

FROM SOCIAL VULNERABILITY TO SOCIAL RISCK IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

This article aims to revise and simplify two important concepts for understanding social issues involving characters from a universe in which there are deprivations, dangers, and prejudices. The definitions of “social vulnerability” and “social risk” still present contradictions, being generally confused and even mixing their meanings. Assuming that the meaning of the terms vulnerability and risk can give rise to similar interpretations, in practice the state that characterizes a social group or individual in a state of vulnerability presents itself with distinct characteristics in the case of risk. In this sense, it is very important to understand that social vulnerability is a situation in which the person or community have a lack of basic services that are not being supplied by themselves or by the State. Since the worsening of this situation, characterized as a negative social progression of the previous condition, it becomes, consequently, a social risk.

Keywords: social issues; social vulnerability; social risk; basic services.

Introdução

Getting along with contingencies that appear in the cycle of existence qualifies the human condition of fragility against adversity, in particular cases reinforce the need for targeted actions to mitigate material difficulties related to the maintenance of life (Alves & Semzezem, 2013). In an unassisted and partly marginalized social system, issues related to poverty and inequality will always be part of discussions about the consequences of economic policies adopted by some countries (Best, 2013). This author when she quotes the work of David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah entitled *Savage Economics* (Blaney & Inayatullah, 2010), highlights a term used by the authors when realizing a dark side to capitalism and its consequences, in what they attributed as being "the wound of wealth". Best (2013), adds that at the beginning of the 21st century, any approach involving risk and vulnerability began to be associated with social protection strategies proposed and perpetrated by public agents, which aimed to generate opportunities for a portion of the population through training processes. These actions were basically aimed at improving the conditions of access to work for the less privileged, addressing the issue of security that occurs when basic needs are met, rather than promoting social mobility.

Around the judgment of what vulnerability is, there are a diversity of propositions, some of which even diverge in ideological, philosophical, and political terms (Ayres et al., 2003). Although risks are out of control, they can be understood using appropriate tools through a logic of probabilities converted into essential instruments for understanding poverty, perceiving that there is a flaw in public social assistance policies, which should seek to broaden the efforts to minimize existing problems in the context of groups that need social protection. All efforts must be directed towards establishing a more stable and fair society (Best, 2013). In which there is a particular effort aimed at the poorest population, without discarding the possibility that in an unassisted context there is a risk of a migration of the upper classes to a condition of insecurity, when basic services are not guaranteed (Alves & Semzezem, 2013).

This article adopts the theoretical framework of modern epistemology in order to better understand two concepts that are frequently used in the social sciences, pursuing associations that facilitate the understanding of each analyzed context and facilitate their subsequent application.

Vulnerability and social risk

According to Cannon, Twigg, and Rowell (2003), vulnerability cannot simply be defined as being synonymous with poverty, as the problem goes beyond simply identifying a portion of the disadvantaged population that is marginalized. However, the circumstance of poverty can be associated with the situation in which a person or groups find themselves at a given time by the result of an invariable condition or downward movement in the social stratum. Consequently, vulnerability is seen as a predictive quality for the status of poverty when it can be foreseen in advance that this will occur because of a series of events that will impact the life of an individual or people, causing some kind of economic damage. In this case, very common due to the problem generated by the lack of work. According to the director general of the International Labor Organization, Guy Ryder, “the absence of income is equal to the absence of food, security and a future” (OIT, 2020, para. 11).

In addition to the conflict of meanings when there is the intention to establish and classify a stage or condition of life, Pidgeon (1998) warned for the possibility of a prejudiced approach that could occur when the perception of risk was associated with specific groups within the society, establishing negative stereotypes that could generate social discomfort due to the adoption of public policies that marginalize rather than promote inclusion, equality, and social justice. In this case, especially when the risk situation is associated with the homeless contingent generally being associated with a portion that depends on illicit chemical substances and commits certain crimes (Silva et al., 2020). However, it must be present in any discussion that the perception of risk varies in different segments of society, which is not homogeneous, with fundamental differences in each context observed through the existing cultural and economic plurality. Thus, some formal analyzes are still not accurate and sensitive enough to contextualize the problem not providing an adequate definition for each episode characterized as risk, claiming that it is only a social construction, disregarding cultural aspects, psychological, race, gender, and age, occasionally associated with vulnerable subjects in the face of a system of policies that stigmatize and marginalize them (Silva et al., 2020).

