



RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN THE CONTEXT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE IMPACT ON THE SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

RELAÇÕES ENTRE MÃES E FILHAS EM CONTEXTO DE VIOLÊNCIA DOMÉSTICA: O IMPACTO NA DIFERENCIAÇÃO DO SELF

RELACIONES ENTRE MADRES E HIJAS EN CONTEXTO DE VIOLENCIA DOMÉSTICA: EL IMPACTO EN LA DIFERENCIACIÓN DEL SELF

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³ The self is the core of personal identity, encompassing the emotional, cognitive, relational, and social aspects that shape the notion of the "I" over time.

How to reference this paper:

Ferreira, L., & Kublikowski, I. (2025). Relationships between mothers and daughters in the context of domestic violence: the impact on the self-differentiation. *Doxa: Rev. Bras. Psico. e Educ.*, 26, e025015. DOI: 10.30715/doxa.v26i00.20166

Submitted: 06/06/2025

Revisions required: 28/07/2025

Approved: 09/09/2025

Published: 17/09/2025

ABSTRACT: This study aimed to analyze, from the daughters' perspective, conflicting relationships with their mothers in the context of domestic violence, with emphasis on the process of self-differentiation. Grounded in systemic epistemology, the research adopted a qualitative approach and a methodological design based on multiple case studies. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, genograms, and timelines, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. Thematic categorization guided the analysis, integrating narrative and visual data. In both cases, results revealed the presence of gender-based domestic violence directed at the mothers, which unfolded into relationships marked by emotional fusion, conflict, and dysfunctional loyalties, significantly impacting the daughters' process of self-differentiation. The study also identified the transgenerational transmission of relational patterns, highlighting the need for clinical interventions that address the complexity of family bonds and their intergenerational legacies.

KEYWORDS: Family relationships. Gender-based violence. Self-differentiation. Intergenerationality. Case study.

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa teve como objetivo analisar, sob a perspectiva das filhas, as relações conflituosas com suas mães em contextos de violência doméstica, com ênfase no processo de diferenciação do self. Fundamentado na epistemologia sistêmica, o estudo adotou uma abordagem qualitativa e um delineamento metodológico baseado em estudo de casos múltiplos. Foram utilizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas, genogramas e linhas do tempo como instrumentos de coleta de dados, permitindo uma escuta aprofundada das experiências das participantes. A análise foi conduzida por categorização temática, articulando dados gráficos e narrativos. Os resultados revelaram, em ambos os casos, a presença de violência doméstica de gênero dirigida às mães, cujos efeitos repercutiram em vínculos marcados por fusão, conflito e lealdades disfuncionais, impactando significativamente o processo de diferenciação do self das filhas. A pesquisa evidenciou ainda a transmissão transgeracional de padrões relacionais, sugerindo a necessidade de intervenções clínicas que considerem a complexidade dos vínculos familiares e seus legados intergeracionais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Relações familiares. Violência de gênero. Diferenciação do self. Intergeneracionalidade. Estudo de caso.

RESUMEN: Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar, desde la perspectiva de las hijas, las relaciones conflictivas con sus madres en contextos de violencia doméstica, con énfasis en el proceso de diferenciación del self. Fundamentado en la epistemología sistémica, el estudio adoptó un enfoque cualitativo y un diseño metodológico basado en estudio de casos múltiples. Se utilizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas, genogramas y líneas del tiempo como instrumentos de recolección de datos, lo que permitió una escucha profunda de las experiencias de las participantes. El análisis se realizó a través de categorización temática, articulando datos gráficos y narrativos. Los resultados revelaron, en ambos los casos, la presencia de violencia doméstica de género dirigida a las madres, cuyos efectos repercutieron en vínculos marcados por fusión, conflicto y lealtades disfuncionales, impactando significativamente el proceso de diferenciación del self de las hijas. La investigación también evidenció la transmisión transgeneracional de patrones relacionales, sugiriendo la necesidad de intervenciones clínicas que consideren la complejidad de los vínculos familiares y sus legados intergeneracionales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Relaciones familiares. Violencia de género. Diferenciación del self. Intergeneracionalidad. Estudio de caso.

Article submitted to the similarity system



Editor: Dr. Paulo Rennes Marçal Ribeiro

Deputy Executive Editor: Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

INTRODUCTION

Based on our clinical experience, we have identified the significant challenges involved in listening to, understanding, and intervening in narratives marked by intrafamilial violence, particularly when it directly compromises the bond between mothers and daughters. Being both a therapist and a researcher in this field requires confronting narratives permeated by silent guilt, invisible loyalties, and deeply ambivalent bonds, whose effects reverberate across the psychic development of women over generations.

