

## REFLEXÕES SOBRE O ENFRENTAMENTO DO CORONAVÍRUS DISEASE 2019: DIÁLOGOS VIRTUAIS COM GESTANTES

## REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFRONTATION OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019: VIRTUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH PREGNANT WOMEN

## REFLEXIONES SOBRE EL ENFRENTAMIENTO DEL CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019: DIÁLOGOS VIRTUALES CON MUJERES EMBARAZADAS

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### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Relatar a vivência de um Círculo de Cultura Virtual, com reflexões sobre o enfrentamento da *CoVid-19* e as repercussões para a saúde das gestantes. **Método:** Relato de experiência de um Círculo de Cultura Virtual utilizando o referencial teórico-metodológico de Paulo Freire. Participaram dez gestantes de diferentes localidades do Brasil. Os diálogos foram conduzidos com ludicidade, estabelecendo analogia com o desenvolvimento da gravidez: o embrião foi considerado Investigação Temática; o feto, Codificação e Descodificação; o nascimento, Desvelamento Crítico. **Resultados:** Os diálogos e reflexões emergentes possibilitaram que as gestantes aliviassem suas angústias e medos e ressignificassem suas atitudes, motivando-se mutuamente em prol da saúde, diante das adversidades geradas pela pandemia. **Conclusão:** O Círculo de Cultura virtual proporcionou interação às gestantes, mesmo estando fisicamente afastadas, configurando-se como possibilidade inovadora na assistência individual e coletiva, nos territórios de atuação das equipes que operam na atenção à saúde, para promover o cuidado no enfrentamento da doença.

**Descritores:** Gravidez; Quarentena; Promoção da Saúde; Saúde da Mulher.

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To report the experience of a Virtual Culture Circle, with reflections on the confrontation of *CoVid-19* and the effects for the health of pregnant women. **Method:** Experience report of a Virtual Culture Circle using Paulo Freire's theoretical-methodological framework. Ten pregnant women from different locations in Brazil participated in this study. The conversations were conducted with playfulness, establishing an analogy with the development of pregnancy: the embryo was considered Thematic Research; the fetus, Coding and Decoding; the birth, Critical Unveiling. **Results:** The conversations and emerging reflections made it possible for pregnant women to relieve their anxieties and fears and redefine their attitudes, thus motivating each other in favor of health, in the face of the adversities caused by the pandemic. **Conclusion:** The Virtual Culture Circle provided interaction for pregnant women. Despite their distance, this experience is configured as an innovative possibility in individual and collective care for teams that operate in health care, in order to promote the care in the confrontation of the disease.

**Descriptors:** Pregnancy; Quarantine; Health Promotion; Women's Health.

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Informar sobre la experiencia de un Círculo de Cultura Virtual, con reflexiones sobre cómo enfrentar la *CoVid-19* y los efectos para la salud de las mujeres embarazadas. **Método:** Informe de experiencia de un Círculo de Cultura Virtual utilizando el marco teórico-metodológico de Paulo Freire. Participaron diez mujeres embarazadas de diferentes lugares de Brasil. Los diálogos ocurrieron de una manera lúdica, estableciendo una analogía con el desarrollo del embarazo: el embrión se consideró una Investigación Temática; el feto, codificación y decodificación; el nacimiento, Revelación Crítica. **Resultados:** Los diálogos y las reflexiones emergentes permitieron a las mujeres embarazadas aliviar sus ansiedades y temores, además de redefinir sus actitudes, motivándolas conjuntamente a favor de la salud, frente a las adversidades generadas por la pandemia. **Conclusión:** El Círculo de Cultura Virtual proporcionó interacción para las mujeres embarazadas, a pesar de que estaban físicamente separadas, configurándose como una posibilidad innovadora en la asistencia individual y colectiva, en los territorios de los equipos que operan en la atención sanitaria, para promover en el enfrentamiento de la enfermedad.

**Descriptor:** Embarazo; Cuarentena; Promoción de la Salud; Salud de la Mujer.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a physiological phenomenon and should be understood and experienced by pregnant women and health teams as part of a healthy life experience, surrounded by great expectations and with changes in the woman's life, in the most different contexts. Nevertheless, it is a borderline situation, where the pre-existence of any clinical condition of maternal and/or fetal risk increases the probability of an unfavorable evolution, thus characterizing these women as high-risk pregnant women<sup>(1)</sup>.