There are still many relationships between some terms with the concept of vulnerability and risk. However, these relationships are often unclear, and the same

term can have a different meaning when applied in different contexts by different authors. Social scientists concerned with analyzing a set of socioeconomic factors may prefer to use the term vulnerability, while other researchers who analyze and discuss environmental disasters prefer to use the term risk (Brooks, 2003). Associating social vulnerability only with poverty has been losing meaning as issues related to well-being and quality of life are perceived. These two aspects lead to a greater understanding of unmet anxieties and demands, impacting individuals or groups that lack, in addition to income, a better availability of certain basic services for a more dignified life; passing through the availability of essential public services until reaching a more just and egalitarian society, including the promotion of individual freedoms and the quality of the environment (Costa et al., 2018).

Rather going deeper in the subject related to vulnerability before become risk, the role of those directly involved is fundamental. According to Donald and Mottershaw (2009), the participation and union of the community to deal with projects that aim to promote the common good of a certain group, strengthen actions when the experience of people living in poverty is used to develop policies and legal strategies related to fighting poverty and reducing inequalities.

According to W.H.O. (2009), the greater the social inequalities, all issues related to both the health of the environment and of people, both will be negatively affected. Unfortunately, there is a tendency for the current processes of segregation to continue to widen social disparities, noting that low-income groups clearly show a relationship between social inequality associated with environmental risks. However, in some cases, the population most exposed to environmental hazards is less culpable in producing the hazard to which they themselves are exposed. In conclusion, in these cases, the intervention must come from groups that cause the damage to the environment for the benefit of the underprivileged, who would not be able to carry out the necessary interventions to reverse the damage already caused.

According to Martin Wolf (2005), in his book that explains how the globalization process took place, it is highlighted that even though the term was only old in the 1990s, did the expression come into force in our daily lives. Since, apart from the immediate association of the word with something that refers to a global effect, the author emphasizes that the main characteristic is that there are two distinct groups against and

in favor of the phenomenon. Those who oppose the process maintain that there is an undesirable effect permeated by issues of a corporatist nature, and neoliberal forces would be acting in a way that impoverishes the masses, destroying democracy and imposing a form of "Americanization", which is not concerned with the welfare of most of the population. Mainly, it contributes to the ruin of the environment; all in the name of the greed of certain groups that only have their eyes turned to personal interests.

Even in this case, there are those who prefer to consider globalization as a force that overturns established borders, bringing all inhabitants of the globe closer together and contributing to despotic governments cease to exist, freeing individuals so that everyone can tread the best path that will lead them to financial prosperity (Wolf, 2005).

According to Santos (2002), the population most affected by globalization continues to have less life opportunities. This inequality is presented in eight dimensions of paramount importance to the well-being of any individual: health; housing; work; education; sociability relationships; safety; information and knowledge; and political participation.

Associating the condition of vulnerability and social risk with the situation of individuals and groups at a global as well as a local level becomes an extremely complex task since the concept is multifaceted, in which vulnerability presents aspects related to "insertion and stability in the market of work, the weakness of their social relationships, and finally the degree of regularity and quality of access to public services or other forms of social protection" (Santos et al., 2014: 122). Therefore, "unprevented situations of social vulnerability tend to become a risky situation" (Santos et al., 2014: 123).

Despite knowing that there is still no consensus regarding the concepts used on vulnerability and social risk in Social Sciences, in the case of social vulnerability, Monteiro (2012) warns against associating this concept with the single idea of social exclusion, even assuming that there is an extensive number of situations and meanings that can be attributed to certain groups with the same perceived characteristics. Along these lines, the author emphasizes the issue of social mobility, which means that "the reduction in the levels of social vulnerability can occur through the strengthening of subjects so that they can access goods and services" (Monteiro, 2012: 35). By providing

certain groups with concrete ways to access benefits that they did not previously have, issues related to marginalization and exclusion would be reduced.

