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Brief bibliographic study of the evolution of women's participation in the labor market

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Abstract

The female role has undergone numerous changes over the years, paving the way for women from all over the world to enter various fields of society. For the development of this bibliographic study, a qualitative approach was adopted, seeking to substantiate the ideas shared here with authors who study the same theme. A bibliographic research was carried out, with analysis of various contributions. The general objective of this work is to perform a historical analysis of women's evolution in the labor market and the occupation of leadership positions in different sectors of society, recognizing the difficulties and obstacles in appropriating spaces that should already be shared with men equitably and mediated by mutual respect. The specific objectives related to this study are as follows: to comment on how women's achievements took place, taking into consideration that they were considered domestic beings; to discuss the modern woman, highlighting her achievements and what still needs to be conquered. Finally, the research reveals that a possible path that benefits women in general is the implementation of policies that make it possible to reconcile personal life with professional career. Understanding, necessarily, that the role of caregiver, in a society that is aging more every day, should not be exclusively attributed to women.

Keywords: Women's evolution; Labor market; Respect; Women's achievements

1. Introduction

The evolution of women in the labor market is a complex and intriguing topic that often elicits strong emotions from readers. Over the past century, women have gradually and steadily discovered their place in the workforce. This article aims to demonstrate how this evolution has taken place over time, with persistence and determination.

The presence of women in the labor market began to take shape in the post-war period, as cultural norms began to shift. Prior to this, women were primarily relegated to domestic roles, while men were expected to be the sole providers for their families.

Several crucial victories throughout the past century have helped to ensure that women have a voice and an active role in areas outside the home. However, these successes have been slow and incremental, and are interconnected in order to be fully realized.

To develop this bibliographic study, a qualitative approach was taken in order to ground the ideas shared here with other authors who have studied this same topic. A thorough bibliographic search was conducted, analyzing various contributions to the field.

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The overarching goal of this study is to conduct a historical analysis of women's evolution in the labor market, including their progress in occupying leadership positions in different sectors of society. This includes recognizing the challenges and obstacles women face in appropriating the spaces that should naturally be shared with men in an equitable manner, mediated by mutual respect.

The specific objectives of this study include discussing the ways in which women have achieved victories, despite having been considered primarily as domestic beings, and elaborating on the modern woman, highlighting her achievements and identifying areas where further progress is needed.

This study is organized into four sections. The introduction briefly contextualizes the topic and presents the research objectives. The second section delves into a theoretical framework based on the opinions and positions of authors who have studied this same topic. The third section explains the methodology used in developing this article, and the fourth and final section presents the concluding remarks.

2. Material and methods

For the development of this bibliographic study, a qualitative approach was adopted, seeking to ground the ideas shared here with authors who study the same theme.

"A qualitative research design is an approach in which inductive research methods are used to analyze data, and the researcher seeks to understand and describe the experiences and perspectives of individuals [1]."

As a procedure for development, a bibliographic research was carried out resulting from a varied range of sources consisting of books, articles, and reports related to the theme addressed here.

Literature review is critical to research as it allows the researcher to assess and interpret past findings, identify gaps in knowledge, and determine future research directions. The bibliographic review also helps the researcher to develop a critical perspective in relation to the subject and to better understand the research results, as well as their relevance for theory and practice. Furthermore, the literature review is an ongoing process, which can be used to update and refine research as new information and discoveries become available [2].

Among the authors who most contributed to theoretically underpinning this research, we highlight: Westin (2020), Aguiar et al. (2020), Araújo, Freitas, and Souza (2021), Bernardes (2021), and Oliveira and Diniz (2022).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Women: From Domestic Walls to Conquering the World

According to journalist Bernardes (2021), the space granted to women was limited to the walls of their homes. It was only in 1827, with the creation of the General Law, that Brazilian women gained access to schools and not just primary education [3].

The General Law brought an important milestone to ensure inclusion in the educational environment, thus creating the possibility of a more comprehensive theoretical basis, previously only dedicated to men, although it still limited women to classes more focused on domestic service and management, such as cutting, sewing, and embroidery.

In addition, the school curriculum was different, according to journalist Westin (2020), for boys and girls. Boys attended more in-depth classes in mathematical studies, while girls were limited to studying the four operations [4].

As reported by Araújo, Freitas, and Souza (2021), it was a characteristic of patriarchy and very present in Brazil - a country built by barons and landowners - to underestimate the intellect of the opposite sex, theorized by the then belief of cognitive limitation, grounding the decision to keep them away from further academic advancement [5].

Female access to basic education ensured that over the years young women developed an interest in literature and study, endorsing a more conducive environment for the construction of critical thinking and intellectual maturity.