For the World Health Organization (WHO), pregnant women deserve special care, in addition to differentiated prenatal care and careful fetal evaluation, since they have a greater possibility of hospitalization and maternal and fetal complications<sup>(2)</sup>. However, since the imposition of changes by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (CoVid-19) pandemic, this care has been restricted for the majority of pregnant women.

CoVid-19 emerged as a serious global public health problem, which spread quickly from China to other parts of the world<sup>(3)</sup>. Evidence indicates that transmission from person to person has been accumulating, without effective treatments or vaccines until now, and still with reasonable ignorance about the characteristics of the disease and its effects<sup>(4)</sup>.

With CoVid-19, it seems to increase the risk of complications, in the pregnancy-puerperal cycle, the management of these women should be rigorous<sup>(5)</sup>. Accordingly, the need for reorganization of services for all pregnant women has been imposed, resulting in the cancellation and/or procrastination of prenatal appointments, alternating between online appointments, essential and indispensable laboratory and/or imaging exams, besides the rearrangement in the care setting during delivery<sup>(5)</sup>.

The gestational period became critical, under pandemic conditions, which was reflected, for example, in the desired behaviors for the pregnancy period such as restriction and/or absence in the participation in support groups, conversation circles, pregnant women groups, baby teas, photo shoots, among others. Dealing with the unknown and with the physiological and expected changes resulting from pregnancy in a pandemic context, where everything is new, is to have a double concern, as it involves the health of the mother and the baby<sup>(6)</sup>.

Such psychological and emotional changes expose the gestational period to a new demand

and to new behavior models, in the search for balance in the face of the context of social restriction. Although pregnant women understand the need for these measures, they may not imply in mitigating the impact on women's health and feelings related to pregnancy and childbirth in times of pandemic.

Considering that pregnancy is a complex and rich period of meaning, which can only be interpreted within the context of the particular history of each pregnant woman, it is necessary to understand the experience of pregnant women, when facing CoVid-19, and seek to assist them in this period. In this setting, where the virtual possibilities of establishing social relationships have gained momentum, the possibility of expanding the use of technologies to approach pregnant women in a virtual way and stimulate reflection on CoVid-19 has been glimpsed, providing spaces for health promotion.

Thus, researchers with experience in the realization of Paulo Freire's Culture Circle decided to adapt the methodology to a virtual mode, in order to enable reflections and promote the health of pregnant women in the confrontation of CoVid-19. From this experience, this article emerged, with the purpose of reporting the experience of a Virtual Culture Circle (VCC), with reflections on the confrontation of the disease and its effects to the health of pregnant women.

## METHOD

### Study Type

It is an experience report, derived from an action mediated by Paulo Freire's theoretical methodological framework<sup>(7)</sup>. The experience was developed in the scope of a research project approved by the Research Ethics Committee with opinion number 4.068.387. In Freire's Itinerary, there is the participation of all those involved in the situations addressed during conversations and in the search for possible directions and decisions. The activity requires that mediators and participants are active people who seek to understand the reality experienced<sup>(7)</sup>. Paulo Freire's Itinerary is adapted and used to meet the intended objectives, through three interconnected moments: (1) Thematic Research, through research circles; (2) Coding and Decoding of the Generating Themes; and (3) Critical Unveiling of the reality found, through critical conversations mediated by researchers. These moments took place in environments designated

as Culture Circle, which, in this work, was performed virtually<sup>(8)</sup>.

The Culture Circle is characterized by being a group of people with the objective of discussing common themes in horizontal and participatory relationships. Each person brings his/her experiences and shares them, in order to lead the conversation, mediated by a facilitator who problematizes the themes that emerge, with the purpose of instigating collective knowledge<sup>(9)</sup>.

### Setting

During the quarantine imposed by CoVid-19, it became necessary to hold the Culture Circle in a virtual way. In this sense, a free cell phone application was used, and the interaction of the participants was made possible by the camera of the electronic device, even though they were geographically distant.