Martins (2012) asserts that the concept of risk, from neoliberal understanding, cannot serve as a basis for social protection actions, as it blames the person for their situation through the observation that “every individual is a free entrepreneur and has the responsibility to live off his work” (Martins, 2012: 93). Public assistance is left with the responsibility of palliative actions aimed at those who do not have the capacity to maintain themselves autonomously.

On the other hand, Castel (2005) perceives that “we could characterize a social risk as an event that compromises the ability of individuals to ensure their social independence by themselves” (Castel, 2005: 27). Once this level is reached, in which individual and collective rights have been violated, preventive care is no longer effective, requiring special care for people who have already exceeded the level of social vulnerability.

Vulnerability may be related to demographic dynamics once associated with issues of the physical-social context, with the environment influencing and being influenced by the population; or it may be related to the social-economic relationship based on inequalities that exist mainly in regions of great technological development (Marandola Jr & Hogan, 2009).

There are still controversies regarding the application of concepts, especially when we refer to individuals or groups. Janczura (2012) paid attention to the issue of risk related to the condition of a weakened technological society, whereas vulnerability identifies the individual's condition in this society. Yunes and Szymanski (2001) made a distinction between risk and vulnerability, in which the first is associated with groups and populations, and the second with individuals according to their susceptibility or negative predispositions. Which would lead us to the idea that we must work the individual so that he can meet basic needs, whereas, when this individual is far from the reach of basic care, he would reinforce the chorus of the group of those in a situation more delicate, since vulnerability increases the likelihood of a negative outcome in the presence of a risk. However, vulnerability only operates when the risk is present. For, without risk, vulnerability has no effect (Cowan et al., 1996).

Otherwise, according to Santos, Roesch and Cruz (2014), since the expressions social vulnerability and social risk began to be used, both were related to the poorest families. Only after 2008, although the concepts were still permeated with doubts about their correct use, the expression *social vulnerability* started to be used to refer to families that lack basic social protection. If the situation of social vulnerability worsened, these same families would be considered at social risk and would need special social protection (Santos et al., 2014).

In the case of Brazil, the concept of assistance before the Federal Constitution of 1988, presented its actions linked to the issue of extreme poverty. Individuals who were not included in the labor market were labeled as misfits and who primarily lacked feelings of pity that would culminate in some demonstration of charity. Since, after the Federal Constitution of 1988, there was a change in the concept of social assistance in Brazil, making Health and Social Security – which constitute the basis of Social Security – elements that began to inspire the notion of social welfare. With that, there was a transformation of what was previously understood as charity, starting to realize the right to citizenship associated with Social Assistance, dressing up as a public policy of Social Protection aimed at guaranteeing rights and conditions for a dignified life (Santos et al., 2014).

From 1993 onwards, the Social Security tripod was formed with the approval of the Organic Law of Social Assistance (LOAS), together with the recognition since 1988 of Social Assistance as a citizen's right and a duty of the State. Since, "from LOAS, social assistance is configured as a public, non-contributory policy, ensuring access for those who need it" (Santos et al., 2014: 2).

After the IV National Conference on Social Assistance, which took place in 2003, the National Policy on Social Assistance (PNAS) was created in 2004; establishing the principles and guidelines that handled the implementation of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS) in 2005. This, with the aim of guaranteeing Basic Social Protection (PSB), as well as Special Social Protection (PSE) of medium and high complexity, causing the PSB to act to prevent individuals from situations of social vulnerability and risk. Then, succeeding PSEmc, already working directly with people who are already at social risk and vulnerability. Consequently, ultimately, PSEac, starting to deal with people who have gone beyond the level of social risk. The latter

being specified by its character of *institutional reception*; since it dealt, in certain cases, with the breaking of family and community ties (Santos et al., 2014).

