* program as she said:

> I stabilize myself psychologically, right? [referring to her goal] Because my psychology was like a Tsunami. Because I was always trying to kill myself. I couldn't stand that pressure because I am alone in caring for the house. I am alone to take care of my son, work, and pay the bills, so I was so suffocated, right? So, it was more for me breathing in relation to all this, calming down, and managing to put things in order, right? (Sandra)

Sandra's testimony vividly illustrated the profound consequences she endured during and after experiencing violence. Her words revealed the emotional instability she suffered while simultaneously bearing the weight of sole responsibility for all aspects of her life. Through Sandra's story, we glimpse the isolation and loneliness many women facing IPV endure. Her narrative serves as a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness between her psychological well-being and the broader social factors that shape one’s life.

Sandra felt overwhelmed by the extensive demands of managing the household, raising her son, working, and handling financial obligations. This highlights the multifaceted influence of various systems on her psychological state. The impact of factors such as the availability of a social support network, work-life balance, and economic conditions is evident in her experience. Sandra's mention of the need to stabilize herself psychologically and organize her life signifies her resilience in adapting and coping with the challenges within her socioecological context.

Her story also reveals the gendered division of labour and the unequal distribution of responsibilities within the household (Shiva, 2013). Sandra highlights her burden as the sole caretaker, provider, and decision-maker, which can lead to feelings of suffocation and psychological distress. Her experiences reflect the gender inequalities and societal expectations placed on women, who often face greater challenges in juggling multiple roles and responsibilities.

Subtheme: Back to studies and careers. This subtheme signifies women's determination to reintegrate into education or employment. By pursuing further education or re-establishing their careers, survivors aimed to regain their independence, enhance their financial stability and experience personal growth. Seven (7) women, with an average age of 32, shared a common desire to resume their studies or pursue their careers. All of them came from low-income or no-income backgrounds, and most were still dependent on family support. Six of the women were mothers, and they represented diverse racial backgrounds. Interestingly, despite it is dangerous to assume, the two white women appeared to have better prospects among the interviewees, possibly due to their support networks or educational levels. Frequently they said their goals were always there, and at the end of the relationship, they could work on them again. Ingride, a young White mother, expressed the profound impact of abuse on her goals and dreams. She shared how the abusive relationship stripped away her aspirations, leaving her feeling lost and without a sense of purpose. However, after making the courageous decision to end the relationship and embark on her recovery journey, Ingride experienced a transformative shift. She regained her sense of self and rediscovered her projects and ambitions, as she said:

> … now I have my goals; I know that I want to complete my studies; I say that I don't want to stop studying; I want to study until I can't anymore, you know? Having a master's, doctorate, baccalaureate, whatever someone can have, I want to because I want to give to my daughter everything I didn't have… my goal is never to stop studying and have my things—having my car, having my house. And try to have a nice life. (Ingride)

After ending the abusive relationship, Ingride's words reflect her renewed sense of determination and ambition. She expresses her desire to pursue her studies and achieve educational milestones, such as a master's or doctorate, to provide her daughter with opportunities she didn't have herself. Ingride's goals extend beyond education; she also aspires to have her car and house and, ultimately, to create a better life for herself and her daughter. Her aspirations exemplify the resilience and strength she possesses. Despite the adversity she faced, Ingride has regained her sense of purpose and is motivated to actively shape her future. Through education and acquiring material stability, she aims to break free from the constraints of her past and create a life filled with opportunities and security.

It is crucial to highlight the intersectionality that shapes Ingride's life. Despite being a young mother, she receives full support from her parents, both financially and emotionally. They even take care of her daughter while she attends university. However, this is not the reality for many Black and Pardo women in Brazil. Most of them have to work from an early age to support their families or provide for themselves and their children.

Subtheme: Helping others. This subtheme emerged as a common goal from the narratives of women who expressed a strong desire to support and assist others who have

experienced IPV. This aligns with previous research highlighting the significant role of helping others in the resilience process following the IPV (Crann & Barata, 2021; Shanthakumari et al., 2014; Taylor, 2004). This includes both formal and informal forms of assistance, emphasizing the positive impact that supporting others can have on one's resilience journey.

In addition, all participants were willing to recommend the NGO programs to others. They frequently aimed to empower other individuals who have endured similar experiences. These survivors aspired to use their own experience and knowledge to raise awareness, provide guidance, and contribute to positive change within their communities. Eight (8) participants from diverse background and ages explicitly articulated their desire to assist or were already engaged in supporting women facing similar circumstances. Notably, Andrea, a Black single mother upon completing her law degree, promptly registered as a volunteer lawyer at *Mapa do Acolhimento* and additionally facilitated a complimentary training course for all volunteer lawyers associated with the project, as she explained:

> … after I graduated, I said what I went through, no one else like that; as far as it depends on me, no woman will go through this situation of being unassisted, right? … Talking to other women who have gone through this all the time, I am faced with a piece of my history. I've seen women who lost babies and had their careers damaged, and it's the same thing I went through. I managed to deal with it and help these women somehow; it makes this process a little worth it. I would prefer not to go through this, but since it happened, I want this not to hurt me anymore… so I'll do my part in society, my life, and this little girl's life, to have all this care. For us. (Andrea)

Andrea's quote highlighted her strong commitment to assisting other women who have faced similar circumstances of abuse. She expressed her desire to ensure that no woman goes through the experience of being unsupported, drawing from her journey. Her motivation stemmed from her interactions with other women who have also endured similar experiences. She recognized that their stories reflect a part of her own history, and witnessing their struggles resonates with her own journey.

Andrea seemed to find a sense of purpose and meaning in her healing process by providing support and assistance to these women. She acknowledged that while she would have preferred to avoid the painful experiences she went through, she is determined to transform her pain into something positive. Andrea sees her role in society, as well as in her daughter's life, as an opportunity to contribute to creating a caring and supportive environment for themselves and other survivors.

Andrea's quote exemplifies the resilience and determination of survivor-advocates who not only seek personal healing but also actively work towards empowering and supporting others. Her commitment to making a difference in women's lives facing similar circumstances demonstrates the transformative power of lived experiences and the potential for personal growth and resilience.

Crann and Barata (2021) conducted a recent study exploring the relationship between advocacy work and resilience among survivors of IPV. Their research shed light on the interconnectedness between women's advocacy efforts and resilience-related concepts found in previous literature. Their findings indicated that survivors' engagement in advocacy work provided them with a sense of validation, hope, and the ability to overcome self-blame. These

positive emotional experiences were linked to their access to community resources, interventions, and support through their advocacy work. The study emphasized the complex and multidirectional nature of the relationship between advocacy and resilience.

Overall, the present findings contribute to the literature on the interplay between advocacy work, recognition of abuse, and resilience, providing a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics involved in survivor advocates experiences.

Thematic Category 3: Interpersonal-level factors

This thematic category explores the role of social interactions, relationships, and support networks in fostering resilience among survivors. Interpersonal-level factors encompass the various ways in which the women engaged with others and received support within their social environment. These factors significantly influence the resilience and well-being of the participants. The thematic category of interpersonal-level factors encompasses a single theme, namely “social support,” which consists of three (3) subthemes: “emotional support,” “housing support,” and “financial aid.” Analysis of the interviews revealed that the participants relied on their social networks for financial assistance and housing support. Notably, none of the women received institutional financial aid or housing support. As a result, the majority of women interviewed had to rely on the support of their families and friends to secure accommodation, except for those who were financially independent or owned their own homes.