In order to accomplish the Culture Circle and maintain a closer relationship among the participants, it was decided to invite, first, two pregnant women from the authors' social conviviality, with a view to facilitating the interaction and deepening the discussions. These pregnant women invited other pregnant friends to join the VCC. The activity was then developed with ten pregnant women.

### Data Collection

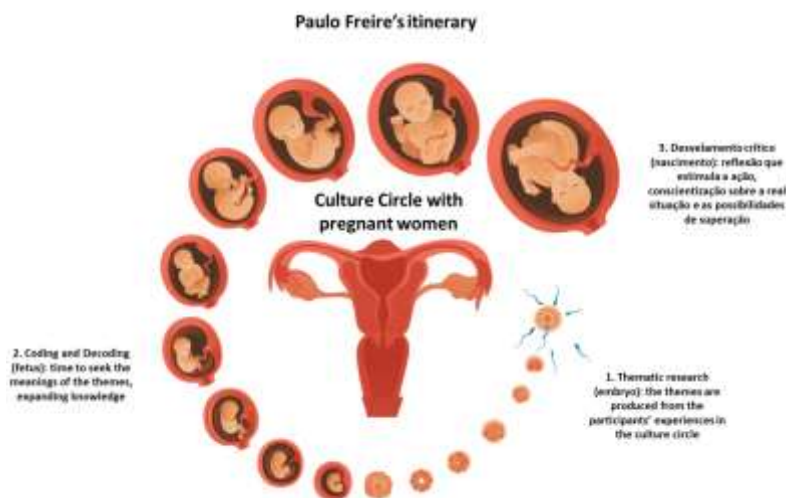
The VCC was held on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a period where the quarantine was in force in Brazil, lasting approximately two and a half hours. For the effective development of the VCC, pregnant

women were guided on the operation of the application, two days before it was held and a test was performed in order to check the connection, image and sound with all those involved in the process. Moreover, at this moment, each pregnant woman was asked to provide an atomic brush and two sheets of A4 paper to be used during the VCC experience. Day and time were scheduled so that all could participate.

On the scheduled day, the VCC was started under the mediation of a nurse, doctor, with experience in conducting Culture Circles. All the participants presented themselves, explaining their name and the weeks of pregnancy. Subsequently, the proposal was shared with the pregnant women, detailing the methodology of work.

In order to go through the stages of Freire's Itinerary in a concrete way for pregnant women, it was decided to make an analogy with the development of a pregnancy that, to be healthy, depends on success in all its phases until the childbirth. It is worth mentioning that the three phases of Freire's Itinerary are interconnected, as well as the development of a pregnancy. The proposal of crossing the Itinerary, through this analogy, also had the purpose of making the discussions about the confrontation of CoVid-19 more creative, playful, interactive, dialogic and convergent to the reality of pregnant women, which made it possible to accomplish all the phases of the Itinerary, in a single meeting, according to Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Freire's Itinerary: analogy with pregnancy development



Source: Adapted by authors from <https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/human-embryo-development-circle-flat-icon-vector-23329044><sup>(10)</sup>

The Thematic Research was compared to the embryo, a structure originating from the fertilization of an egg by a sperm, which is fixed in the uterine cavity of the woman. The mediator showed the image of an embryo in the uterus and pointed out that that would be the moment for pregnant women to pay attention to the topic about confrontation of CoVid-19, seeking their deep feelings in the face of its effects in Brazil and in the world. In order to encourage conversation, the mediator asked the following question: What are your feelings about CoVid-19? The pregnant women wrote down their feelings on an A4 sheet, and all had the opportunity to listen to each other and to be heard, through conversations and by promoting reflection on the world concretely lived in the daily actions of each participant, opening possibilities for its transformation.

In the Coding and Decoding phase, which refers to the situation experienced by the participants, the mediator showed the image of a fetus and addressed that, from that development, its characteristics would be clearer and its movements would be more intense in the mother's womb. The mediator invited the participants to admire and reflect on the Generating Themes, perceiving its characteristics, its origin and consequences for their lives. Thus, the participants were instigated to reveal a critical awareness about healthy pregnancy in the face of CoVid-19. At this moment, all pregnant women explored their fears and transformations, in addition to other feelings aroused by the need to experience quarantine in the gestational period and the other effects, with the arrival of the pandemic, such as economic, political and social issues.