In Brazil, the work developed by the Social Assistance Reference Center (CRAS) is outstanding in terms of social assistance, which aims to prevent situations of vulnerability and social risk by developing potential and strengthening family and community bonds. The programs are aimed at the population in a situation of social vulnerability because of the situation of deprivation resulting from poverty; as well as the weakening of affective bonds in the domestic and collective environment (BRASIL, 2005a).

The Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS) coordinates special social protection actions of medium complexity, being responsible for the continued offer of specialized guidance and support in social assistance to individuals and families whose rights have been violated; however, without breaking bonds (BRASIL, 2005b).

Apart from how one can graduate and classify about social needs and dependencies, public social assistance policies that intend to mitigate the impacts caused by social inequalities – not only by the advent of globalization, but also by economic policies aimed at favoring a small portion of society – must be based on promoting well-being and propagating more sustainable concepts that will impact not only the present generation but also the demands of future generations. All, seeking the production of citizenship, assuming fairer ways of living through the distribution of power and knowledge (Carmo & Guizardi, 2018).

According to Martins (2012), "policies are not designed to face poverty and inequality, but to manage them and minimize conditions of social rebellion. These are actions that seek to isolate conflicts and enable control of poor segments of society through minimum compensatory policies" (Martins, 2012: 90). This fact, obviously, does not present satisfactory solutions, as it simply deals with an extremely complex problem with superficial and not very blunt actions. Also, according to that author, he alerts to the issue of those "policies that blame the individual for their situation, based on the neoliberal understanding that every individual is a free entrepreneur and has the responsibility to make a living from their work, with public assistance being just a palliative intended for those who are unable to maintain themselves autonomously"

(Martins, 2012: 93). In this way, the purposeful inefficiency of some actions that should mitigate the suffering of disadvantaged individuals and groups is justified.

Martins (2012), after analyzing some concepts, highlights the difference between basic public policies of effective concern for social welfare; since some actions are based on the understanding that within groups in conditions of poverty, there are those who deserve to be assisted more than others. Therefore, labeling some as individuals who will not adjust regardless of what action is taken. With that, in the view of some public managers and thinking about not stimulating the dependence of the public power, the expenses of the state protection are reduced and consequently the expenses with the prison system are increased. What segregates much more than shelters, because instead of caring, it only punishes itself, "contributing to a policy of exile and social distancing of the poor, to the detriment of meeting their needs" (Martins, 2012: 94).

If there are no effective policies for the social integration of this contingent into socioeconomic development projects, social inequalities can be represented by circular processes in which today's marginalized will need to be helped tomorrow. One way to work positively on harmful effects is to consider uncertainties (vulnerability and risks) as manageable, which can be minimized while concurrent efforts are made to repair their effects. Mainly, one must act mainly with children to prevent a future of suffering (Hillesheim & Cruz, 2008). Assuming that someone reaching the condition of Social Risk is a person who had their ties broken with family members and with the group to which they belong, in the case of children, the issue of social risk is enhanced since they are more exposed to abuses by society since they no longer have the people who could protect them (Hodges et al., 1997). In this way, it is necessary that there is a concern from the conception of the individual within a family nucleus, until the moment that certain bonds present themselves with potential risks of rupture. Trying to prevent the individual from walking into a situation of abandonment by the family, society and government.

Conclusions

In the field of social sciences, there are still differences between the concepts of social vulnerability and social risk, with some uses of one or the other being incorrect or disconnected from many academic sources. Much remains associated with a world in

which the dominant economic system marginalizes rather than integrates, establishing criteria that are almost always associated with poverty due to social inequalities.

The concepts can also be associated with individuals' or groups' ability to meet their demands, relegating to public power the responsibility of providing what a certain segment of the population could not. Attempting to manage the upward or downward movement associated with social mobility so that those who are in situation of vulnerability and face lack basic social assistance do not descend into a critical situation requiring special attention. At the same time, through targeted actions, individuals who are in a state of social risk, with all ties broken, and who are unable to change this state of total dependence due to incapacity, can be integrated into society or into their own family unit, through targeted efforts promoted by competent institutions.

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