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Gender, Reproductive Health, and Daily Life in an Experience of Action-Research with Youth of Maré, Rio de Janeiro

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Objectives: To analyze the results of applying action-research techniques on issues such as gender, sexuality and reproductive health in groups of young men and women.

Methodology: Action-research under the tenets of Paulo Freire and the reflective and practical proposal of the women's movement. The participants were young people from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Results: The authors present reflections by youth of the two groups on gender issues, sexuality and reproductive health, to which are added in a phased manner other topics related to family, identity and citizenship, education, employment and integration into social networks.

Within the first theme, participants from both groups described the male gender as a representation in which man appears as the supplier, the authority figure in the family, the one who exercises power, but that is now confronted by the new roles women have been gaining in society. The authors emphasize that, in view of the participants, men are usually more resistant to attend health services when they become ill. Around sexuality, participants stated that women have difficulty negotiating condom use with their partners and in most cases are subordinate to the will of men.

In regard to reproductive health, both men and women refer to the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases as the responsibility of both genders, although it’s women who are more alert to these risks. Participants in one of the groups highlighted the contribution of the women's movement to the public policies of health care, but also showed concern that attention to women is still limited.

On the subject of family, one group says that the family is the only social support network; the other group points out that young parents face challenges in health care. Both groups believe that family members have a strong sense of family belonging, which contributes to the construction of personal identity.

Under the theme of identity and citizenship, the participants reveal the dissatisfaction of men with situations that have led them as much to gangs’ violence as to deprivation of liberty by the police once it erroneously identifies them as members of any of those criminal groups. On issues of education and labor, they complain on having so few opportunities for working and studying since they believe barriers are due to class differences. This has led young people to participate in social networks to vindicate public policies related to human rights, reproductive health and public safety. This has encouraged the formation of movements, actions and thoughts that are characterized by diversity and plurality.

Conclusions: For the authors, the implementation of action-research contributes to the discussion and construction of public policies on gender, sexuality, reproductive health, equality and social justice among youth.