It is from the existential situation, from the thinking of everyday life, that reality is faced. Accordingly, in the Critical Unveiling phase, the awareness of the Generating Themes investigated happened, through conversations and making more concrete a movement of transformation of the lived reality. To this end, the mediator presented the image of the womb, at the time of the birth of the baby, depicting the end of the journey in the mother's womb, where families receive the child and usually give it a name with a special meaning.

Thus, the mediator highlighted that they were almost at the end of the VCC and invited them to unveil the significant learnings about the experiences in facing the CoVid-19 and/or about the experience of participating in the Culture

Circle, encouraging the interaction of all to write such meanings on an A4 sheet. While the pregnant women were writing, the mediator sang the song "Tente outra vez" (Try again), a composition by Raul Seixas, accompanied by guitar, in order to stimulate feelings and provide an opportunity for creativity.

### Data analysis and processing

The unveiling of the investigated themes was held during the whole process and with all the pregnant women participating in the Culture Circle, as foreseen by Paulo Freire's method. The themes were redefined through the discussions and reflections that emerged during the meeting. This stage is a continuous process of action-reflection-action, which helps in the understanding of reality<sup>(7,9)</sup>, from the discussions that emerge in the VCC, where pregnant women empowered themselves to promote the confrontation of CoVid-19.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pregnant women were between 21 and 36 years old, mentioned to be middle class and lived in different places in Brazil: four were from Santa Catarina, two from Rio Grande do Sul, one from São Paulo, one from Rio de Janeiro, one from Paraná and one from Ceará. The participants were between the twentieth and thirty-third week of pregnancy and all were in quarantine.

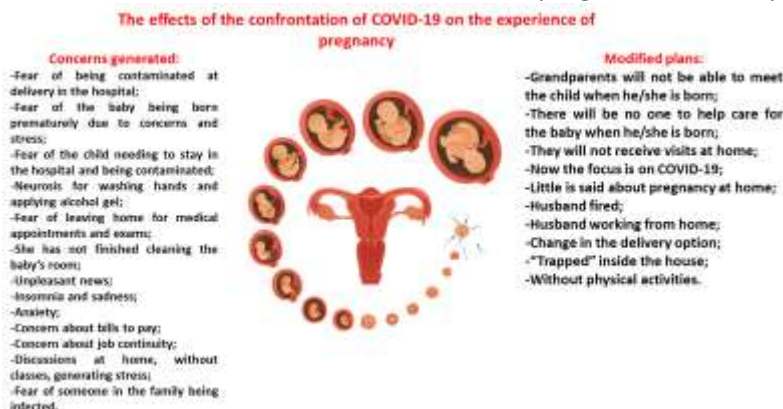
After discussing the experience of quarantine and developments in the confrontation of CoVid-19, during pregnancy, the participants of the activity defined two Generating Themes, in the phase of Thematic Research: 1) Concerns generated; 2) Modified plans.

The investigation of the themes was a moment of discovery of what affected the daily routine of the participants, during the quarantine, entering their vocabular universe and enabling the critical perception of the lived reality. In order to 'manage the reflections' and go through the stage of Coding and Decoding, which involves the apprehension of the themes researched and the critical awakening about reality, the pregnant women went in search of the meanings of these themes. Decoding is a critical analysis of a situation that has been codified, which causes a journey from the abstract to the concrete and from the parts to the whole<sup>(11)</sup>. It discussed the situations that they experienced with the pandemic, seeking to broaden their knowledge, from the perspective of admiring and exploring

such situations, their perceptions, talking about the CoVid-19 pandemic, as well as the concerns

generated and modified plans, as displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Effects of the confrontation of CoVid-19 on pregnant women’s perception



Source: Adapted by authors from <https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/human-embryo-development-circle-flat-icon-vector-23329044><sup>(10)</sup>

All the concerns presented by the pregnant women were discussed in the VCC, and it was up to the mediator to increasingly challenge the participants, contextualizing the codified existential situation and the doubts that emerged in the conversation. Pregnant women participated and contributed with experiences and knowledge about the Generating Themes and their implications, promoting each other’s health by means of encouragement and sharing of information.