We observed that, in many of these contexts, domestic violence—often directed at the mother—produces significant repercussions in the mother-daughter relationship, hindering the process of self-differentiation and reinforcing patterns of emotional dependence and affective enmeshment. Families with diffuse boundaries tend to perpetuate rigid expectations and prescribed roles, directly affecting the construction of female autonomy and identity.

This research emerged from the need to gain a deep understanding of this phenomenon, integrating clinical listening with theoretical investigation. However, the literature review revealed important challenges, particularly the scarcity of empirical studies addressing domestic violence from the relational perspective between mother and daughter, considering the multigenerational impact of these experiences. While the literature on self-differentiation, gender-based violence, and intergenerational bonds provides relevant foundations, it seldom examines the subjective consequences of this specific relationship marked by violence.

Methodologically, we employed a qualitative approach based on Vasconcellos' (2018) new paradigm systemic thinking and conducted multiple case studies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, genograms, and timelines. The thematic analysis revealed categories such as low self-esteem, reflected in difficulties with self-differentiation; enmeshed identification through conflict with the mother; mother-daughter relational conflict; domestic violence; and parental emotional/psychological abuse toward daughters.

Presenting these dynamics, especially through graphic and narrative instruments, also posed emotional and ethical challenges for the researcher, who had to accommodate—through clinical listening and analytical distance—contents often marked by pain, exclusion, and familial silencing, without losing sight of the scientific objectives.

The findings offer important contributions for mental health and social assistance professionals by expanding the understanding of the effects of domestic violence on the mother-daughter bond and its repercussions in the adult lives of daughters. They also suggest possible paths for therapeutic interventions that are more sensitive to multigenerational complexities, aiding families in breaking cycles of suffering and fostering healthier relationships.

Conflictual relationships, violence, and the impact on self-differentiation

Some families are structured with diffuse boundaries, resulting in a familial entanglement in which roles and responsibilities overlap, compromising the individuality of their members. This phenomenon can directly impact the process of self-differentiation, particularly for children, hindering the development of autonomy and identity (Bowen, 1993; Neumann et al., 2023). For conceptual clarity, we adopt the term “domestic violence,” following Serpeloni et al. (2023), who identify its prevalence in the context of gender-based violence and violence against women. To analyze the complexities of these relationships, we draw on Nagy and Spark (2017) and Alves-Silva and Scorsolini-Comin (2022), who discuss the concept of invisible loyalties in multigenerational¹ relationships and the generational transmission of values, beliefs, behaviors, and legacies. These authors propose the metaphor of a “ledger of credits and debits,” wherein systematized familial expectations generate tacit obligations that often result in relational conflicts and difficulties in individual differentiation.

The literature reinforces the association between conflictual mother-daughter relationships and the development of daughters’ identities, particularly regarding self-differentiation. Fiorini et al. (2018) and Andrade et al. (2024) note that the transition to adulthood requires a reorganization of family dynamics, in which parental control should give way to support. However, in families with diffuse boundaries, children frequently remain in prolonged positions of dependency. This phenomenon is corroborated by Reis and Rabinovich (2006), who emphasize the daughters’ need to differentiate themselves from maternal trajectories, especially when these are perceived as negative. This process can generate conflicts and significant emotional impacts, as the mother’s history tends to exert a decisive influence on the daughters’ identities.

Dornelas and Garcia (2006) emphasize that the relationship between mothers and adult daughters unfolds through a dialectical movement, characterized by closeness and distancing, the pursuit of differentiation, and the recognition of similarities. This process directly influences the construction of female identity. Self-differentiation involves the development of individuality and the right to express opinions and convictions independently of the values of the family of origin (Neumann et al., 2023). However, when the mother-daughter relationship is marked by emotional enmeshment—understood here as a condition in which boundaries between family members become indistinct, hindering self-differentiation—a bond of affective dependence or conflagration may develop, compromising the daughter’s autonomy.

Research on the transition to adulthood shows that familial enmeshment can impede the construction of an independent life project. Parents frequently experience anxiety when

¹ *Multigenerational* refers to the analysis of family patterns and bonds passed down through three or more generations, highlighting intergenerational influences on current relationships.

their children enter adulthood, finding it difficult to navigate this new family configuration. Such enmeshment can prolong emotional and material dependence, diverting the young adult from their own interests and obstructing autonomy (Correia & Mota, 2016).

