

Discourses on abortion amid the Zika epidemic: analysis of the coverage by newspapers *O Globo* and *Folha de S.Paulo*

Discursos sobre o aborto na epidemia de Zika:
análise da cobertura dos jornais *O Globo* e
Folha de S.Paulo

Discursos sobre el aborto en la epidemia de zika:
análisis de la cobertura de los periódicos *O Globo*
y *Folha de S.Paulo*

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to analyze the national press coverage of abortion in cases of Zika infection and examine whether it reinforced discourses already associated with the practice or broadened and qualified the discussion of the subject. It is a qualitative study based on the analysis of 43 news stories on Zika/microcephaly/abortion published in the newspapers O Globo and Folha de S.Paulo between November 2015 and December 2016. Based on concepts from Journalism and Discourse Analysis, we identified the sources present in the coverage and analyzed the arguments they used in order to justify their positions, in addition to the strategies, types of knowledge and values they mobilized in the argumentation. We found that both newspapers privileged specialized sources – physicians in Folha de S.Paulo and lawyers and legal scholars in O Globo – and silenced the voices of women directly affected by the epidemic. As for the argumentation, sources that were favorable to the right to have an abortion in cases of Zika infection mainly denounced social injustices, while those who oppose it used a defense-of-life discourse. We observed the predominance of knowledge derived from beliefs and moral values in the discursive arena we analyzed, which was further marked by analogies loaded with negative meaning on both sides of the debate. Comparing our data with those from other studies on abortion in the media, we consider that the media coverage of Zika/microcephaly/abortion played a relevant role in reconfiguring the media discourse on the subject, characterized by a more technical focus, by a plurality of voices and positions and by a greater attention afforded to favorable arguments based on constitutional principles.

Abortion; Zika Virus; Microcephaly; Address; Press

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Introduction

In January 2015, a then-unnamed viral infection began to disseminate across Brazil, quickly becoming a public health problem. In April of that year, researchers from the Federal University of Bahia announced it was the Zika virus (ZIKV) ¹. Initially, it appeared to be akin to a mild dengue, but the expressive increase in the number of births of microcephalic babies in Northeastern states set off alarms among the country's health authorities. In November 2015, faced with growing evidence pointing to an association between ZIKV and microcephaly among newborn babies whose mothers had been infected during pregnancy, the Ministry of Health decreed a Nationally Important Public Health Emergency ².

The association between Zika and microcephaly – scientifically validated in 2016 ³ – mobilized a diverse range of actors – physicians, patients, researchers, government authorities, journalists, among others – imposing different challenges to each. If, on the one hand, the most imminent challenge was imposed on physicians and scientists, who had to concentrate their efforts on the rapid production of new knowledge on the virus and its mechanisms of action, on the other, it was not long before the epidemic generated broader social discussions regarding the State's responsibility, social inequalities and reproductive rights. With regard to this last point in particular, the following question asserted itself: which rights must be guaranteed to women, in particular pregnant women, given the risk of carrying a child with microcephaly?

The guarantee of women's basic rights in the face of a health emergency – including access to information on family planning, the distribution of long-acting contraception, the possibility of interrupting a pregnancy in the case of an infection and assistance to babies born with microcephaly – is the basis of the Direct Motion of Unconstitutionality (ADI, in Portuguese) 5581, presented to the Federal Supreme Court (STF, in Portuguese) in August 2016 by the Association of National Public Defenders, with consultancy from the organization Anis – Institute of Bioethics, Human Rights and Gender.

The initiative of presenting a motion directly to the STF is justified: since the 1990s, the Judiciary has authorized abortion in cases of severe fetal abnormalities that are incompatible with extra-uterine life ⁴, showing itself to be more progressive than the Legislative. In 2012, in an emblematic case for the abortion debate in Brazil, the Court decided that the termination of pregnancies of anencephalic fetuses is not a crime. This ruling was in response to a Motion of Noncompliance with a Fundamental Precept presented to the Supreme Court by the Confederation of National Health Workers, with consultancy from the organization Anis. The Court has also voted on controversial scientific themes. In 2008, for example, the Court rejected an ADI that challenged the use of embryonic stem-cells in research and treatment, putting an end to a three-year-long controversy set in motion by the approval of the Biosecurity Law in 2005 ⁵.

In 2016, ADI 5581 was responsible for reintroducing abortion into the media. As a privileged locus for constructing public opinion, in which different voices and discourses are exhibited, information media actively contribute to the public debate ⁶. Within this perspective, the press coverage of abortion plays a relevant social role, since the subject involves moral, religious, legal, public health and human rights issues that must be discussed by society.