The last stage of the Itinerary was the Critical Unveiling. In this stage, also recognized as the phase of problematization, the consciousness is developed through concepts. The subjects involved exteriorize their world perspective, and the Circle mediator tries to reduce its direct intervention in the conversation to a minimum. At

this moment, a process of action-reflection on the Generating Themes was developed, which culminated in the unveiling of their critical awareness<sup>(11)</sup>.

Here, the focus was on the search for transformation of the problem-situations experienced by pregnant women, with an understanding of reality, through reflections on their lives, thus unveiling the limits and potentialities. The pregnant women had the opportunity to reflect on the learning from the VCC experience and on the meaning of experiencing the confrontation of CoVid-19 in the gestational period. They presented the meanings, through a keyword or a phrase, evaluating their experience and learning in the Circle, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Learning of pregnant women in the experience of the Virtual Culture Circle



Source: Adapted by authors from <https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/human-embryo-development-circle-flat-icon-vector-23329044><sup>(10)</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the pregnant women showed intense emotion and appreciation during the musical moment and also invited family members to participate: some sang together, others cried, some hugged and asked for another song to be sung. The mediator answered the request and sang a Almir Sater's song "Tocando em Frente" (Going forward), arousing deep emotions in pregnant women and their relatives (husband and children).

At the end of the VCC, the pregnant women and some relatives (who were present at the musical moment) checked the possibility of holding another virtual meeting. The mediator then advised all the pregnant women and their families to describe their doubts and send them a WhatsApp message to be discussed in the next Circle. All those involved in the process rescheduled another date for interaction, learning, information sharing and mutual health promotion.

The reflections in the VCC were guided by conversations, necessary to make it a dynamic learning space for the discussion of the Generating Themes and the unveiling of the critical-reflexive thinking of pregnant women, which was widely shared.

Considering that CoVid-19 is a new situation in the world setting, with research still being conducted and few studies published on the subject, many guidelines for its confrontation are based on diseases caused by other viruses (SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV; H1N1) due to the similarity and severity of the commitments that they determine in pregnant women, which classifies them as a risk group<sup>(12-13)</sup>.

Commonly, the hormonal and emotional changes of pregnancy trigger situations of stress, fear and anxiety. In the current pandemic situation, with the pregnant woman considered to be a risk group, specific concerns have arisen such as: the fear of leaving home for prenatal appointments, the possible contamination of someone at home, the possibility of contaminating herself in the hospital, of having a premature birth or of the newborn needing hospitalization. All this adds to the anxiety and stress caused by the unknown, with the children at home, with the most frequent marital discussions, the bombardment of unpleasant news about CoVid-19, the financial concerns and stability at work, also generating neuroses with the process of hand hygiene.

It is important to emphasize that, during pregnancy, some risk factors may trigger depression, such as: previous history of depression, unplanned pregnancy, absence of partner or social support, high perceived stress condition, presence of adversities, history of abuse or domestic violence, past or present history of obstetric complications, fetal loss, financial problems, unemployment and dependence on psychoactive substances<sup>(14)</sup>.

Pregnant women participating in this experience reported concerns similar to those pointed out as risk factors for depression. Accordingly, it is imperative the preparation of the nursing and other professionals of the health area, with a view to preventing depression during the pregnancy period, as well as planning actions that extend the effectiveness of the care offered.

The CoVid-19 pandemic, as well as other public health emergencies, can trigger extremely high stress, anxiety and depression in women during pregnancy and generate negative consequences. After the CoVid-19 outbreak, there was an increase in the prevalence of depression and, in general, pregnant women not yet diagnosed with depression became more susceptible<sup>(15)</sup>. Moreover, in this period of pandemic, pregnant women manifest several concerns such as not going to their prenatal care due to perceived risk of exposure, stress, anxiety and constant and, sometimes, even excessive use of sodium hypochlorite and alcohol<sup>(16)</sup>.

In literature, there are reports of pregnancy loss between the second and third trimester of pregnancy in women affected by CoVid-19, with severe clinical condition and hospitalization in intensive care unit. Nevertheless, there is more concern about premature delivery, which reaches more women affected by CoVid-19<sup>(17-19)</sup>, as well as about fetal distress<sup>(20)</sup>. This fact is in line with the concern of contracting the disease and premature delivery manifested by the participants of the VCC.