Studies indicate that factors such as parental conflict, social support, and attachment patterns significantly influence the development of children's individuality. Marital conflicts directly affect young people's developmental processes, while parental security within the conjugal relationship is considered fundamental for establishing a healthy emotional structure, influencing future affective bonds. In a study with 432 young adults in Portugal, the absence of secure affective relationships and the presence of marital conflicts were associated with significant risks to children's mental health, including emotional difficulties and impaired psychological adjustment (Mello et al., 2020).

From a systemic perspective, Vasconcelos (2018) argues that the quality of communication between mother and daughter is a key determinant in establishing healthy or dysfunctional relationships. Watzlawick et al. (2007) highlight that ambiguous or dysfunctional communication patterns can generate relational disturbances, reinforcing conflictual patterns and impeding self-differentiation. Poor communication, combined with unresolved family loyalties, may establish multigenerational dysfunctional cycles in which relational patterns are transmitted from one generation to the next.

The literature indicates that exposure to domestic violence against women negatively impacts children's development, leading to emotional disorders and learning difficulties (Alves & Prado, 2020; Sousa et al., 2024). Studies show that children exposed to such environments may exhibit multigenerational repetition patterns, reproducing violent behaviors or establishing submissive bonds in future relationships (Silva et al., 2021).

Domestic psychological violence, commonly referred to as psychological torture, is a difficult-to-detect phenomenon characterized by humiliation, rejection, deprecation, and disrespect. This form of violence leaves deep marks, undermining self-confidence and increasing psychological vulnerability (Souza & Bernardes, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this phenomenon intensified, as social isolation forced many women to remain in continuous contact with their aggressors (Dulius et al., 2021).

In light of this context and the challenges it imposes, the present study, grounded in systemic thinking, aims to analyze, from the daughters' perspective, conflictual relationships with their mothers, investigating the impact of this bond on self-differentiation in domestic violence scenarios. Understanding these dynamics is essential for improving clinical and interventional strategies that foster autonomy and support the healthy emotional development of women involved in such relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This study was grounded in the epistemology of Systemic Thinking, a paradigm that departs from linear and reductionist explanations by understanding human phenomena as interactive, circular processes embedded within broad relational contexts (Vasconcellos, 2018). From this perspective, the subject is seen as a being constituted through relationships, and psychic suffering is understood as an expression of imbalances in relational dynamics, particularly within the family system. This epistemology underscores the importance of investigating the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences, respecting the complexity, historicity, and uniqueness of each life trajectory.

Based on these foundations, a qualitative approach was adopted, emphasizing an in-depth understanding of the meanings constructed by participants regarding their family relationships, with a focus on the process of self-differentiation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006). This approach proved consistent with the study's objectives, allowing access to subjective nuances and affective dynamics that could not be captured through quantitative methods.

Instruments: a Multiple Case Study design, as outlined by Yin (2016), was employed to allow detailed and comparative analysis of complex phenomena within their real contexts. Cases were selected based on demands emerging from the researcher's clinical practice and treated as instrumental, following Stake (2006); that is, they were chosen not only for their intrinsic value but also for their contribution to the theoretical deepening of a specific phenomenon. Data collection involved the integrated application of three techniques:

- Semi-structured interviews, which provided access to participants' subjective discourse, allowing them to freely express their perceptions, feelings, and memories regarding their mothers and family environment. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full for subsequent thematic analysis;
- Genograms, a graphical tool used to represent family structure and relational bonds over at least three generations. Genograms were constructed collaboratively with participants during the sessions, aiming to map multigenerational patterns, identify alliances, ruptures, triangulations, and other relevant elements of family organization. This technique was essential for visualizing the family system's structure and accessing content that does not easily emerge through verbal narrative alone;
- Timelines, employed as a visual and narrative resource to organize significant life events of participants chronologically, facilitating the construction of meaning regarding lived experiences and their developmental impacts.

The combined use of these three techniques enabled multiple levels of analysis: affective, structural, and temporal. Each instrument was selected based on its ability to access complementary dimensions of experience and enhance analytical depth. Data were analyzed through thematic categorization, respecting the uniqueness of each case while seeking to identify recurring relational patterns.

As proposed by D'Allones et al. (2004), the Case Study requires the integration of multiple sources of information to apprehend the internal logic of a life trajectory, considering its complexity and multiple levels of meaning. Similarly, Kublikowski (2018) emphasizes that clinical psychology case studies not only reveal aspects of the phenomenon under investigation but also allow the researcher to critically reflect on their theoretical, ethical, and subjective positioning throughout the investigative process.