This article presents the results of a study – developed within the Master's in Science, Technology and Health Communication of the Casa de Oswaldo Cruz/Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (COC/Fiocruz) –, the goal of which was to characterize and analyze the national press coverage of abortion in cases of Zika infection and to examine whether it reinforced discourses already associated with the practice or broadened and qualified the discussion of the subject. Thus, three questions guided the analysis: (1) Who are the main news agents?; (2) What are their positions with regard to the possibility of abortion for pregnant women infected with Zika?; and (3) What arguments do they use in order to justify their positions and which types of knowledge, values and strategies do they mobilize in this argumentation? In order to assess the development of the media debate on abortion, we will carry out a comparative analysis of our data with those from other studies on this subject.

Theoretical framework and methodological procedures

The study we present in this article was qualitative, guided by concepts from the fields of Communication and Linguistics. The corpus we analyzed was constructed based on searches on the websites of the newspapers *O Globo* and *Folha de S.Paulo*. Using the keywords “zika-aborto” (“zika-abortion”) in the search tools of both newspapers’ websites, we found 101 items in *Folha de S.Paulo* and 52 items in *O Globo*, published between 1 November 2015 (the month in which the Brazilian government declared the National Public Health Emergency due to the Zika-microcephaly epidemic) and 31 December 2016 (the month when the Supreme Court was set to begin deliberations on ADI 5581). Based on that search, we selected only texts that represented the genre *news* (informative character, presence of a lead, use of quotation marks and polarization of source opinions ⁷), whose central subject was abortion in the context of the Zika epidemic. Following these steps, we retained 26 items from *Folha de S.Paulo* and 17 from *O Globo*, constituting a corpus of 43 news stories on Zika/microcephaly/abortion.

In order to answer the first of our questions, we began by identifying the sources of information presented in the news stories in the corpus. Sources have considerable importance in the process of assigning newsworthiness to a fact. The careful selection of sources by the media makes certain actors visible, following criteria of notoriety, authority and credibility, which make up a set of values that events must satisfy in order to become news. We chose the classification proposed by Lage ⁸, which divides sources into “official” (referring to institutions that hold some State power and represent the branches of government), “independent” (non-governmental organizations or social groups and their representatives), “witness” (those directly involved in the fact, whether as participants or observers) and “experts” (experts on a specific subject who are sought out by the press in order to explain or interpret the events they are reporting). However, we found it necessary to create subdivisions for some of these categories in order to sufficiently contemplate the diversity of actors they include. We were also interested in distinguishing between *cited sources* – those actually vocalized in the news stories through direct discourse – from *mentioned sources* – generally composed of institutions, studies and official documents that provide background information for the news story, or by actors who are mentioned, but were not heard by the newspaper.

In order to answer the second and third questions, we will use concepts from Patrick Charaudeau’s Semiolinguistic Theory ⁹, particularly those related to the manner of organizing the argumentative discourse. According to the author, the subject who is involved in an argumentation will have to engage in a triple discursive activity, having to inform their interlocutor of the subject under discussion (problematizing), present their position on it (taking a stance) and expose the strength of their arguments in search of adherence (proving). In order to validate the argumentation and persuade their interlocutors, the argumentative subject uses different discursive strategies – for example, *reasoning by analogy* ¹⁰ – and mobilizes *knowledge derived from evidence* and *knowledge derived from beliefs* and different *values* ⁸ – domains of truth, aesthetic, ethic/morality, hedonic and pragmatic.

Lastly, in order to ascertain what is repeated and what is new in the discourses of the Brazilian press on abortion, we will use concepts from the French school of Discourse Analysis ¹¹, particularly the relationship between paraphrase and polysemy. Paraphrase and polysemy are defined in discursive terms as the border possibility between the same and the different. According to Orlandi ¹², paraphrase represents the return to the same place of saying, produces the variation of the same. Within it, different formulations of the same crystallized saying are produced. To paraphrase is to say always positioned in the same place in the discursive memory. Polysemy, it turn, is the possibility of breaking with the continuity of the sedimented saying. In opposing paraphrase, polysemy represents a dislocation and is characterized by the emergence of different meanings within the discourse. What we intend in this article is precisely to understand the relationship between these terms in the *O Globo* and *Folha de S.Paulo* coverage of Zika/microcephaly/abortion by comparing it to other moments in which abortion was the focus of attention in the Brazilian press, in order to verify whether or not this debate broadened and qualified the media discussion of the subject.

Results

Sources

News stories from both newspapers gave opportunity for different actors to speak, so that the press coverage was marked by a plurality of voices. However, the newspapers included these voices to different degrees.

In *Folha de S.Paulo*, medical sources appear in first place, followed by representatives of the legal category, such as lawyers and legal scholars. The category scientists/researchers was driven by the recurring presence of the Anthropologist and UnB professor – thus described in the newspaper – Débora Diniz in the coverage.