Associated with the fear of being contaminated in the hospital, pregnant women participating in this study expressed concern about the possibility of the child being hospitalized at birth, either because of prematurity or possible contamination with CoVid-19. Nevertheless, neonatal outcomes show clinical manifestations related to prematurity, since most newborns tested for CoVid-19 had negative results. Those born at more than 36 weeks performed well at hospital discharge, while some preterm infants over 31 weeks needed admission to a neonatal

intensive care unit and morbidity is related to greater prematurity. Thus, in the studies described until now, it is not possible to infer that there is vertical transmission of CoVid-19<sup>(17,19)</sup>.

In the face of so many worries and ignorance about the effects of CoVid-19 on pregnancy and the social distance imposed on women, the use of available resources, such as music in this experience, can contribute to promoting health, because, in addition to being a universal language, music enables moments of fun, stress reduction, facilitates the bond, encourages reflection on the messages sent, arouses emotions, memories, good humor, among other benefits<sup>(21)</sup>.

It is also important to argue about the availability of spaces for online care, which becomes a support tool for women during this period, offering shelter and space for exchanges with other pregnant women who experience the same situations, since they are deprived of group activities, usually made available by the health care network. Such practices enable the empowerment of pregnant women, helping them to identify their own needs, control stress, fatigue and face more effectively their concerns and plan changes in times of stress<sup>(22)</sup>. This tool is important to reduce stress levels, which can promote general health and quality of life<sup>(23)</sup>.

In this situation of social isolation, it is necessary to establish communication channels for pregnant women and provide real-time online support to offer emotional support and effective guidance. It is important to consider the implementation of virtual assistants able to answer frequent questions and provide the participation of women who experience the same situation. Universities play a key role and should involve teachers and students, in an articulated and coordinated way, in order to provide this support through the web<sup>(24)</sup>.

Accordingly, the VCC, based on Paulo Freire's Methodological Itinerary, constitutes an educational and participatory process, covering the social context, with the establishment of links between pregnant women and nurses, with a constructive exchange capable of modifying the environment through actions and guidance, establishing a problematizing process based on the reality of each participant. In Freire's methodology, the individual becomes active and participant through conversations and group discussions, becoming critical and reflective in face of real situations that challenge him/her,

making it possible to intervene in this context where all participants take part by reading and writing the world with their own ideas<sup>(25)</sup>.

Given the concerns generated and the plans modified by the CoVid-19 pandemic, the learning of pregnant women in the experience of the VCC was found. The liberating education proposal proposed by Freire can be understood as a way of understanding the world, reflecting on it, transforming reality from a conscious action. His thinking has significantly contributed to the construction of knowledge, based on a critical and reflective attitude in Nursing, incorporating problematizing education, having as a starting point the dialogue with the students<sup>(25)</sup>.

Faced with the successful experience of the VCC, which provided an opportunity for integration and social contact at a distance with women who experience the same situation and develop similar feelings, it is clear that the virtual space can be configured as an educational technology for Nursing, in order to improve the promotion of health in the community. In addition, it allows for reception, exchange of experiences and information, horizontal discussion, construction of knowledge and freedom of expression, even if the participants are distant, geographically.

The limitation of this experience was the fact that it was held only with pregnant women, with the participation of the partner and other family members only at the end, during the process of reflection. In addition, the development of the Culture Circle in a virtual space was an innovative proposal, deserving new perspectives and improvement of the strategy, especially in view of the need for social restriction as a preventive measure against CoVid-19. These essays demonstrate the relevance of investigating the perceptions of other audiences regarding what was faced in this crisis, in Brazil and in the world.

## CONCLUSION

The experience of a VCC, with reflections on how to confront the Coronavirus Disease 2019, has redefined the perception of pregnant women on the effects of the disease on their health and that of their babies.

It should be underlined that the limitation of access to communication technologies, such as the computer and the Internet network itself, is a complicating factor to replicate this experience with some groups of pregnant women.

Education in the XXI century has been going through constant changes and innovations, which promote the establishment of relationships of theory and practice, through different methods and technologies. The VCC has contributed not only as an education device that can be used by health professionals, in different opportunities, but also in the transformation of care practices, valuing the experience of the participants and promoting their empowerment.

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