Thus, the methodological design adopted in this study proved consistent with the investigative objectives and systemic framework, enabling in-depth listening to participants' experiences and contributing to the understanding of family dynamics that intersect with the process of self-differentiation in contexts of violence.

Participants: two women were interviewed: Geovana (28 years old, single, heterosexual, cisgender, childless, living with her parents) and Danielle (38 years old, mother of a nine-year-old son, heterosexual, cisgender, also living with her parents). Both are physiotherapists, earning approximately five minimum wages, and belong to urban middle-class backgrounds.

Procedure: the study followed the guidelines established by Resolutions 466/2012 and 510/2016 of the National Health Council, with approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo on June 16, 2021 (Approval No. 4,981,336).

Data Analysis: following the phases of compilation, decomposition, recomposition, and interpretation (Yin, 2016), five main categories were identified: low self-esteem, fused identification through conflict, mother-daughter relational conflict, domestic violence, and parental emotional/psychological abuse toward daughters. According to Yin (2016), the analysis of the results enabled an understanding of how participants perceive themselves through the meanings they attribute to their family relationships—meanings that constitute relational networks that include the researcher.

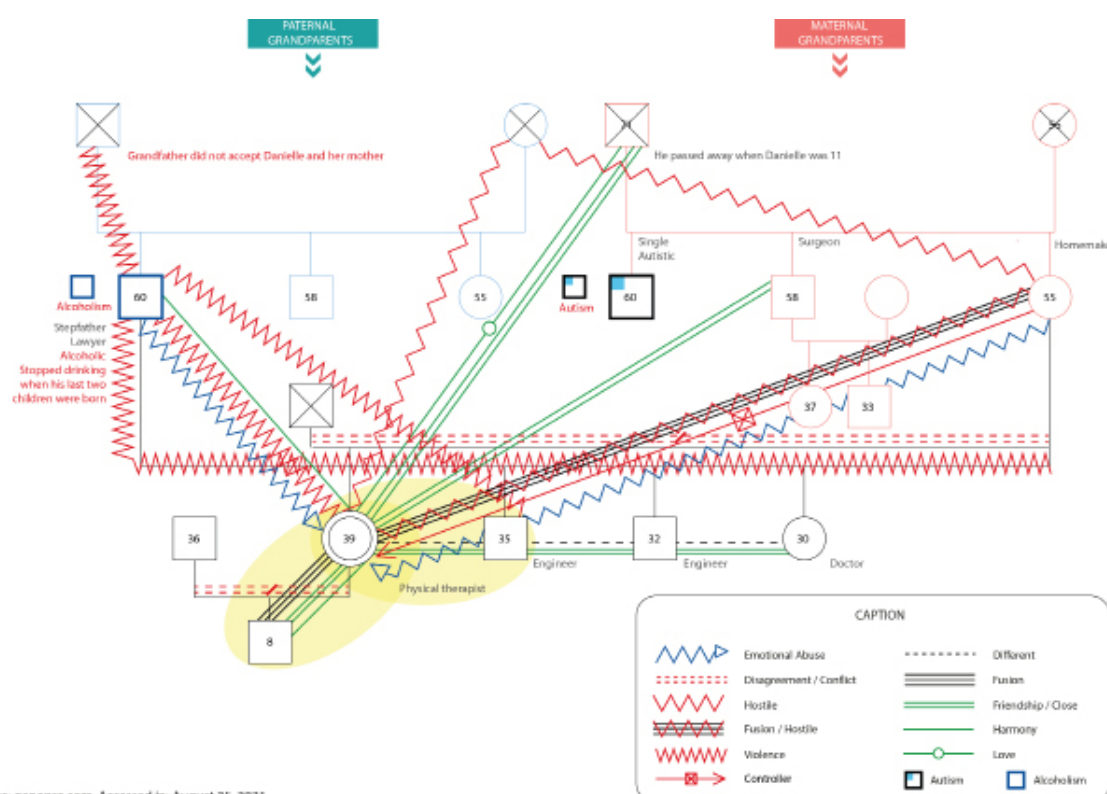
RESULTS

The genogram analysis of the two participants was conducted based on Cervený's (2019) proposal, which allows mapping family structure and dynamics from a multigenerational perspective, highlighting repetitive relational patterns, conflictual bonds, diffuse boundaries, and intergenerational alliances. During the technical reading of the genograms, the

position of members within the family network, symbolic and actual bonds, and the quality of expressed relationships (hostility, fusion, distancing, etc.) were considered. This analysis was integrated with interview content, enabling the identification of the five central thematic categories previously mentioned.