Theme: Social Support

This theme explores the crucial role of supportive relationships and networks in the lives of women survivors. It emphasizes the significance of receiving emotional, practical, and

informational support from family, friends, and support groups. The literature recognizes social support, encompassing both emotional and material assistance from others, as a vital form of support and a protective factor for women who have experienced IPV. It serves to mitigate the adverse effects of IPV on their psychological well-being (Carlson et al., 2002; Howell et al., 2018; Jose & Novaco, 2016; Karki et al., 2021; Machisa et al., 2018; Mahapatro Meerambika et al., 2021). Prior research has underscored the importance of social support as a key factor in fostering resilience, identifying it as a significant external pathway for many women (Carlson et al., 2002; Crann & Barata, 2016; Machisa et al., 2018). The presence of social support facilitates transformative experiences for survivors of IPV (Crann & Barata, 2016). Social support plays a critical role in helping the participants cope with challenges, navigate the healing process, and facilitate their recovery (Carlson et al., 2002).

The findings from the interviews indicate that all fifteen (15) women participants reported having various forms of social support from their friends, including online, co-workers, and family members. The nature of this social support encompassed emotional assistance, such as providing strength, security, courage, and offering referrals, as well as tangible forms of aid in terms of housing and financial support. Remarkably, the interviews revealed a significant overlap in the provision of support between family members and friends, evident across the three (3) subthemes of emotional support, housing assistance, and financial aid.

Subtheme: Emotional support. This subtheme explores the vital role of emotional support in the participants' lives, encompassing understanding, empathy, validation, and comfort provided by their social support networks. The literature recognized that positive social support plays a crucial role in enabling survivors to address and process their traumatic

experiences. It provides them with a safe space to share their stories, receive validation and affirmation, and engage in the process of reviewing and reframing their life narratives (Anderson et al., 2012). Having someone who listened to them without judgment and offered empathy helped alleviate feelings of isolation, shame, and self-blame (Carlson et al., 2002).

Interestingly, three (3) participants, White (2) and Black (1) mothers with post-secondary education degrees, emphasized how online social support helped them go through the experience of abuse and find institutional support. For Érica, a White mother with low income, support came from online interactions on social media. She was already part of a Facebook group for mothers when they referred her to divorced women groups, institutions, and professional support. She said:

> Because before being in this group, I'm already part of mothers' groups, right? It's about more participatory mothering and more modern approaches to mothering, and before that, I was already part of childbirth and breastfeeding circles… So, I'm already in women's circles… and then, the name of the *Mapa do Acolhimento* appears now and then. (Érica)

Érica expressed her participation in women's groups, which have played a significant role in her life by providing a sense of community and belonging. These groups have offered her a platform to share experiences, receive guidance, referrals, and learn from other mothers. The support and knowledge she gained from these groups have been valuable in navigating her journey as a survivor of IPV.

For Fernanda, a single White woman, with a master’s degree, economically independent with properties, beyond the physical safety that she found through her network, this

experience made her realize that she had more than co-workers; she had deep relationships with them, and for her, without them, she would not have overcome the situation of abuse. As you can see below, she felt lifted for all of them:

> I had no idea of this proportion [of love] … They closed around me in an unbelievable way… They protected me because they knew I lived alone in a state a thousand and five hundred kilometres away from my family… They wouldn't let me down; they protected me all the time. And suddenly, when I realized [from] this protection circle I was lifting, they did not let me fall, right? … they closed around me; they are amazing women... I just overcame because of them. Because I had someone who took the right hand, the left hand, took it underneath, and I was carried by them. All the time. (Fernanda)

Fernanda's words show how much she felt embraced, loved, and protected by the circle of women who supported her. She emphasized the unwavering support she received from these incredible women who were closed around her and protected her. Being aware of her vulnerable situation, living far away from her family, they provided a sense of safety and ensured she never felt alone. Fernanda acknowledges that their continuous support enabled her to overcome the challenges she faced. The imagery of them taking her right hand, left hand, and carrying her symbolizes the collective strength and solidarity that lifted her up during her healing process. This narrative underscores the crucial role of emotional and social support in fostering resilience and empowering survivors of IPV.

Lorena, a Black mother with low income, shared that she was not counting on her family's support, as her family was traditional, believing that it was shameful to divorce and leave the husband. To her surprise, after hesitating, she had the support she needed:

> Then I opened the game with my family and received all the support I didn't expect. Honestly, I was very surprised by my family. I received support that was also very fundamental in everything. It's very essential to this day, you know? … I was afraid my family wouldn't take me in, and I didn't imagine how they would be important and how they would welcome me, you know? (Lorena)

Lorena's statement highlights the significant emotional support she received from her family, which exceeded her expectations. She expresses her surprise and gratitude for their support, emphasizing its fundamental role in her journey. Lorena had initially feared that her family might not accept her or offer the support she needed, but their welcoming and supportive response proved to be essential and continues to be vital to her. This demonstrates the significance of emotional support from family members in helping survivors of IPV navigate their healing and recovery processes, fostering their resilience.

Irrespective of race, economic status, or educational level, survivors can benefit greatly by receiving emotional support from trusted individuals, such as family, friends, or support groups. This support empowers them to process their traumatic experiences, regain a sense of self-worth, and develop effective coping strategies (Carlson et al., 2002). This support creates a safe and nurturing environment that promotes healing, growth, and the development of resilience. It allows survivors to feel heard, supported, and valued, enabling them to regain their strength and rebuild their lives with a renewed sense of hope and determination. Emotional support serves as a powerful tool in the resilience journey, fostering the necessary conditions for survivors to thrive and overcome the adversities they have faced.

Subtheme: Housing support. This subtheme reflects various forms of support to ensure survivors have a secure place to live. Housing was a standard issue affecting most participants. A safe place to stay contributed to their well-being, sense of security, and empowerment, fostering a sense of control over their own lives (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015). This support enabled survivors to establish a stable foundation to focus on healing, recovery, and rebuilding their lives. Being dependent on their partners to have a place to live and to protect their children, women become more vulnerable to their abusers (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015). The presence of poverty and limited affordable housing options further exacerbates the difficulties faced by individuals seeking to escape violent relationships (Matjasko et al., 2013).

Throughout the interviews, a prominent observation was that most participants who experienced housing insecurity received support primarily from their family members, followed by friends, regardless of their race, economic status or educational level. This pattern can be attributed to the cultural value of familism, which is prevalent in Brazilian society and other Latin American countries. Familism emphasizes the importance of nurturing strong connections with family, including biological relatives as well as chosen relationships such as “fictive kin and godparents” (Roditti et al., 2010, p. 351). This cultural value fosters emotionally positive and supportive family dynamics, encouraging individuals to prioritize their relationships with family members and seek their support in times of need. One illustrative case is Paloma, a Pardo single mother who is starting a local nail business, who is now building her house on her mom’s land, as she shared:

> I'm building my house on my mother's land. My mom's got a land. Then during the pandemic, I lived for rent. During the pandemic, I saw that things were getting harder.