In this newspaper, representatives of religious groups did not appear frequently: they were entitled to a voice – that is, they appeared as *cited sources* – in only 5 of the 26 stories we analyzed. Sources connected with the Brazil without Abortion Movement (*Movimento Brasil sem Aborto*) appear in three.

Members of feminist organizations – described as such – made even fewer appearances than religious groups. They appear in only two stories as *cited sources*. Though publicly recognized for her activism in the feminist movement, Débora Diniz's position as a researcher and her affiliation with UnB were privileged by *Folha de S.Paulo* to the detriment of her connection to the feminist organization Anis.

The women who were affected by the epidemic are mentioned by the other sources in all of the *Folha de S.Paulo* stories, but are not given a voice in any of them.

In *O Globo*, on the other hand, we found an absolute predominance of judges and lawyers as the main sources of information. Unlike what happened in *Folha de S.Paulo*, in *O Globo*, the medical category does not appear as a source – either mentioned or cited – in any story. That is, the newspaper chose to focus on the legal perspective of the debate, to the detriment of the medical perspective.

Religious, feminist and *Brasil sem Aborto* sources were present in half of the *O Globo* sample (8 out of 17). The distribution of members of these three categories is a result of tallying their presence in the *O Globo* corpus. Although the three groups – traditionally representing different positions with regard to abortion – do not always appear in the same story, news stories tended to present the argumentation of more than one source, characterizing the theme as controversial. However, since *O Globo* sought to hear religious representatives with different ideological positions, we observed that, in some of the stories, the controversy took place between members of this group.

The United Nations (UN) was the main international organization mentioned in the stories, always with the hook of the statement issued by its High Commissioner for Human Rights – in February 2016 – in defense of the right to have an abortion in countries affected by the Zika epidemic that have restrictive laws.

In *O Globo*, the affected women were mentioned in almost all stories and had a voice in one.

Positions and arguments

The sources heard by the two newspapers took different stances with regard to the possibility of allowing the termination of a pregnancy when the pregnant woman is infected with Zika, mobilizing a series of arguments in order to defend their positions.

The medical sources had largely favorable stances with regard to the proposal of allowing abortion in these cases. Their arguments were mainly centered on the severity of the brain lesions associated with Zika and on the prognosis of a difficult life for the mothers and for the future individuals. A statement by a physician, who was not identified by *Folha de S.Paulo*, in which he explains why he supported a patient's decision to terminate a pregnancy, illustrates this argumentative line: "*The brain lesions were extremely severe, the child would have had serious physical and mental problems. They [Joana and her husband] did not regret their decision*"¹³.

Physicians' arguments also draw attention to the problem of social inequalities and of State responsibility. In a story published in February 2016 in *Folha de S.Paulo*, physician Dráuzio Varella defends abortion in cases of Zika infection, arguing that: "*Rich women have [abortions] normally and nothing*

ever happens (...). Now, poor women, women from favelas, those make up the statistics. Those die (...), Banning abortion means punishing those who do not have money”¹⁴.

In a story published that same month by the same newspaper, the physician and former Health Minister José Gomes Temporão criticized the blaming of individuals for the Zika epidemic and transferred the responsibility to the State, which, according to him, does not guarantee basic life conditions to Brazilians. Here is the excerpt from the story in which his position is explained: Temporão states that there is “a false impression” that the epidemic is the result of “people’s negligence”. According to the former minister, the blame lies mainly with the State, which does not adequately offer trash collection, water and sanitation services. “Around 80% of the foci in the Northeast are not there because of families. They don’t have continuous access to water, so they store it. Brazil has gone through permanent outbreaks of Zika, dengue and chikungunya for the past 30 years because these issues were not addressed”¹⁵.

On the opposing side, the issue of the fetus’ potential for extra-uterine life was raised in the Federal Medical Council’s (CFM, in Portuguese) arguments when opposing the idea that there is a similarity between anencephaly and microcephaly, and against the very proposal of allowing abortion in the latter case. Publicizing the official statement issued by the CFM, *Folha de S.Paulo* presents their position:

In a statement, the council affirms that “in the case of fetuses with a microcephaly diagnosis, in theory, there is no incompatibility with life”. The CFM stated that “the early termination of pregnancy should be defined in light of what the Brazilian Penal Code and STF determine”¹⁶.

Incompatibility with life was the essence of the STF’s argument when it issued its ruling in favor of allowing the abortion of anencephalic fetuses. In the debate surrounding abortion in cases of Zika infection, however, the argument was used against the proposal, since, through microcephaly is an incurable condition, in most cases, babies survive. With anencephaly, babies are either stillborn or, when they are born live, only survive for a short time. Thus, it was easier to escape a moral debate.