These categories are discussed in the following section in light of systemic literature and Bowen's (1993) theory of self-differentiation. The genograms that supported the analysis are presented below.

Figure 1. Danielle's genogram



Note. Prepared by the authors.

Danielle's genogram reveals a complex family network characterized by hostility, violence, emotional abuse, enmeshed bonds, and alcoholism, reflecting a multigenerational transmission of dysfunctional relational patterns.

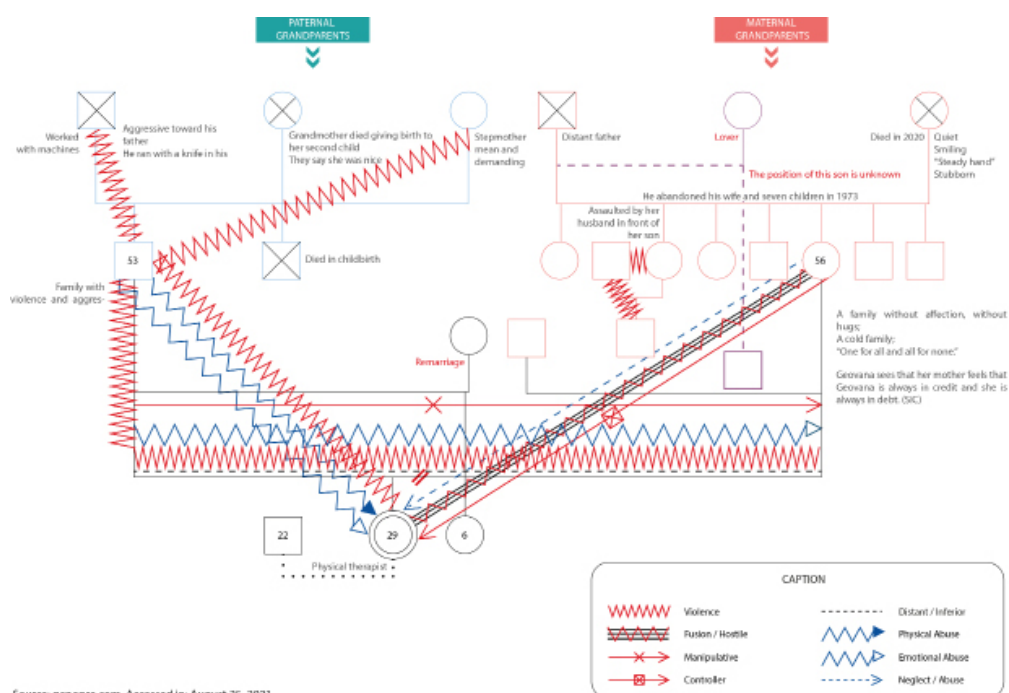
On the paternal side, the stepfather stands out as an alcoholic, controlling, and hostile figure, with a history of problematic alcohol use, including during the births of the youngest children. The paternal grandmother explicitly rejected Danielle and her mother, reinforcing an atmosphere of disqualification and exclusion. Family relationships on this side are dominated by symbols of violence, emotional abuse, and hostile bonds, indicating an aggressive environment devoid of affective support.

On the maternal side, a more ambiguous relational structure is observed: although bonds of closeness and affection exist, they coexist with enmeshed and hostile relationships among women of the same generation (mother, aunts). Danielle's mother is embedded in multiple intense relationships characterized by conflict and emotional fusion. The early loss of the maternal grandmother, when Danielle's mother was 11 years old, may have affected her affective development and contributed to the construction of invisible loyalties between mother and daughter, complicating differentiation across generations.

Danielle herself (39 years old) is situated within a scenario of dense emotional overlap, with conflictual bonds both with her mother and stepfather, simultaneously displaying elements of closeness, hostility, and control. Danielle's son (8 years old) is already integrated into the network with lines of tension and fusion, suggesting a repetition of dysfunctional relational patterns in the next generation.

From a systemic perspective, the genogram indicates: diffuse boundaries and emotional enmeshment; multiple ambivalent relationships (love/hostility); repetition of patterns of violence and exclusion; and mother-daughter fusion with difficulty in self-differentiation (Bowen, 1993). The reading of Danielle's family configuration allows the inference of risks to emotional autonomy and identity construction, not only for her but also for her son, who is already exposed to unresolved family legacies. This pattern underscores the importance of clinical interventions addressing transgenerational bonds and promoting healthy psychic separation processes, particularly between mothers and daughters.