Bernardes (2021) writes that ideals of equality were not yet a major issue in women's circles because even with access to education, the entertainment dedicated to this population segment contemplated conduct affirmatives to practices

already prevailing in society. Communication aimed at the female audience permeated less relevant subjects, feeding the ideal standards of women in the empire [3].

In 1879, they were guaranteed the right to attend universities through Decree Law no. 7,247/1879, strengthening their process of emancipation and encouraging their figures in the scientific field. It was the landmark of occupation in the academic environment that provided many other subsequent achievements.

According to Muniz, Bacha, and Pinto (2015, cited in Oliveira, 2021), the parameter began to gain a different configuration in the early twentieth century, more precisely in the period that includes the First and Second World War [6].

The contexts of World Wars imposed the need for women to join the workforce to support their families since many of them lost relatives to the war, and/or some returned disabled and unable to perform work activities.

In addition, in the 1930s, in Brazil, the consolidation of Labor Laws came, which aimed to establish and guarantee more favorable working conditions for all workers since, in general, workers were subjected to unhealthy conditions and exhausting working hours [6].

Another striking factor that positively propelled this female protagonism was the right to vote in Brazil, which happened in 1933, during the Vargas Era. This fact favored and strengthened the female presence in the social, cultural, and financial context, also impacting family nuclei [3].

Gradually, more women became heads of households, being solely responsible for the support and provision of the home, a role that was previously played only by men. Thus, women were composing and strengthening the workforce.

According to Oliveira (2021), the advent of industrialization was also fertile ground for the opening of jobs, absorbing non-specialized labor at the time. In this context, women were hired in a situation of inequality compared to men, with lower salaries and degrading conditions [6].

In addition to these present facts, according to Bruschini and Lombardi (2003, cited in Oliveira, 2021), they report the influence of other decisive factors for the consolidation of women's force in the workforce, such as technological [6].

3.2. The Modern Woman

The modern woman is a force of constant movement and occupation of different spaces. Her secular achievements have given shape to a different version of the woman presented by her ancestors. The female gender is historically marked by the struggle for spaces, equality, and better life opportunities. The ideal of a woman was - for centuries - linked to the reproductive role and nothing more.

According to Aguiar et al. (2020, p.02),

In the literature of Machado de Assis, a great Brazilian novelist, we find the woman presented as a servant to a society that was restructuring and had as its bias for that the home, the nuclear family with the intimacy that sustained social ascent, in which the woman had her place as caregiver of children, husband, and family, but in restricted conditions of submission to the husband's position [7].

The literature of the time reported everyday traits of society, delimiting the figure of the woman to the social function of progenitor and submissive to the husband. Women were not considered a workforce even if they performed domestic work, and it was because of this that the protagonist of one of Machado de Assis's most famous novels, *Capitu*, was seen as a rule breaker, always questioned by her partner in the book, Bentinho [7].

According to Aguiar et al. (2020, p.23), "the society reserved for women a single possibility of social ascent, marriage, which restricted the value of women to that of a zealous wife who would raise the family's status and the husband's social ascent [7]."

Until the 19th century, women were seen as progenitors, and their role was exclusively dedicated to the family and the desires of the husband. The greatest form of respect as a society was through marriage and reproduction [4].

Women were not stimulated to be critical, did not have the right to vote, and were not owners of their reproductive rights. Their access to school was different, a parameter that only changed in Brazil with Decree-Law No. 7,247/1879, allowing them to enter universities and broadening their intellectual horizons.

According to Aguiar et al. (2020), the context of war had already inserted women to act on the battlefield, but many families were depleted by the loss of their parents since the obligation in this context was male [7].

Aguiar et al. (2020, p.02) emphasize that “Many women lost their husbands in this context and had to restructure themselves by seeking work, leaving the household service aside to go to paid work, even if little [7].”

Araújo, Freitas, and Souza (2021, p. 05) also point out that “in social and cultural terms in the Western aspect, it is attributed to women the responsibility for unpaid activities [5].”

That is, it is in this parameter that women are responsible for paid activities in their external work functions and also unpaid ones, performing domestic work and taking care of children.

The conciliation of various tasks forced women of different ages to the so-called double workday, where they did a kind of juggling to handle their domestic and employment duties.

Moreover, the advent of industrialization was also a fertile ground for the opening of jobs, absorbing unskilled labor at the time. In this context, women were hired in a situation of inequality compared to men, with lower wages and degrading conditions [8].

Since the end of the 20th century, the dynamics of the globalized world combined with the capitalist productivity system have turned the workplace into a competitive environment, requiring various changes in the production and scientific processes. "These changes have produced a new model of capitalism and have required flexible specialization. Outsourcing, part-time work, informal contracts, etc. [6]."

Thus, in the first historical part, it will be demonstrated how women have been conquering their space over the years, through education and continuous learning. An adventure full of guilt, fear, tears, and traumas.

According to Murdock (2022, p.85), it was this feminine mystique that led to the cult of the superwoman in the 1980s, promising young women "that they could have it all - a lucrative and fulfilling career, a loving, equal and stable marriage, and a joyful motherhood." However, the price to be paid for this conquest has been high [9].

But despite the demands and self-imposed pressure imposed by women themselves over decades, since the 1990s, “the female narrative has been changing as women turn to issues of identity, relationships, connection, and empowerment. Women are making a huge difference in society, showing what can be achieved when they move forward together” [9].

As an example of this difference, we can cite the #metoo movement, already in the 21st century, which exposed sexual harassment in both work environments, religions, sports federations, and entertainment.

The 21st century is bringing many changes in several different sectors of humanity, among them the way women are seen in society, the spaces they occupy, and their participation in the labor market. Currently, women can be seen in high positions in politics, religion, art, sports, management, and several other areas, but this was not always the case.

As Oliveira and Diniz (2022, p. 05) point out:

For a long time, women have had a silent role in history, playing a supporting role in almost all social spaces: in production, politics, and the various sectors that make up the public space. We say almost all because the domestic-family sphere has been considered the quintessential female space. Moreover, this same space has always been conceived as insignificant and inferior to the male-dominated public space [10].

Oliveira and Diniz (2022) point out that this view of inferiority generated female dissatisfaction because their desires and opinions were set aside or seen as inferior to the male [10].

It is precisely in this social and cultural perspective that some of the challenges women face in work routines are found. A study conducted by Araújo, Freitas, and Souza (2021) reports that only 14% of women interviewed earn more than their partners [5].

The study also shows that even though this difference has decreased in recent years, it is still substantial, since the average salary found by researchers for women is approximately R\$ 2,700.00 reais, while the same result for men exceeds R\$ 3,000.00.

Another challenge presented by the same study is the division of tasks in household chores. The data presented show that 94% of women interviewed say they work outside the home, but only 22% of them say they have some kind of help with household chores, whether from their husbands, children, or housekeepers.

These data report to us that, despite having gained the right to work in the job market, most women have not been able to get rid of their household obligations. One did not cancel out the other, as Detoni, Lages, and Sarmento (2015) stated in their study [11].

Silva, Gonçalves, and Cornelius (2017) conducted research with university students aged 17 to 25 on the topic of female management versus male management in the workplace. When asked about the belief that men are better leaders, 33% of the respondents attributed it to the way people are educated, not to competence itself [12].

When asked which gender is a better leader, 66.7% stated that both genders are capable of leading. Only 15% of the respondents declared an open preference for one of the genders, whether male or female. This study, like the previous one, leads us in the same direction: changes in the job market are still not ideal, but they are happening.

Before discussing the obstacles of the female gender in the job market, it is necessary to reflect on what the term "female gender" informs us. The word "gender" carries not only biological aspects but also social and cultural roles attributed to the male and female [10].

The arguments used to support this dichotomy are diverse, one of the strongest being the biological definition supported by the fact that women are progenitors, extending the various types of care - whether for offspring or relatives - because it is tied to their human purpose, feeding the old maternal figure ideal.

Passos and Guedes (2018, p.69) emphasize:

Many of the explanations rely on the biological capacity of women to be the progenitor, thus extending the care of children, the elderly, and the disabled to the female sex. For men, the biological factor is limited to strength, virility, and exposure in public spaces. Based on these differences, stereotyped roles were created for men and women, defining the destinies of both based on sex [13].

Still, with regard to the historical weight of being a female figure in today's postmodern society, it is important to analyze women as individuals, without predetermined destinies or pre-established functions. Beauvoir (1967 apud Passos & Guedes, 2018, p. 03) affirmed: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this product [13]."

4. Conclusion

Considering the objectives and resulting reflections brought to light, one can understand the historical context from which women have always been delegated the role of holders of domestic chores, child care, and organization of the family institution. Merely the desire for women's emancipation was not sufficient to modify this reality. Several political and economic events were necessary to enable a change in this context.

This research indicates a growing evolution in terms of achievements and appreciation of the role of women in the labor market. However, there is still much to happen. Despite advances in women's levels of education and professionalization, much still needs to be achieved, for example, regarding equal conditions of remuneration compared to men.

Another point that needs to be emphasized concerns the double workload that, even today, is primarily a role occupied by women in our society. This reality directly impacts the careers of these women, who often have to make a choice and end up having to put their careers on hold. This reality is evident when women go through pregnancy and childcare.

Finally, the research reveals that a possible path that favors women in general is the implementation of policies that make it possible to reconcile personal life with professional career. Understanding, necessarily, that the role of caregiver, in a society that ages more each day, should not be exclusively attributed to women.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors assure that there is no conflict of interest with the publication of the manuscript or an institution or product mentioned in the manuscript and/or important for the result of the presented study.

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