If most of the medical sources – prevalent in the *Folha de S.Paulo* coverage – showed themselves to be favorable to the proposal, legal sources – the majority in the *O Globo* coverage – were, for the most part, opposed to the possibility of abortion in cases of Zika infection. A recurring source in the coverage, Rio de Janeiro State Attorney and member of the *Movimento Brasil sem Aborto* – thus described by *O Globo* – Paulo Leão states: “Eliminating this life is a form of eugenics (...). The mere assumption does not authorize the anticipation of death (...). Preserving the life of ‘the weaker, those who are considered a burden to society, those who are different’ is one of the greatest advances of current democracy”¹⁷.

In a document publicized by the newspaper, the Federal Attorney General’s office presents the argument of viability, opposing the proposal: “We thus conclude that authorizing the termination of pregnancy under such a hypothesis would be a frontal violation of the right to life, since, although a child whose mother was infected with Zika during pregnancy may have severe neurological damage and bodily limitations, its life is viable”¹⁸.

Among the legal sources, one of the few positions favorable to the proposal was that of then-Attorney General Rodrigo Janot, who presented the issue in the following manner: “This does not mean devaluing human life or the lives of people with disabilities – since no imposition of the termination of pregnancy is being created. The decision will always belong to the pregnant woman, in light of the diagnosis of infection by the virus. It is merely the acknowledgment that regarding human reproduction as a duty, under these conditions, means imposing on women a veritable state of torture, immense mental suffering”¹⁹.

Representing the Judiciary branch, only two Supreme Court justices were heard by the newspapers, but they did not take a clear stance with regard to the proposal. In a statement to *O Globo*, Justice Luis Roberto Barroso did not address the merit of the motion, but invoked the constitutional principles of autonomy and freedom in order to criticize the current legislation: “The current legislation is a violation of women’s autonomy, of their right to freedom. It is within this autonomy that people make the most important existential choices of their lives, and whether or not to have a child is among the choices that the State is not entitled to take away from women”²⁰.

Justice Carmem Lúcia, also seeking to avoid a clear position with regard to the proposal, established a distance between the anencephaly and microcephaly cases: “This motion is ‘more delicate’ than the one heard in 2012, when the Court allowed abortions of anencephalic fetuses (...). It’s something else, completely different”²¹.

Lawyers' arguments to *Folha de S.Paulo* reaffirm the category's tendency to oppose the proposal, supported by the defense-of-life discourse. The newspaper reported on an official opinion signed by Senate lawyers, in which they affirmed that "*the authorization of abortion due to embryonic or fetal malformation, even if for professedly benevolent reasons, opens the doors to eugenic abortion and to the preventive control of diseases through abortion*"²².

The woman's right to choose and the State's responsibility for the epidemic are part of the argumentation of some of the members of the scientist/researcher category, especially represented by the "Anthropologist" and "UnB professor" Débora Diniz. In a story from *Folha de S.Paulo*, she states: "*Women cannot be punished by the country's act of negligence of not having controlled the mosquito population (...). Either the State offers the best conditions and permanent care to newborn babies with microcephaly or it allows women to make the individual choice of terminating their pregnancies*"¹⁶.

On the other hand, the defense of the fetus's life is also part of this category's argument arsenal, presented by Biologist Lenise Garcia, president of the *Movimento Brasil sem Aborto*. The newspaper reports: "*To her [Garcia], a possible permission will function as an act against life. 'Many absolutely normal children will be aborted due to the assumption that they have microcephaly'*"²³.

As for the argumentation from members of the religious category, the different choices made by the two newspapers lead to different positions presented by these sources in each. In *Folha de S.Paulo*, religious voices were mostly represented by the Catholic Church, maintaining the Holy See's established opposition to abortion, illustrated by this statement from Dom Odilo Scherer, Archbishop of São Paulo, in a story produced by *BBC Brasil* and published by *Folha de S.Paulo*: "*No one can decide on the life and death of a human being (...). It is a human being. Still developing, but a human being (...). The unborn baby (whether with) only 12 weeks or with 20 weeks of gestation, is human since the first moment of conception*"²⁴.

O Globo presented more diverse arguments from members of this category: some of the religious leaders consulted by the newspaper addressed social justice and women's freedom of conscience. In a statement to the newspaper, Joel Zeferino, president of the Baptist Alliance of Brazil, stated: "*It is necessary to allow this abortion for the women who wish it, because it is a matter of social justice, so that poor women are not deprived of a right, based on each person's freedom of conscience*"²⁵.

In a statement to the newspaper, Rosângela Talib, one of the coordinators of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Catholics for the Right to Choose, an organization that defends the decriminalization of abortion, emphasized: "*They (the women who are affected) will have to bear the burden of the lack of sanitation, of trash collection, exams, medications? It's a mental, psychological health issue. We defend that the State is obligated to provide all assistance to the women who wish to carry their pregnancies to term*"²⁶.

Arguments from feminist sources were mainly centered on women's suffering and vulnerability and on the State's responsibility for the epidemic and for the care of children born with congenital Zika syndrome. In a story in *Folha de S.Paulo*, feminist physician Jurema Werneck states: "*The State says: you cannot have an abortion. But it also says that your children are your problem*"²⁷. When explaining Anis' proposal, Sinara Gumieri, a member of the organization, stated: "*We have a public health emergency which affects the most vulnerable while facing a State that is neglectful with regard to public policies (...). It is a request for protecting the mental health of women affected by zika, for acknowledging the anguish and suffering in the face of uncertainties and of a precarious access to health*"²⁸.

With regard to witness sources, though the women affected by the Zika epidemic were mentioned in almost all stories we analyzed, we found that their voices were practically absent in both newspapers' coverage. In only one story, from *O Globo*, the mother of a child with microcephaly had a voice. Her statement emphasizes the reality of the difficulties Zika mothers experience, and also endorses a personal position against abortion: "*There are days when there's no transportation, nor anyone to care for the children. I spend all the time alone with both of them, so it's very hard. Sometimes there are doctor appointments the entire week, and it's very hard (...). I know it won't be easy, but I feel inhuman when I look at my daughter and remember I wanted to kill her. Because that's what abortion is: the death of an innocent*"³⁰.

The Box 1 presents a synthesis of the argumentative staging of the debate on abortion in cases of Zika infection, mediated by the newspapers we analyzed.

Box 1

Argumentative staging.

| Source type | Cited sources | Appearances as cited sources | Favorable arguments | Neutral arguments | Opposing arguments |
|-------------|---|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Expert | Physicians | 15 | - Severity of brain lesions; - Inequality and social (in) justice; - State responsibility; - Late microcephaly diagnosis. | | - Potentiality of life. |
| | Lawyers, legal scholars and other legal representatives | 10 | - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic; - Right to health. | | - Potentiality of life; - Defense of the fetus' life. |
| | Scientists/researchers | 14 | - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic; - State responsibility; - A woman's right to choose. | | - Defense of the fetus' life. |
| Independent | Religious representatives | 12 | - Inequality and social (in) justice; - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic; - A woman's right to choose. | | - Defense of the fetus' life; - Sacralization of motherhood. |
| | Representatives of feminist NGOs/Activists | 5 | - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic; - Inequality and social (in) justice; - Defense of women's lives; - State responsibility. | | |
| | <i>Movimento Brasil sem Aborto</i> (Brazil Without Abortion Movement) | 4 | | | - Defense of the fetus' life. |
| | International organisms and sources | 5 | - Inequality and social (in) justice; - Defense of women's lives; - A woman's right to choose; | | |
| Official | Supreme Court justices | 3 | - A woman's right to choose. | - The case of congenital Zika is different from that of anencephalic fetuses. | |
| | Ministers and public office representatives | 6 | - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic. | - Women should ponder the decision to become pregnant. | - Individual responsibility. |
| Witness | Affected women | 1 | - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic. | | - Defense of the fetus' life. |

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization; STF: Federal Supreme Court.

Types of knowledge, values and discursive strategies

We observed that the argumentative subjects of the media staging mobilized both *knowledge derived from evidence* and *knowledge derived from beliefs* – following the typology defined by Charaudeau ⁶. However, unlike what was observed in previous debates about similar issues involving scientific aspects, such as anencephaly and embryonic stem-cells, in the media debate on ADI 5,581, *knowledge derived from beliefs* prevailed, illustrated by arguments that assess the issue based on personal opinions, religious convictions and ethical and moral judgments.

This result is not entirely surprising. In the case of anencephalic fetuses, scientific knowledge, by guaranteeing that there is no possibility of life for a baby born with anencephaly, weakened anti-abortion rights arguments based on the defense of life. In the case of embryonic stem-cells, the scientific community was able to convince decision-makers that, before the development of the central nervous system, the embryo cannot be considered a life, thus providing a counterpoint to religious arguments. In the case of congenital Zika syndrome, on the other hand, the science shows that there is no incompatibility with life; even though quality of life is severely affected, there is still life. Thus, arguments based on scientific knowledge collide with arguments “in defense of life” and lose strength, creating space for disputes based on beliefs and other values.

In the coverage we analyzed, moral/ethical values prevailed, present both in the arguments that defend fetuses’ right to life and in statements from sources in favor of abortion in cases of Zika infection, who mobilize a social justice discourse by emphasizing the vulnerability of poor women, by predicting the difficulties imposed by the syndrome on the lives of mothers and children, and by affirming the freedom to choose as part of women’s constitutional rights.