Figure 2. Giovanna's genogram



Note. Prepared by the authors.

Giovanna's genogram (28 years old) reveals a family configuration shaped by trans-generational patterns of violence, emotional neglect, emotional abuse, and enmeshed and hostile bonds, highlighting the fragility of caregiving ties in both parental lineages.

On the paternal side, there is a history of explicit violence and intergenerational aggression. The paternal grandfather is described as violent and threatening, and the family is marked by episodes of physical and emotional abuse. Giovanna's father appears as an emotionally absent figure, involved in an extramarital relationship, with a history of abandoning his family of origin and practicing physical violence, reflecting broken alliances and parental neglect. The presence of a stepmother characterized by rigidity and high demands further reinforces an unstable family environment.

On the maternal side, although no explicit violence is reported, accounts reveal a family with profound affective deprivation, described as "emotionally dry" and lacking expressions of affection. Giovanna's mother (56 years old) is perceived by her daughter as occupying the role of "constant creditor," while the daughter is positioned as "in debt," suggesting dynamics of invisible loyalty, relational control, and emotional indebtedness. This perception reinforces unbalanced bonds, hindering the daughter's autonomy and individuation.

The current relationship between Giovanna (28 years old) and her mother (56 years old) is characterized by emotional enmeshment, manipulation, and control, as indicated by symbolic markers in the genogram. There is evidence of emotional neglect, hostility, and minimal differentiation between generational roles. The repetition of patterns of suffering and the absence of secure bonds impede Giovanna's identity formation and compromise her self-differentiation process.

DISCUSSION

The first category was designated as low self-esteem, identified through difficulties in self-differentiation. Bowen (1993) asserts that when individuals cannot navigate their relationships harmoniously as a defined self, they tend to merge intensely with others emotionally (fusion). In the mother-daughter relationship, it was observed that family conflicts, diffuse boundaries, and enmeshments among family system members have a significant impact on the emotional health of young adults (Mello et al., 2020).

These narratives, particularly Danielle's, reveal self-perceptions characterized by low self-esteem, identity crises, lack of recognition of one's potential and possibilities, and paths marked by suffering, relational conflicts across various spheres, and the search for belonging and acknowledgment from their mothers.

Right after I left school, when I was at S. and finished my course, S. invited me to be a teacher in a technical course, and I refused. I said, 'No!' I had no background for a massage therapy course. I was a student; how could I become a teacher? (Danielle)

From that time until my early thirties, it was really difficult. As I said, I was extremely overweight, with morbid obesity, unemployed, separated, and with a small child. I moved back in with my parents, carrying a huge debt, listening to my mother say that I was a failure, that I was a disappointment, you know? (crying) Seeing my siblings (pause for crying), all three of them doing well, and I was just falling behind (crying). So, when I would find everyone at home talking, talking, I started closing myself off, you know? (Danielle)

The second category emphasized the process of fused identification through conflict with the mother. Bowen (1993) states that issues compromising the health of the family environment and its functioning may reside in the high emotional reactivity of each member and the family as a whole, as well as in low group differentiation, which ultimately leads to triangulation through relational conflict.

Individuals fused through conflict interact primarily via conflict and become emotionally bound to these relationships, impacting the self-differentiation of both parties. Another process sustaining fusion through conflict in this relationship occurs through invisible loyalty. According to Nagy and Spark (2017), expectations between mother and daughter can be encapsulated in an emotional commitment, primarily from daughters toward their mothers. This is a transgenerational process that perpetuates conflictual relationships through recursive patterns that self-perpetuate, as illustrated in the excerpts below:

I can't forget one time when she was really sick, flu or something—I don't even remember what she was sick with. So, I made her a soup because she couldn't eat properly. I brought her a very nutritious soup, and she looked at it and said, 'What is this?' I said, 'I made a very nutritious soup for you; it has some rice, some... I don't know what.' Did she touch the food? No! Later, she went downstairs and ate bread with butter. (Danielle)

I think the best moment was when I read something about panic disorder. At 14, I realized I had it—what a relief! I understood that it's something I have, and other people have it too. Anyway, at that time, my mother got hurt, and that was actually good because I started spending more time with her. I was very dependent on her; I couldn't be away from her... she was my safe harbor, you know? I stayed... (pause)... anyway, it was good that she got hurt because I could spend more time with her. (Geovanna)

The third category addresses conflict in the mother-daughter relationship, produced through communication between the two and permeated by psychological and intrafamilial domestic violence.