> She said [referring to her mom], so, you'll leave the rent and stay here with me, so you can build [the house]; instead of paying the rent, you pay the construction material. (Paloma)

Paloma shared how she was building her own house on her mother's land, a gesture of support from her mother. This support allowed Paloma to transition from renting to having her own home, relieving the financial burden of paying rent and providing her with a more stable living arrangement. Having a place to live or housing support is integral to strengthening the resilience of women survivors of IPV. It promotes safety, independence, stability, and support, all essential components for overcoming trauma and rebuilding their lives. Recognizing the significance of housing as a resilience-enhancing factor is crucial in developing comprehensive support systems for survivors of IPV.

From an ecological perspective on resilience, the protective nature of resources, such as family ties and values, can vary based on cultural and temporal factors. It is important to recognize that what may be considered protective in one context may not necessarily hold true in another. The significance and impact of these resources are influenced by the cultural norms, beliefs, and values that shape individuals' experiences and interactions within their specific sociocultural context (Ungar, 2012).

Subtheme: Financial aid. This subtheme refers to providing financial support, resources, or assistance to the women survivors. It recognizes the impact of financial abuse and the need for economic empowerment in the recovery process. Financial support gives women a sense of security and relief (Carlson et al., 2002) and control over their life (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015).

In my study, it was found that eight (8) women received financial support from their family and/or friends after leaving their abusive relationships, while one (1) received alimony. This support played a crucial role in helping them meet their basic needs, secure housing, access essential services, and regain financial stability. Most of these supported women lived in smaller urban centers or peripheral regions of large cities, coming from diverse racial backgrounds (White, Black, and Pardo) with varying educational levels, and nearly all were mothers.

Moreover, the study revealed that six (6) women demonstrated complete economic independence from their former partners during the separation, highlighting their ability to manage their finances and make independent financial decisions. Among these women, all of them had higher education, including two who possessed postgraduate diplomas. Notably, two (2) experienced severe financial abuse, underscoring the significant impact of economic control and manipulation within IPV.

Furthermore, ten (10) participants in the study successfully achieved economic independence from their former partners. In contrast, four (4) participants continued to rely on financial support from their families, with three being Black or Pardo and one younger participant being White. It is worth noting that youth dependency on parents is a traditional aspect of middle-class Brazilian culture. The financial aid provided to survivors not only met their immediate financial needs but also played a crucial role in empowering them to rebuild their lives and pursue their aspirations.

Based on the available information from the interviews, it was observed that most Black and Pardo women had salaries classified in class E, with only one exception who had a family

income in class C (her dad and her salary together). Among White women, the majority fell into better-paid jobs from a Brazilian reality despite the present data showing an unemployed woman (Ph.D. student) and one with low income at the time of the interview; the latter claimed to be experiencing a significant decrease in revenue due to the pandemic. This reality is also reflected in Brazilian society, where White women are generally better paid than Black women. These inequalities not only increase the chances of these women staying in the relationship but also that they face much more difficulties when leaving. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the three well-paid women in the study held postgraduate diplomas, emphasizing the significant impact of higher education on their career success and earning potential.

Érica, a White single mother whose employment was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, told how she was creative in seeking alternative solutions, as she said:

> I was in a terrible situation. There wasn't one more Real [Brazil's currency] in my bank account, and then I made a crowdfunding, right? I received much help from my social network on Facebook. So, when I started doing these casual jobs right after this crowdfunding, I saved that money because I knew I could get into a bad situation again, right? And now I'm making ends meet with this money, but I'm not having any income… I'm looking for a job. (Érica)

Érica's personal experience reflected her resourcefulness and resilience in seeking alternative solutions to address her financial struggles. She described being in a dire financial state, with no money left in her bank account. In response, she turned to crowdfunding, leveraging the support and assistance she received through the social networking platform.

Through crowdfunding, Érica received much-needed help from others who contributed to her financial needs. This demonstrates the power of social networks and the willingness of people to come together to support individuals in difficult situations. Érica's experience highlighted her resilience, adaptability, and proactive approach to addressing her financial struggles. She utilized crowdfunding and casual employment to navigate difficult circumstances, demonstrating her determination to overcome economic hardships.

Financial aid or financial independence is a significant factor in strengthening the resilience of women survivors of IPV. It promotes economic stability, freedom, reduced vulnerability, enhanced well-being, and breaks the cycle of abuse (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015). Recognizing the significance of financial support in supporting survivors' resilience is essential in developing comprehensive interventions and support systems for those affected by IPV.

Thematic Category 4: Community-Level Factors

This thematic category explores the role of community-level factors in fostering resilience and focuses on the broader social and institutional support available to survivors in their communities. The community-level factor is a thematic category that compounds one (1) theme: “institutional support,” with four (4) subthemes: “psychological support,” “legal aid,” “faith and religious support,” and “other institutional support.”

Theme: Institutional Support

This theme examines the support provided by various institutions within women’s communities. Institutional support acknowledges the crucial role that organizations and systems play in addressing the needs of survivors and promoting their resilience. In this respect,

it is important to note that all participants were registered with NOSSAS NGO, meaning they all had at least three months of legal and/or psychological support. All women recognized how essential the support from NOSSAS NGO was and how it changed their lives when they realized they had someone to count on.

Subtheme: Psychological Support. This subtheme highlights the availability of resources and services that cater to the emotional well-being of survivors. Psychological support helps survivors process their trauma, regulate their emotions, manage their mental health, and develop coping strategies, ultimately fostering resilience. Fourteen (14) participants received psychological support through *Mapa do Acolhimento* or other institutions. For Cristina, a White single mother of two with postgraduate degree, understanding the psychological violence she was in was a process immersed in feeling guilt aggravated by her profession in mental health. She described that the support from *Mapa do Acolhimento* was fundamental to her leaving the abusive relationship, as she said:

> I was already destroyed, and then I said I am going to ask for help… I could only be a divorced mother and have my children because of this duo between Manuela [Psychologist] and Suzana [Lawyer]… Manuela helps me a lot, a lot, a lot… I think from the legal point of view, psychological violence is very complex. The legal part of psychological violence was not so black and white like that, right? Not so literal. Like Antonio [ex-husband] didn't say, 'You bitch, you're horrible, I hate you.' No. He didn't say these things. It's complex, isn't it? I am still trying to understand. (Cristina)

In this excerpt, Cristina emphasizes how she was "destroyed" by the complexity and manipulative nature of the psychological violence she endured. She highlights the importance

of effective communication between professionals, such as lawyers and psychologists, to navigate her case successfully. This brings to attention the significance of a multidisciplinary approach and the provision of well-informed psychological support in addressing the complexities of IPV. It becomes evident that professionals need to be adequately trained and qualified to understand the nuances of IPV. The examples of Cristina and other women shed light on the necessity for professionals to possess the expertise to handle IPV cases and provide appropriate guidance, as also seen in Luiza's experience. Psychological support played a crucial role for Luiza, a Pardo single mother of two with postgraduate degree, as her psychologist recommended relevant books on DV, enabling her to learn and comprehend her own experiences. Through psychoeducation and supportive listening, Luiza gained valuable insights into the violence cycle and developed self-love, as she said:

> I think this psychological help, I think it's essential, because if it doesn't happen like they predicted it would happen to me, change my mind, you know, change my mind, go back to the cycle because I did it. I could totally see the difference because I had already lived this thing of coming back, right? To change your mind, to give it a chance. Wanting to look at the man, then “he's really sorry, he's going to change, you know”? I went through this I think it helped me too. Realizing that there had to be a stop, right? (Luiza)

Luiza expresses how the psychological support she received had a transforming impact on her, especially in recognizing the cycle of violence she experienced. She reflects on a previous attempt to leave her abusive relationship years ago, which ended with her returning to the cycle of violence due to the absence of psychological support. Previous research found that, on average, it takes women five to seven attempts to leave successfully, and each

subsequent effort becomes increasingly perilous. While women may have genuine fears about the consequences of staying or leaving their abusers, they can also be enticed back into the relationship during the "honeymoon phase" of the abuse cycle. During this phase, the abuser seeks to downplay the violent episode by apologizing, making promises of change, and offering gifts, among other manipulative tactics (Walker, 2006). However, for Luiza, as the example above indicates, having psychological support played a definitive role in ending the violence cycle, promoting the recognition that she “had to put a stop” to it.

While Cristina and Luiza had more recent experiences, Débora left the relationship 11 years ago. She is a White remarried mother of two (from second married). She tried therapy at other moments in her life but could not pay or didn’t find the right fit. Through *Mapa do Acolhimento* program, she was able to have the support she needed to deal with the long-term consequences of IPV.

> With *Mapa*, I was able to look, I've been putting myself, let's say, sort of transcending, putting me out and looking like that, “look, Débora, look there, you see?” and I have been able to stop, breathe, analyze. I haven’t had panic attacks or anxiety attacks anymore… I think, at the moment that *Mapa* actually started to work for me, it was extremely important. Let's say it was my lifebuoy. Because I was very, let's say, I was hurt in a very complicated way… Still under construction, but here we go. (Débora)

Débora's words emphasize how hurt in a “complicated way” she was, meaning the complexity of the violence and trauma she had suffered. She also brings her learning through psychotherapy, which helped her understand how to self-regulate and manage the effects of

the violence she underwent. In her own words, this support was a “lifebuoy” that saved her from the effects of IPV.

Débora's experience serves as a poignant example of the enduring long-term effects of IPV on women's lives, particularly when the necessary care and support are lacking. Despite successfully leaving an abusive relationship over a decade ago, Débora continues to bear the marks and consequences of that past trauma in her current life. She has since remarried and started a family, but the lingering impacts of her previous abusive relationship persisted. It's noteworthy that Débora is the only participant who remarried, which could be attributed to the fact that she was the one who ended the relationship over a decade ago, which ratifies the long-term impacts of IPV.

Survivors of IPV experience enduring adverse health effects, even after the abuse has ceased for years. These consequences include compromised health status, diminished quality of life, and increased utilization of healthcare services. Previous research has also shown that the psychological trauma inflicted by DV has a more profound impact on their overall health in the long run. Women with psychological disorders resulting from such abuse are more susceptible to repeat victimization, further exacerbating their long-term health and increasing their risk of engaging in suicidal behaviour (Alejo, 2014).

Psychological support emerged as a vital resource for the participants, offering them a safe space to express their emotions, heal, and find supportive individuals to lean on. Other research has found that individual psychotherapy was an essential strength for women survivors of IPV during stressful times (Ahmad et al., 2013b; Anderson et al., 2012). Through therapy, these women embarked on a journey of introspection, developing coping strategies,

processing their trauma, and self-discovery. Additionally, confirmed by previous findings (Anderson et al., 2012; Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015), psychotherapy provided access to informal support networks, enabling these women to identify individuals within their safe circle. The significance of psychotherapy as a social resource of support and strengthening resilience cannot be overstated, as it empowers women to navigate the long-term consequences of IPV and rebuild their lives.

Subtheme: Legal Aid. This subtheme emphasizes the provision of legal support and assistance to survivors in navigating the legal system. This includes access to legal advice, assistance with filing restraining orders, guidance through legal proceedings, and judicial representation. Legal aid enabled survivors to protect their rights, seek justice, and secure their safety, enhancing their resilience and empowering them. A total of ten (10) women received legal aid from NOSSAS NGO, while three (3) participants received legal support from another source. Although the two (2) that did not receive legal support were White, their history seems to influence this more than their race. Eight (8) women requested restrictive measures for their partners and had litigious divorces. To illustrate this point, there is the example from Fernanda, a White single woman with a Master's degree, when she shared:

> When I returned with the protective order [PO], I managed to restructure to seek a lawyer, first lawyer after I protected myself judicially, then I went to take care of the psychological. (Fernanda)

Fernanda emphasizes the significant role of physical safety and judicial protection in facilitating her personal growth and self-improvement, consequently strengthening her resilience. This aligns with previous research that has consistently highlighted the importance of

ensuring physical safety as a crucial factor in empowering women to break free from abusive relationships (Schaefer et al., 2021). Fernanda's statement reflects her experience of seeking a PO and legal support, which allowed her to reorganize her life and take subsequent steps, such as addressing her psychological well-being. This highlights the interplay between legal protection and the ability to engage in other forms of support, ultimately contributing to Fernanda's empowerment and journey toward recovery.

Renner and Hartley (2021) found that receiving legal aid services that address IPV can positively impact women's overall well-being, regardless of the type of case or duration of assistance provided. Although civil legal services are not explicitly designed to target women's psychological well-being, their research suggests that receiving legal support can contribute to stabilizing their safety and economic circumstances, which, in turn, may improve their psychological well-being. Therefore, civil legal services are considered a crucial element of a comprehensive community response to IPV, alongside the more commonly recognized components such as the criminal justice system, social service agencies, and domestic violence shelters. By including civil legal services, the overall quality of life for women affected by IPV can be enhanced in the long term (Renner & Hartley, 2021).

Subtheme: Faith and Religious support. This theme relates to the role of spirituality, personal beliefs, and the role of religious institutions in supporting survivors. This involved spiritual guidance, pastoral care, prayer groups, and creating a supportive and understanding environment for survivors to seek comfort and find strength within their faith. While some studies emphasize the distinction between spirituality and religious institutions (Drumm et al., 2014), recognizing spirituality or faith as individual protective factors and religious institutions

as community-level factors, it is crucial to acknowledge the profound influence of the environments in which individuals are raised or exposed to. The beliefs, values, and practices associated with faith, spirituality and religion are shaped by cultural, social, and familial contexts, highlighting the interconnectedness between individuals and their broader environments. This recognition reinforces the significance of investigating faith and religious support as a theme related to community-level factors in my study.

Only three (3) participants explicitly mentioned their relationship with God or a higher power and regularly attended religious institutions. They were Pardo (2) and Black (1) mothers with different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. This highlights the diversity of spiritual experiences and beliefs among survivors. Regardless of the specific nature of their faith, the theme "faith and religious support" underscores its potential as a resource in helping survivors navigate the impact of IPV and find strength and resilience. The beliefs and values that underpin their faith could guide their decision-making, offer solace during adverse times, and foster a sense of meaning and optimism.

Joana, a Pardo single mother, serves as an illustrative case, actively engaging in church activities, prayer groups, and volunteering within the institution. She shared how her beliefs and religion gave her strength, hope, and guidance during their healing journey. During the interview, Joana said that she had separated from her abusive partner, but for three years, in her words, he tortured her over the phone and made threats against her life. Finally, when she moved to the neighbourhood with her parents and changed telephone numbers, she thought she was at peace. However, the situation reached a new level of distress when a detective hired by her ex-partner managed to track her down and contacted her at her workplace. Her story

took a rather unconventional turn as, ironically, the detective hired by her ex-partner to locate her became an unexpected ally. This unexpected turn of events proved beneficial as the detective assisted her in gathering substantial evidence against her ex-partner. With this newfound evidence, she was able to secure the protective measures that she had previously been unable to obtain. In the following excerpt, she describes how her faith provided her faith helped her in this situation, as she said:

> Actually, I think my faith helped me so much. I asked so much for God, for the angels, for the beings of light to enlighten and get this bad thing out of my way that when a detective came, the detective stayed by my side, helping me with evidence, helping me with everything, and in the fright living there all that situation, the only thing I wanted was to remain free… Asking for strength from the higher, greater power of God. (Joana)

In Joana's narrative, she underscores the pivotal role of her faith in helping her overcome the abusive relationship and ultimately find freedom. According to her, her unwavering belief in a higher power led her to perceive a divine intervention in her life. Joana describes this intervention as an angel sent by God to rescue her from the torture she endured for over three years. It was through the assistance of the detective that she was able to secure the necessary protective measures, leading to her newfound freedom. The detective's support proved to be a critical factor in her journey toward safety and liberation.

Existing research highlights the positive relationship between spirituality, religious institutional support, and the strengthening of resilience in women who have survived IPV (Anderson et al., 2012; Fowler & Rountree, 2010; Howell et al., 2018; Mushonga et al., 2021; Yick, 2008). Spirituality and religion offer mechanisms that contribute to resilience, such as

providing meaning-making and a sense of purpose, emotional support, coping mechanisms, and fostering hope and optimism (Burnette & Hefflinger, 2016; de la Rosa et al., 2016; Drumm et al., 2014). By engaging in spiritual beliefs, women survivors of IPV can find comfort, develop a broader perspective on their experiences, and draw upon inner strength. This enhances their resilience by providing a sense of meaning, emotional well-being, adaptive coping strategies, and a positive outlook for the future.

Although only a small number of participants reported regular attendance at religious institutions, it is worth noting Joana's experience as she found a safe space and assistance from a religious institution. Engaging in volunteer work and connecting with others who faced similar challenges enabled her to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved and offered invaluable support during her resilient journey. Anderson et al. (2012) discovered that participants derived comfort and strength from their spirituality and religious beliefs, which played a vital role in their recovery process. These beliefs endowed them with the resilience necessary to endure their challenges, find meaning in their suffering, and cultivate a sense of purpose. Participants who belonged to religious communities benefited from emotional support, a sense of belonging, a feeling of security, and practical assistance.

In contrast to previous research that commonly reports a high number of participants relying on religious activities to cope with IPV, the present study revealed that only a small number of participants sought support from their faith and religious institutions. Although Brazil is a predominantly religious country, this finding may be attributed to the specific profile of the participants, who resided in urban centers, pursued professional careers, and had a

relatively young average age. These factors could potentially shape their perspectives and priorities, leading to a lesser emphasis on faith and spirituality as coping mechanisms.

The Datafolha (2020) survey on religious demographics in Brazil revealed that 50% of the population identifies as Catholic, 31% as Evangelical, and 10% have no religious affiliation. Women constitute 58% of Evangelicals and 51% of Catholics. Notably, religious affiliation varies based on race, age, education, income, and region. Most Catholics and Evangelicals are Pardo, followed by White and Black individuals, as also seen represented in this subtheme. In terms of education, a higher proportion of Evangelicals completed High School compared to Catholics, and more Catholics attained Superior education. Both religious groups have significant representation in lower income brackets, with 46% of Catholics and 48% of Evangelicals earning up to 2 times the minimum wage.

Subtheme: Other Institutions. Besides the support from NOSSAS NGO, for some women, the support came from other sources. This subtheme encompasses various forms of support provided by institutions that are not categorized under the previous subthemes. This may include police stations, other NGOs, healthcare providers, and other community resources that offer assistance tailored to the unique needs of survivors. To illustrate, Paloma's process to contact professional help came through a doctor's appointment for her ex-partner. At that time, they lived in a rural area of the North of Brazil, and her husband had mental breakdowns. She told how her ex-husband's psychiatrist approached her:

> Then she said [the doctor], 'So, Paloma, I'll tell you something, and you may not accept. It is your life, but I will say something to you: go away. Don't stay here. Here you do not have any structure to care for yourself and your son. Stop taking care of him and take

> care of yourself. Take care of your son. I'll give a letter to you and with this letter, you will arrive in your hometown and look for any place with psychological care, right? She said, 'you are in an extremely abusive relationship.' Was it the first time, right? [that she had contact with this reality – that she was in an abusive relationship]. (Paloma)

Paloma's statement raises a meaningful discussion about the need for healthcare professionals to receive proper training and understanding of the intricate dynamics of DV. Women often seek medical help for physical or mental issues, visiting their family doctor or gynecologist. By arming healthcare providers with knowledge about IPV, similar to Paloma's story, they can validate the experiences of survivors, provide improved guidance, and facilitate appropriate referrals to support services. Ultimately, this equips healthcare professionals to significantly contribute to these women's resilience. However, the existing literature in Brazil paints a concerning picture of basic assistance, describing it as inadequate for survivors (Pedrosa & Spink, 2011). This study has revealed that physicians are unprepared to deal with women victims of DV, as their academic training does not address issues of gender and violence. This results in difficulties in care and a lack of specialized guidance.

Previous research conducted in Brazil has highlighted the significant role of nurses in healthcare, particularly in fostering resilience among individuals (Labronici, 2012; Trigueiro et al., 2014). For these authors, in addition to providing various forms of care, nurses have the opportunity to serve as mentors in the journey of resilience – However, Labronici (2012) and Trigueiro et al. (2014) also emphasize that to fulfill this role effectively, nurses must overcome prejudices and judgments and actively strive to perceive and comprehend the entirety of a woman who is a victim of DV. They must understand her as a lived body, one that has

experienced domination, exploitation, and suffering, while acknowledging her personal history's profound impact on her subjective experience. By creating a safe space for women to share their stories, nurses can respond to their cries for help and support them in their journey toward DV healing and resilience.

Paloma's statement also draws attention to a concerning contradiction, where healthcare professionals in Brazil are legally obligated under Law 10,778 of November 24, 2003, to report cases of DV. However, this example demonstrates how even professionals can be unaware or fail to fulfill their legal obligations regarding addressing DV. The existing literature consistently highlights the inadequate execution or incomplete implementation of these mandatory notifications (Leite & Fontanella, 2019).

Thematic Category 5: Societal-Level Factors

This last theme explores the broader social context in which these individuals navigated and its impact on their resilience.

Theme: Recognizing the Patriarchal Culture

This theme encompasses the societal norms, values, and beliefs that perpetuate gender inequalities and reinforce traditional power dynamics. During the interviews, participants frequently highlighted the influence of their culture and the prevailing beliefs within their social context on their experiences. The cultural expression of patriarchy was often manifested as a lack of support from various institutions, families, and workplaces. All participants reported feeling a lack of support from some institutions, family, and friends. The participants acquired insights into the prevailing reality of patriarchal cultural traditions primarily through their interactions with volunteers from *Mapa do Acolhimento*, including their lawyers and

psychologists. Others also were exposed to information in their universities or social circles. The interviews revealed a remarkable level of clarity among the women regarding the repercussions of gender inequality in their narratives. Their expressions of anger were palpable as they recounted their disappointment and frustration in not receiving the expected support from the state, institutions, their families, and friends.

The theme “patriarchal culture” can have a contrary effect on resilience by creating awareness and promoting critical thinking regarding gender inequalities and societal power dynamics. In other words, raising awareness and empowering individuals to challenge oppressive norms. By addressing these cultural expressions, individuals could find validation, support, and appropriate resources, contributing to their resilience in recovering from IPV.

Subtheme: Lack of Institutional Support. The participants' narratives revealed the profound influence of patriarchal norms on their interactions with institutions. These norms shaped the responses they received when seeking assistance and often contributed to their feelings of being unheard, dismissed, or blamed for the violence they experienced. During the interviews, we could see how collective values, culture and social norms have influenced women’s decisions to stay or leave their relationships. One example was Joana, a Pardo single mother, who recognized that while she had some support from a church, she also felt prejudice and discrimination there.

> Look, although spirituality was fundamental in this process, I think that the spiritual support around due to religious leaders, priests, and pastors, could also be changed. Because I heard a lot: "You have to pray because some spirit is taking him over;" "This is

> the action of the devil;" or "Ah, but the smart woman knew how to build her house." So, this sexist culture inside the church also bothered me a lot. (Joana)

Research has shown that religious support can have both positive and negative effects on survivors of IPV. Anderson et al. (2012) revealed how the lack of institutional support within church communities can significantly impact IPV survivors. Some participants in their study also exposed that their churches often pressured them to forgive their abusive spouses and made them feel guilty for considering leaving their marriages. Similarly to my findings, seeking religious advice did not offer the expected support, as the participants felt obligated to prioritize the preservation of their marriages, even at the expense of their own well-being. These findings underscore the importance of religious institutions better understanding and addressing DV, challenging patriarchal norms, and providing appropriate support to survivors. Religious institutions can contribute to the resilience and healing of IPV survivors by taking these steps.

The police were identified as another institution that often fails to provide adequate support to survivors of IPV. In the interviews, nine (9) women shared their experiences of encountering a lack of support from the police, even when seeking assistance from specialized women's police stations. They were Black (2), Pardo (4) and White (3), mostly with low income. Luiza, a Pardo single mother, highlights this issue:

> The policewoman who attended me told me the following: “Dear, you don't have any bruises, yeah, nobody's going to do anything for you here. You don't want him anymore, leave him. But no one will do anything for you here." (Luiza)

Luiza's quote reflects her disappointing encounter with the police, specifically a policewoman who downplayed the significance of her situation because she didn't have visible bruises. She notes the perception that her case was considered less significant because her experience primarily involved psychological and economic violence, as opposed to cases involving physical and sexual violence. This highlights the need for improved training and awareness among police officers, including at women's police stations, to effectively support survivors and address the diverse forms of IPV. In addition, many women reported feeling ignored or mistreated by the police when they reported it alone, without a lawyer, which also reflects how the system excludes people with fewer resources.

Support from the police can help survivors strengthen their resilience in several ways. It provides validation for their experiences, safety, and helps them feel heard and believed. The police can also offer guidance and assistance in navigating the legal system, obtaining protective measures, and connecting survivors with support services. Officers showing empathy and sensitivity build trust and encourage survivors to seek help. Ultimately, supportive police response contributes to survivors' overall well-being, helps them rebuild their lives, and enhances their resilience in overcoming IPV.

As mentioned earlier, the lack of institutional support is also present in healthcare professionals. Factors including inadequate technical preparation for identifying and managing cases and cultural beliefs that view DV as solely an intimate problem contribute to professionals underestimating the situation's complexity. As a result, cases are frequently underreported. Furthermore, professionals may have a limited understanding of legal concepts, relying solely

on their common sense knowledge when responding to these situations (Leite & Fontanella, 2019).

Regarding “lack of institutional support,” participants expressed feeling unheard, dismissed, or blamed when seeking assistance from various institutions such as specialized women's police stations. The experiences shared by the women suggest that these institutions lacked empathy and adequate preparation to handle cases of psychological and patrimonial violence. This lack of support from the police, healthcare professionals and other institutions reinforces feelings of victim-blaming and discourages individuals from seeking help. Such responses contribute to a sense of powerlessness and can hinder the development of resilience.

Subtheme: Lack of Social Support. The influence of patriarchal culture extended to familial dynamics, where traditional gender roles and expectations hindered their access to support and understanding. Participants expressed how societal expectations and gendered stereotypes reinforced their vulnerability and perpetuated a cycle of violence within their relationships. Although many women received support from their family members, almost all women with diverse racial and socioeconomic background shared a lack of support from some family members or acquittances, including from female family members, as in the case of Luiza, a Pardo single mother:

> Because within my family, I was not welcomed, you know? When I told my sisters, I talked, I said what was happening, I was labelled a bad person … People questioned me, you know, and it hurt me a lot because it wasn't something that ever happened, you

know? A couple's quarrel? No, it was years of living in the cycle of violence, which I had no idea. (Luiza)

Cristina, a White single mother, revealed that despite everyone being aware of the incidents taking place, she received no support from her neighbours, as she said:

The whole building listened; nobody did absolutely anything, nobody wanted to testify, nobody, especially the manager, she didn't want to show the images of the elevator, nothing. Such a thing is very absurd, isn't it? At that time, my friends, even my friends, my friends, no one could stand to listen; everyone was afraid to listen. (Cristina)

Cristina exposed that the lack of support, intervention, and willingness to testify, from her neighbours and friends, demonstrated a collective silence and fear surrounding DV. This lack of solidarity further isolated Cristina. Fortunately, these women were able to access support from qualified individuals who helped them understand the patriarchal dynamics at play, encouraging them to question the status quo and confront oppressive systems. As previously mentioned, these women were eager to share their newfound knowledge and become advocates for other women. This highlights the transformative power of information and education in bringing about positive change and significantly impacting these women's lives, ultimately contributing to their resilience.

The quotes above illustrate how patriarchal culture influences familial dynamics, reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations. Participants faced barriers in receiving support and understanding from their family members, including female relatives who perpetuated harmful stereotypes and failed to provide empathy and validation. This lack of

social support exacerbates feelings of isolation and vulnerability, making it difficult for individuals to break free from the violence cycle.

All women in the study faced a lack of support stemming from the patriarchal culture. Although the limited sample size makes generalization challenging, it is worth noting that no significant differences were observed based on race, colour, educational level, or economic status concerning this theme. However, it is well-known that in Brazil and everywhere, Black women experience more discrimination than White women, and economically disadvantaged women face greater challenges than those with higher incomes. It is possible that these differences were not evident in this sample because all women had access to lawyers and psychologists through the *Mapa do Acolhimento* program, which provided resources they may not have had otherwise.

Overall, the patriarchal culture described in the interviews creates significant obstacles for individuals seeking support and reinforces gender inequalities that contribute to the challenges faced in recovering from IPV. Addressing these issues requires dismantling patriarchal norms within institutions, promoting empathy and training among service providers, and challenging harmful gender stereotypes within families and communities. Doing so makes it possible to create a more supportive environment that strengthens resilience and enables survivors to recover and thrive.

The analysis and discussion of the thematic category, themes and subthemes revealed that the resilience exhibited by the women in the research is a compilation of evolving behaviours, showcasing the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments.

Resilience encompasses the diverse ways individuals respond to and engage with opportunities for personal growth that are both available and accessible to them (Ungar, 2012).

Like other studies on resilience (Lopez-Fuentes & Calvete, 2015), I recognize that the study design does not enable the establishment of a predictive relationship between pre-existing levels of resilience and recovery from abuse. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that individuals overcome adversity and demonstrate resilience. The narratives the interviewed women shared shed light on their various paths, which either fortified their resilience or prompted them to question and reflect on their future trajectories.

A comparative study by Lopez-Fuentes and Calvete (2015) explored the differences between women who had successfully recovered and those who had not. Their findings indicated that while both groups utilized external sources of support to a similar extent, the recovered women exhibited a higher utilization of individual resilience factors. This suggests that women initially rely on external support systems for resilience but gradually develop and mobilize personal resources as the recovery process unfolds. Although my study did not directly compare recovery outcomes, it was evident that the participant who remained in an abusive relationship during the interviews displayed fewer individual resources and lacked a sense of personal strength. These findings align with previous research highlighting the importance of social support, both formal and informal, in facilitating the resilience process, particularly during the initial stages.

Considering the seven common principles governing resilience across different research and reflecting on the themes and sub-themes discussed earlier, it can be affirmed that the women in this study align with the seven principles in many ways. Principle number (1)

encompasses that resilience emerges within the context of adversity (Ungar, 2021). In the case of the women in this study, their experiences of IPV created the backdrop against which their resilience emerged. Despite facing adverse circumstances, these women demonstrated remarkable strength and resourcefulness in navigating situations and seeking support (Ungar, 2021).

Principle number (2) attest that resilience encompasses the five processes of persistence, resistance, recovery, adaptability, and transformation (Ungar, 2021). This principle aligns with the women's experiences in this study, as they demonstrated the various processes of resilience in their journey toward overcoming the effects of IPV. Throughout their narratives, the women persevered through challenging circumstances and refused to give up. They exhibited resistance by actively confronting and opposing the abuse they endured. Recovery was apparent in their journeys as they worked towards healing and regaining a sense of well-being. Adaptability was evident as they adjusted and navigated changing circumstances, often making difficult decisions to prioritize their safety and well-being. Lastly, the transformation was observed as they underwent personal growth and positive changes due to their experiences, developing a greater sense of self-awareness, strength, and empowerment.

Principle number (3) focuses on trade-offs between systems when experiencing resilience (Ungar, 2021). This principle was evident in the context of women survivors of IPV. Various challenges and trade-offs, such as the potential escalation of violence, the emotional burden of single motherhood, the difficulties of the legal process, and financial constraints accompany the decision to leave an abusive relationship. These trade-offs demonstrated the

complex choice survivors had to make, weighing the risks of staying in an abusive relationship against the potential dangers of leaving.

Principle number (4) states that a resilient system is open, dynamic, and complex (Ungar, 2021). In the context of women survivors of IPV, this principle is evident through the diverse ways in which resilience is expressed and the range of resources these women utilize. Through an analysis of the narratives and themes identified, we can perceive the complexity, dynamism, and openness of the resilience in these women. The women demonstrated resilience in various ways, adapting to their circumstances and utilizing available resources to navigate their challenges. The women's resilience is shown through their adaptive responses, utilization of diverse resources, and engagement with various support systems.

Principle number (5) states that a resilient system promotes connectivity (Ungar, 2021). In the context of women survivors of IPV, this principle emphasizes the importance of connections and relationships in fostering resilience. In the narratives of the participants, the significance of connectivity is evident. The women often spoke about the support they received from family members, friends, and support organizations. Additionally, connectivity extends beyond individual relationships to include community-level support. All these connections played a vital role in their resilience. By fostering solid connections, individuals are better equipped to navigate the challenges of IPV and work toward healing and empowerment.

Principle number (6) states that a resilient system demonstrates experimentation and learning (Ungar, 2021). In the context of women survivors of IPV, this principle highlights the importance of adaptability, flexibility, and continuous learning in the face of challenges. Experimentation and learning can manifest in various ways in the context of women survivors

of IPV. It involves a willingness to try different coping mechanisms, seek new resources and support systems, and explore alternative pathways to healing and recovery. The participants' narratives often reflected their willingness to explore new paths, try different strategies, and learn from their experiences. They demonstrated resilience by adapting to their changing circumstances, seeking out new resources, and acquiring knowledge that helped them navigate the challenges they faced.

Principle number (7) emphasizes that a resilient system incorporates diversity, redundancy, and participation (Ungar, 2021). During the analysis of the study participants, it became evident that specific coping strategies did not produce the intended outcomes. In response, individuals showcased their resilience by actively exploring alternative avenues for healing and recovery. For instance, those who did not benefit significantly from a specific individual therapy or a lawyer sought additional support from different professionals. This diverse range of coping strategies established redundancies and allowed participants to generate fresh approaches that compensated for those that were less effective for their specific circumstances. In addition, through their stories, one could see how these women exhibited active participation and commitment to their resilience journey, showcasing their agency and determination to overcome the hurdles they encountered. They not only focus on their own healing and recovery but also advocate for their rights and provide support to others who have faced IPV.

The participating women showed their ability to navigate and negotiate “their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being” (Ungar, 2012, p. 17). As previously emphasized and exemplified in several excerpts from the

participants' interviews, macro factors such as culture influenced their choices of staying or leaving the relationship, as well as legal intervention and psychological institutional support and their support network.

In our society, it is well known that VAW is a social force inherited from the patriarchal order. It possesses the capacity to structure social reality, making it an influential and expressive modality. This violence is laden with profound meanings and symbols, permeating social relations with dynamics of domination and power. The symbolic weight it carries is as influential as other aspects (Bandeira, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to create resilient interventions to promote resilient women.

Resilience can be fostered by adapting the environment to the individual, which involves reducing exposure to risks, mitigating the negative consequences of exposure, or eliminating risks altogether. Individuals, especially those at risk, can experience positive long-term development by changing the environment. This perspective highlights that individuals do not necessarily need to demonstrate internal or external adaptation if the environment is effectively modified to remove conditions that hinder their development (Ungar, 2012).

These sociological factors, including racial background, education, income, and geographical location, contribute to the complexity of women's experiences and resilience within the context of intimate partner violence. Due to the limited sample size in this study, it is not possible to determine if women of different racial backgrounds have specific patterns of resilience. Any generalizations made must be approached with caution as they are based solely on the 15 women in this study. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that as the participants

needed internet access for online interviews, potentially limiting representation to women in urban areas, particularly from the wealthier Southeast region of the country.

Conclusion

The complexity of comprehending resilience among women survivors of IPV in Brazil, taking into account their life stories and intersections of oppression, was also mirrored in my own struggle to grasp this master thesis fully. Towards the end of my research journey, I came across an excerpt from the introduction to the first chapter of the book Mulheres e Violências: Interseccionalidades (Women and Violence: Intersectionality) by Brazilian academics, which resonated deeply:

> The act of writing about situations of violence, and specifically about violence against women and gender, is not an end in itself, nor is it just an exercise in freestyle. It requires an emotional, affective involvement and a particular intellectual and political commitment from the writer, as violence is in itself a “disturbing force,” a “disquieting power.” [my own translation] (Bandeira, 2017, p. 16)

This excerpt validated all the mixed feelings I felt on constructing this thesis while delving into such a sensitive matter. Working with survivors in all spheres requires both emotional and intellectual engagement, acknowledging the profound impact of violence on women's lives. It demands a committed response to address this distressing issue and foster resilience among survivors.

The identification of key themes and subthemes in the interviews through the social ecology model of resilience offers valuable insights into the complexity of resilience within the context of IPV. These findings contribute significantly to the scholarship on IPV, as they

highlight the multifaceted nature of resilience and the various factors that strengthen it at different levels.

Specifically, in the Brazilian context, these findings shed light on the unique challenges faced by women experiencing IPV and how they navigate adversities and endure with unshakable strength when they have the proper support. The themes related to individual factors, such as “motivation to leave,” “rediscovering themselves,” and “pursuing goals and projects,” underscore the importance of individual motivations in the resilience process. Important to emphasize that the influence of societal, community and interpersonal factors extends beyond the individual level, significantly shaping individual motivations. Non-individual elements play a crucial role in moulding these motivations. Furthermore, the significant role of “social support” in enhancing resilience at the interpersonal level emphasizes the need for supportive networks to empower women facing IPV. At the community level, the theme of “institutional support” stands out, indicating the critical role of community resources in assisting women to cope with IPV. This finding emphasizes the importance of accessible and responsive support systems to aid survivors on their journey toward resilience. Finally, the theme of “patriarchal culture” at the societal level is particularly relevant in the Brazilian context and in other developing contexts, where gender norms and power dynamics influence women's experiences with IPV. Understanding this broader societal influence is essential for designing comprehensive strategies to address IPV effectively in Brazil and elsewhere.

Although this study recognized that all women, irrespective of race, education, or class, demonstrated resilience and employed distinct strategies to navigate available resources, the intersectional analysis of the data brought to light significant divergences in the experiences of

IPV survivors and their access to resources, shaped by factors such as race, class and other variables such motherhood and education in the Brazilian context. For instance, participants in longer relationships, predominantly Black and Pardo individuals with low incomes, faced physical violence and homicide attempts, while White participants initially experienced psychological violence before physical violence upon separation. Motherhood added complexity, as women with children found it more challenging to leave abusive relationships This was attributed to the dual factors of insufficient support and constrained financial autonomy, which were further moulded by their distinctive racial and class disparities. Economically empowered White women faced financial coercion, while financial abuse and control were predominantly reported by Black and Pardo mothers. White women had better prospects due to support networks and education, while racial and social disparities affected more Black and Pardo women. Higher education was mostly correlated to higher social class, with well-paid women holding postgraduate diplomas. This intersectional analysis highlights the complex interplay of race, class, motherhood, and education in shaping the experiences of intimate partner violence survivors, shedding light on the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by different groups within the sample.

By gaining a comprehensive understanding of how resilience, violence, and socioeconomic and educational diversity intersect, particularly when it comes to fostering resilience in individuals who have experienced IPV, can serve as a guide for future interventions. This understanding can help mitigate the long-term negative impacts of violence on the well-being of women while also shaping societal, community and interpersonal level responses to effectively support them in achieving positive outcomes.

When implementing an intervention, it is crucial to consider both assets and risks, as solely focusing on assets may overlook the intricate interplay between these factors. Protective factors, such as assets, can play a role in resilience when individuals face risks. Understanding the dynamic relationship between assets and risks is essential for identifying patterns of behaviour associated with resilience in the presence of adversity. Therefore, a comprehensive intervention should consider the complex interchanges between assets and risks to promote resilience effectively (Ungar, 2012).

We commonly hear that policies should be for everyone. However, this raises questions about who exactly is included in this "everyone." If women, especially Black women, are in a place of greater social vulnerability due to the inequalities produced by society, failing to look attentively at them makes it impossible to advance in a deeper way. Without recognizing and naming the reality of marginalized groups, necessary improvements may not even be considered for a reality that remains invisible (Carneiro, 2019).

Addressing IPV requires a comprehensive and intricate approach, recognizing that the impact of measures taken may take time to yield significant results. Proposals rooted in feminist principles, such as implementing comprehensive support services that address the intersecting needs of survivors of IPV, taking into account various factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and disability. This includes accessible and culturally sensitive counselling, legal assistance, healthcare, and social support programs catering to survivors' diverse experiences and identities of survivors. Integrate intersectional perspectives into training and educational programs for schools, universities, and institutions. This involves raising awareness about the ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect and

compound the experiences of marginalized individuals. Additionally, engaging both men and women in efforts to reduce and prevent violence in intimate relationships is believed to be a more effective long-term alternative. By discussing topics such as gender, patriarchy, and power dynamics with men, progress can be made.

Furthermore, participatory democracy and implementing relevant public policies are crucial in understanding local challenges and developing tailored solutions for communities. For instance, encourage and support the increased representation of women in political positions to promote gender equality and advocate for policies that address IPV. As well as advocate for policy and legislative reforms that explicitly consider the intersecting experiences and needs of marginalized individuals and foster participatory research and evidence-based studies on GBV to inform the development of more efficient public policies and targeted actions.

Overall, besides considering international recommendations, it is even more crucial to consider approaches that prioritize bottom-up policies and draw on grassroots knowledge, which are valuable tools for instigating change. Understanding that improving the human development index of vulnerable groups translates to improving the human development index of a city or a country, it becomes essential to focus on this reality (Carneiro, 2019).The quality of the environment and policies plays a crucial role in determining outcomes, particularly for vulnerable individuals. It is a mistake to focus solely on individual competence and overlook the significant influence of sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors on developmental trajectories. Resilient outcomes and long-term positive results depend more on the environment's ability to meet individuals' needs rather than solely on personal agency. In other words, personal traits and individual-level changes play a minor role, with the focus being on

the intervention's ability to attract and engage survivors of IPV. Motivation and agency may contribute to success, but the intervention's quality is the primary driver of positive outcomes (Ungar, 2012).

In summary, my research offers valuable insights into the development of resilience in individuals who have left violent relationships. It underscores the significance of comprehending the factors contributing to recovery to provide adequate support to survivors. Recognizing the interplay between these factors is crucial for developing comprehensive interventions and support systems that holistically address the multifaceted needs of women who have experienced IPV, fostering their resilience.

Overall, this research provides valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working to support survivors of violence. Moreover, the specific focus on the Brazilian context helps to inform tailored interventions and policies that acknowledge the unique socio-cultural factors influencing women's experiences with IPV in the country. By addressing these challenges and building on the identified sources of resilience, efforts can be directed toward fostering a safer and more supportive environment for all women facing IPV in Brazil.

This research acknowledges certain limitations that warrant consideration. One notable limitation is the exclusion of women from rural areas, impoverished regions, and indigenous communities in the study sample. Although I could not have control over the sample selection process for this being a secondary analysis of qualitative data, I recognize the difficulty of accessing these populations, mainly through online platforms, which further adds to the research's limitations. In addition, this master thesis relies on a secondary analysis of qualitative

data from another study's findings, indicating that there was no control over the interview process, original questions, and follow-up process.

Considering these limitations, future research should strive to include women from rural areas, impoverished regions, and indigenous communities to ensure a more inclusive understanding of the experiences of diverse populations. Utilizing innovative methods that account for the challenges of accessing these populations, such as community-based research approaches, may be necessary.

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