In the mediated dispute between beliefs and values, we identified the presence of different persuasive strategies, among which the use of analogies loaded with negative meanings by both sides of the debate. We saw, in a *O Globo* story, the Rio de Janeiro State Attorney and member of the *Movimento Brasil sem Aborto* Paulo Leão speak of *eugenics* when referring to abortions in Zika cases. A term associated with the selection of human beings based on their hereditary characteristics in order to improve future generations, and which points back to the crimes committed by Nazi Germany, eugenics is now a totally indefensible practice. On the other side of the debate, we saw Rodrigo Janot, then Attorney General, associate the prohibition of abortion in those cases with *torture* ¹⁹, a term also associated with violent physical acts, highly questionable, but used by Janot to refer to the mental suffering of women forced to give birth to children with microcephaly. By using these words, appealing to memory and to emotion, we observe that the actors involved in the debate seek to strengthen their arguments in order to gain adherents.

Yesterday and today – old or new discourses?

In order to obtain more elements for our analysis and its contextualization, we must consider other moments of discussion about abortion in the media. For comparison purposes, we will refer to three other studies which addressed the Brazilian media coverage of abortion, in the context of three different debates: legal abortion in SUS, in the late 1990s ³⁰; embryonic stem-cell research and decriminalization of abortion, in 2005 ³¹; and abortion in cases of anencephaly, in 2012 ³². Though these studies asked different questions, employed different methods than ours and, at times, focused on other newspapers and magazines, we believe that they provide data which, when added to ours, help to paint a picture, even if not definitive, of the coverage of abortion in the Brazilian press. We highlight some elements of these studies in Box 2, by way of a comparison.

We observed, initially, that, two decades after Pazello and Correa’s study of the subject in the media, between 1996 and 2000, the choice of spokespersons in the media debate on abortion did not suffer great alterations: medical, legal, religious, scientific, governmental, non-governmental and social movement sources are still present. What changes is the priority given to each. If in the late 1990s the major press privileged official sources when reporting on the discussion on abortion, in the current debate on Zika/microcephaly/abortion, experts – whether physicians, researchers or lawyers and legal scholars – gained greater space. Thus, we may say we have experienced a weakening of the official perspective in the coverage of abortion.

Box 2

Abortion in the media: comparative elements.

| Subject under discussion | Legal event(s) | Period under analysis | Corpus description | Cited/mentioned sources | Arguments | Priority discursive focus |
|--|--|----------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Legal abortion in SUS | PL 20/1991 | July 1996 to December 2000 | 699 stories on abortion in the newspapers: - <i>Jornal do Brasil</i> ; - <i>O Globo</i> ; - <i>Folha de S.Paulo</i> ; - <i>O Estado de S. Paulo</i> . | - Judiciary/police; - Churches; - Executive; - Characters in the story/witnesses; - Legislative; - Public institutions; - Academic releases; - NGOs/Movements; - Other media sources; - Political parties/congress members; - Opinion polls; - Medical Councils and Associations. | Opposing: - Defense of life – fetus as a “person”. Favorable: - Abortion as a serious public health problem; - Defense of a secular State; - Defense of human rights: women’s right to citizenship and exercise of democracy; - Social (in)equality. | - Defense of life; - Rights of fetuses. |
| Embryonic stem cell research and decriminalization of abortion | Biosecurity law and Ministry of Health’s Technical Norm dismissing the need to present a police report in order to have an abortion in rape cases. | 01/Jan/05-31/Oct/05 | 447 stories in the newspapers: - <i>Folha de S.Paulo</i> (407); - <i>Folha de Pernambuco</i> (40). | - Regional Medical Council; - <i>Rede feminista de saúde</i> (Feminist Health Network); - Physicians; - Catholic church; - Religious figures. | Opposing: - Intangibility of human life; - Human life begins at the moment of conception. Favorable: - Abortion as a public health problem; - Abortion as a financial problem (public expenditures resulting from illegal abortions); - Non-existence of brain activity in the fetus up to the 12 th week of gestation (if there is no brain activity, then there is no life). | - Defense of life; - Rights of fetuses. |

ADI: Direct Motions of Unconstitutionality; ADPF: Motion of Noncompliance With a Fundamental Precept; NGO: Non-Governmental Organization.

On the other hand, in the case of the coverage of Zika/microcephaly/abortion, as we have seen, witness sources were silenced: the women who were affected, despite being mentioned in most stories, did not have a voice. In the newspapers we analyzed, only one affected woman was heard. Rellegated to the position of victims, they do not speak, but are merely spoken of by the sources accredited by the media as spokespersons of the debate. Thus, we are left without knowledge of their positions with regard to the issue.

When we examine the argumentative disputes in the media coverage of abortion in other moments (Box 2), we realize that much of what has already been said on the subject reappears in the coverage we have analyzed. For example, in the previous coverage of abortion, we observe the mobilization

Box 2 (continued)

| Subject under discussion | Legal event(s) | Period under analysis | Corpus description | Cited/mentioned sources | Arguments | Priority discursive focus |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Anencephaly | ADPF 54 | July and August 2004 and October 2007 | 3 items: - 1 interview in the magazine <i>Época</i> (2004); - 2 articles in the newspaper <i>O Estado de S.Paulo</i> (2004 e 2007). | - Débora Diniz: feminist Anthropologist; - Carlos Alberto Di Franco: journalist and spokesperson of the pro-life position. | Favorable: - Suffering of women pregnant with anencephalic fetuses; - Valuing women's lives; - Defense of women's right to health, to dignity, to liberty and to being free from torture; Opposing: - Defense of the fetus' status as a person; - Affirmation of the State's responsibility over managing citizens' lives | - Defense of constitutional principles; - Women's rights. |
| Congenital Zika | ADI 5,581 | 01/Nov/2015-31/Dic/2016 | 43 stories in the newspapers: - <i>Folha de S.Paulo</i> (26); - <i>O Globo</i> (17). | - Physicians; - Lawyers, legal scholars and other legal representatives; - Scientists/researchers; - Religious representatives; - Representatives of feminist NGOs/ activists; - <i>Movimento Brasil sem Aborto</i> (Brazil Without Abortion Movement); - International organisms and sources; - Supreme Court justices; - Ministers and public office representatives; - Legislative representatives; - Affected women. | Favorable: - Inequality and social (in) justice; - Vulnerability and suffering of women affected by the epidemic; - Severity of brain lesions caused by congenital Zika syndrome; - Late microcephaly diagnosis; - State responsibility; - Defense of women's lives; - A woman's right to choose; - Right to health. Opposing: - Defense of the fetus' life; - Potentiality of extra-uterine life in microcephaly cases; - Individual responsibility; - Sacralization of motherhood. | - Defense of constitutional principles; - Women's rights. |

ADI: Direct Motions of Unconstitutionality; ADPF: Motion of Noncompliance With a Fundamental Precept; NGO: Non-Governmental Organization.

of arguments centered on the defense of life ^{30,31,32}, which often reduced the discussion to the (mis) understanding over what life is and when it begins, instigating a reductionist view of the complex issue of abortion. In the press coverage of the proposal of allowing abortion in cases of Zika infection, we verified that this discourse was once again made present, especially in the statements from religious sources and “pro-life” groups, but also in the voices of lawyers and legal scholars. The arguments of this nature were, however, far from representing the majority of positions at stake. In opposition, we verified the recurring (re)mobilization of arguments defending women's rights and the State's responsibility, and denouncing social inequalities and the vulnerabilities of poor women who wish to

terminate their pregnancies, arguments that were already part of the discursive repertoire of groups favorable to the cause and which gained prominence in the coverage we analyzed.

Given the fact that paraphrastic processes represent the return to the same spaces of saying, the comparative data suggest that the coverage of abortion we analyzed has a more paraphrastic than polysemic nature, since it resumes already-sedimented discourses on the subject, invoking norms, values and knowledge that are crystallized in society and giving voice to the same social actors.

This does not mean, however, that this coverage did not represent advancements in the sense of amplifying and qualifying the debate on abortion. More than new sources and arguments, we can speak of a possible reconfiguration of the media discourse on abortion, in which the newspapers we analyzed play an important role. This reconfiguration is characterized, on the one hand, by an increasing departure from the police focus and from official sources and, on the other, by the more legal and medical-scientific framing of the subject, by the plurality of voices and positions and by the greater space reserved for favorable arguments based on constitutional principles, such as the right to dignity, freedom and health – though discourses centered on the defense of life are still present.

This reconfiguration began in the late 1990s, with the inclusion of countless actors in the debate and the dislocation of reports on abortion from the police pages to the political section and other imprints³⁰, and is consolidated with the STF decision which resulted in the authorization of the termination of pregnancy in cases of anencephaly in 2012. At that time, according to Diniz & Vélez³³, the political and media debate surrounding abortion was broadened with regard to the arguments that were mobilized, which went beyond the traditional rhetoric of the defense of life by associating abortion with constitutional principles. The press coverage of Zika/microcephaly/abortion in 2015-2016 takes on this legacy, privileging and strengthening this line of argumentation. This process, however, is threatened by the political and social context established in the country since the 2018 presidential elections, which enabled the rise to power of a conservative agenda.

Final thoughts

We believe that the results we have presented satisfactorily answer the three questions which guided our analysis. With regard to the update of the debate on abortion in the Brazilian press, it is worth highlighting the importance of the studies we referenced, directed at monitoring and analyzing the media coverage of the subject. Though with different methodologies and objectives, and concentrating only on specific media segments, these studies, added to our own, enable us in some way to examine, contextualize and seek to understand the advances and challenges regarding the debate on abortion within Brazilian society. However, for a more complete picture of the coverage of abortion in the Brazilian press, more research efforts are required.

It is also worth noting that studies such as ours and those we have cited may also help us better to understand the media's role in debates such as the one surrounding abortion, which have great social and health relevance. In this case, we observed, for example, a tendency for the newspapers we analyzed to give voice to some individuals and to silence others, revealing that social actors to which the media gives space are not always those directly implicated in the facts, but those susceptible to have a certain visibility and credibility, according to criteria of notoriety, authority and prestige. On the other hand, the fact that the voices of the affected women were silenced in the media coverage we analyzed does not mean that they were not given a voice in other spaces. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the protagonism of "Zika mothers" in a documentary and book³⁴ resulting from a study carried out by Débora Diniz. Considering the premise of the defense of citizens' rights supported by journalism, the behavior of these newspapers with regard to those affected by the Zika/microcephaly epidemic in this specific debate leads us to ask: does the silencing of the affected actors result from their disqualification by the media? To what extent do debates on science and health involve those who are directly affected?

Contributors

W. Castilhos contributed to the writing of the article, conception and design, analysis and interpretation of data. C. Almeida contributed to the writing of the article and critical revision of the final version of the text.

Additional informations

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Resumo

O objetivo do estudo aqui apresentado foi analisar a cobertura da grande imprensa nacional sobre o aborto em caso de Zika e examinar se esta reforçou os discursos já associados à prática ou se ampliou e qualificou a discussão sobre o tema. Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa realizada com base na análise de 43 notícias sobre Zika/microcefalia/aborto publicadas pelos jornais O Globo e Folha de S.Paulo entre novembro de 2015 e dezembro de 2016. Baseando-se em conceitos do Jornalismo e da Análise do Discurso, identificamos as fontes presentes na cobertura e analisamos os argumentos por elas usados para justificar suas posições, além de estratégias, saberes e valores mobilizados nesta argumentação. Constatamos que os dois jornais privilegiaram fontes especializadas – médicos na Folha de S.Paulo e advogados e juristas em O Globo – e silenciaram as vozes de mulheres diretamente afetadas. Quanto à argumentação, as fontes favoráveis ao direito ao aborto em caso de Zika denunciaram, sobretudo, as injustiças sociais, enquanto as contrárias à proposta reacionaram o discurso em defesa da vida. Observamos a predominância de saberes de crença e valores morais na arena discursiva analisada, marcada ainda por analogias carregadas de sentidos negativos nos dois polos do debate. Comparando nossos dados aos de outros estudos sobre o aborto na mídia, consideramos que a cobertura da grande imprensa sobre Zika/microcefalia/aborto desempenhou um papel relevante na reconfiguração do discurso midiático sobre o tema, caracterizada por um enfoque mais técnico, pela pluralidade de vozes e posicionamentos, e por maior espaço reservado a argumentos favoráveis baseados em princípios constitucionais.

Aborto; Zika Virus; Microcefalia;
Discurso; Imprensa

Resumen

El objetivo del estudio aquí presentado fue analizar la cobertura de la prensa nacional de gran tirada sobre el aborto en caso de zika, y examinar si esta reforzó discursos ya asociados a la práctica o amplió y proporcionó otros matices a la discusión sobre el tema. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa, realizada a partir del análisis de 43 noticias sobre zika-microcefalia-aborto publicadas por los periódicos O Globo y Folha de S.Paulo, entre noviembre de 2015 y diciembre de 2016. En base a conceptos del Periodismo y del Análisis del Discurso, identificamos las fuentes presentes en la cobertura y analizamos los argumentos usados por ellas para justificar sus posiciones, además estrategias, saberes y valores movilizados con esa argumentación. Constatamos que los dos periódicos privilegiaron fuentes especializadas – médicos en la Folha de S.Paulo y abogados y juristas en O Globo – y silenciaron las voces de mujeres directamente afectadas. En cuanto a la argumentación, las fuentes favorables al derecho al aborto, en el caso del zika, denunciaron sobretudo las injusticias sociales, mientras que las contrarias a la propuesta reaccionaron con el discurso en defensa de la vida. Observamos la predominancia de saberes relacionados con creencias y valores morales en el terreno discursivo analizado, marcado todavía por analogías cargadas de opiniones negativas en los dos polos del debate. Comparando nuestros datos con los de otros estudios sobre el aborto en los medios, consideramos que la cobertura de la prensa de gran tirada sobre zika-microcefalia-aborto desempeñó un papel relevante en la reconfiguración del discurso mediático sobre el tema, caracterizada por un enfoque más técnico, por la pluralidad de voces y posicionamientos, y por un mayor espacio reservado a argumentos favorables basados en principios constitucionales.

Aborto; Virus Zika; Microcefalia;
Discurso; Prensa

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