Never, never could I talk to my mother. People say, 'Talk to your mother, explain, open up.' But there is no possibility of talking to her, because when you try, she flips a switch and starts to freak out, screaming, hitting herself, breaking things. You simply cannot talk to my mother. She takes everything personally; she thinks you are judging, criticizing, complaining—so it's impossible! (Danielle)

From around 16 or 17, I began feeling a lot of resentment toward her, a lot of sadness seeing that she allowed all of this (referring to the father's aggressions toward the daughter) ... about fighting with me if something is out of place or if I don't clean something, which is the condition of everyone in the house. (Geovanna)

Such conflicts between mothers and daughters translate into issues that indicate difficulties in self-differentiation (Ferreira, 2022). Dornelas and Garcia (2006) assert that the mother-daughter relationship is instrumental in shaping female identity for both parties. The daughter mirrors the mother, while the mother may project onto the daughter her unfulfilled feelings and needs, culminating in emotional difficulties that compromise the self-differentiation of both.

Considering the context of violence among mothers, daughters, and fathers, studies on domestic violence indicate that such dynamics impair communication, and the emotional health of members enmeshed in these relationships, rendering them permeated by emotional disturbances and fostering co-constructed, self-perpetuating aggressive interactions (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024; Silva & Souza, 2023; Souza & Bernardes, 2023).

The fourth category that emerged is domestic violence (Law No. 11,340, 2006), characterized as a patterned behavior of aggression, involving the exercise of direct or indirect coercion over cohabiting members.

He was very aggressive; he would hit her, he would hit us, so she didn't have much time for me, in that sense, you know? ... And I couldn't understand why my mother didn't separate from him. I would say: 'You have to leave, shall we go? Shall we leave?' And she wouldn't leave, because of financial dependency, the other siblings, and everything else... so, all of this was really complicated. (Danielle)

My mother always tried to salvage the relationship; she was always very afraid. When we were still in Argentina, she feared that my father might do something to me, flee with me, and she also said she couldn't separate because otherwise I would have to stay either with him or with her, and she couldn't leave the country with me, because

my father wouldn't allow it. So she dragged the situation along, in a very tense way, to the point that my father would leave us outside the apartment for hours because he was angry, breaking things, and she endured all of this. (Geovanna)

Studies on domestic violence conclude that such violence impairs the victims' comprehension, leading to the development of mental symptoms, isolation, and potentially culminating in apathetic resignation, whereby the victim adapts to the situation of violence and conforms to the perpetrator's behavior (Barroso Filho, 2008). Children, adolescents, and young adults living with their mothers in situations of gender-based domestic violence tend to develop the same symptoms as the primary victim (Alves & Prado, 2020), as well as when they are direct targets of aggression, as observed in this study—particularly in the case of Giovanna, who was the primary target of her father's physical assaults.

Factors maintaining mothers and daughters in violent relationships, pointing to the cycle of domestic violence identified in this research, include: fear, maintenance of the marriage, expectations of the perpetrator's behavioral change, financial dependence, lack of social support, and brief moments of happiness that may mitigate the perception of violence (Brasil, 2006; Magalhães et al., 2020; Walker, 2012).

An important finding in this study resonates with research addressing family violence and highlighting the generational transmission of violence (Santos & Moré, 2011). It was observed that the perpetrators of violence in both families had themselves been victims of violent and hostile parents, and it is understood that they unfolded these aggressions across generations—and, arguably, internalized and reproduced them.

The fifth category identified is parental emotional/psychological abuse toward daughters. Emotional abuse is defined as acts of omission and authoritarianism perpetrated by parents or significant individuals toward the abused person, considered harmful in light of community values or the assessment of a specialist in the field. These acts are carried out by a person in a position of power, placing the child or individual in a vulnerable situation (Poalacin-Iza & Bermúdez, 2023).

Considering the permeability of intrafamilial violence², in these cases perpetrated by parents, Martins et al. (2007) note that children involved in domestic violence situations often experience abuse characterized by the misuse of disciplinary power, objectifying the children within this dynamic.

Regarding emotional abuse perpetrated by fathers/stepfathers, this category revealed the following patterns:

² *Domestic violence* is physical or psychological abuse or neglect committed between members of the same family, usually marked by power relations and cohabitation.

Then I started eating, and my father would tell me that I was... today, looking at photos, I say: 'Wow, I wasn't fat!' and my father called me fat. Once, he scolded me because I was eating a grape. So then I started eating in secret, because I wasn't allowed to eat; if I did, they would criticize me for it. (Danielle)

The relationship with my father was always very disturbing; he didn't accept that I had panic disorder and would throw my medication away. (Geovanna)

He threatened to kill me, saying I should sleep with one eye open and the other closed, and I showed this to her, and she... she said nothing, did nothing. (Geovanna)

Regarding emotional abuse perpetrated by mothers:

So, I'm trying to pull myself together, trying to disentangle myself from this, to see myself outside these situations, because it destroys me to such a degree that I surrender, I don't want to do anything for myself anymore, to be myself anymore, you know? I've thought about taking my life! ... the day she told me I was a disappointment, that I was the daughter who didn't succeed... I thought: 'What am I even good for?' To my mother, I am a disappointment; my siblings, for sure, look at me and say, 'Poor Dani, right? She's the one who didn't make it!' (Danielle)

And even so, seeing everything he did to me, she would always say that I liked my father more. I never understood that! That when I tried to build affection with my father, she didn't approve, she didn't like it. She was jealous, or thought... She always thought I wanted to go to Argentina with him. (At that time, they were already living in Brazil.) Later, it wasn't even because he wanted it; she started thinking I wanted to go away with him to Argentina. I never understood that—if she saw that I suffered so much, why would I want to leave with someone like that? (Geovanna)

Brodski (2010), in her research on self-esteem and parental emotional abuse, emphasizes that this type of abuse operates as a repetitive pattern in the caregiver-child relationship, communicating that the child is unimportant, deficient, unworthy of love, unwanted, and at risk, being valued only when meeting the needs of the other. The author demonstrates that emotional abuse leaves deep marks on the individual, and this suffering can persist throughout adulthood, potentially evolving into psychopathological disorders, eating disorders, sexual dysfunctions, substance dependence, cognitive and memory problems, as well as post-traumatic stress symptomatology (Valdanha-Ornelas et al., 2021; Van der Kolk, 2020). The family is a disciplinary space, but when power is exercised inadequately, it constitutes a situation of emotional abuse.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This multiple case study is believed to have fulfilled its investigative purpose by shedding light, through singular family systems, on complex and recurring dynamics in mother-daughter relationships within contexts of domestic violence. The systemic perspective employed was enriched by the clinical listening of participants, highlighting how dysfunctional communication patterns, rooted in intergenerational family loyalties³, perpetuate bonds marked by fusion, triangulation, and emotional abuse, thereby compromising the process of self-differentiation across generations.

The analysis revealed that conflicts in the mother-daughter relationship, far from being isolated or circumstantial, result from recursive processes. The absence of differentiation in both mothers and daughters establishes circular dynamics in which parental control, affective neglect, and emotional dysregulation assume the contours of psychological and symbolic violence. These patterns, sometimes invisible to everyday observation, are brought to light through clinical instruments such as genograms and timelines, which expose the hidden layers of relational suffering.

Although the focus of this study was on subjective and relational factors, the narratives analyzed allow for an understanding of the intimate interplay between gender, culture, and generation in sustaining domestic violence. The mothers depicted remain in bonds permeated by aggression not only due to emotional reasons but also because of social constraints—such as the absence of support networks, fear of maternal exclusion outside the marital model, and hope for transformation in the partner's behavior.

Thus, the present study not only reaffirms the relevance of systemic approaches in understanding family conflicts but also highlights the urgency of research that deepens the processes involved in perpetuating these bonds. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of developing and evaluating interdisciplinary intervention strategies capable of broadening the perspective on suffering linked to domestic violence. It is hoped that the findings presented herein will contribute to the improvement of practices among psychologists, social workers, educators, medical professionals, and other health and social protection practitioners, as well as to the construction of public policies sensitive to the multigenerational complexities that permeate family relationships.

³ *Intergenerationality*: focuses on direct exchange between coexisting generations (parents and children, for example).

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CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: None.

Funding: None.

Conflicts of interest: None.

Ethical approval: The research was conducted following ethical approval (CAAE: 50435721.7.0000.5482), with Opinion No. 4,981,336.

Data and material availability: Yes, available upon request from the corresponding author.

Authors' contributions: Luciana: development of the work; Ida: supervision and contribution to the text.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação

Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation

