

A View of Motherhood Among Women with Visual Impairment: An Integrative Review

Olhar Sobre a Maternidade de Mulheres com Deficiência Visual: Uma Revisão Integrativa

Una Mirada a la Maternidad para Mujeres con Discapacidad Visual: Una Revisión Integradora

RESUMO

Objetivo: descrever os desafios enfrentados por mulheres com deficiência visual durante a maternidade e o papel das tecnologias assistivas no apoio ao cuidado maternal. **Método:** A revisão integrativa foi realizada entre 2024 e 2025, utilizando bases como PUBMED, SciELO, LILACS, BVS e dados do Ministério da Saúde. **Resultados:** Dos 1.152 artigos encontrados, 18 foram selecionados para análise. Os resultados revelam barreiras persistentes, falta de informação e deficiências nos serviços de saúde. **Conclusão:** O estudo destaca a importância de ampliar o acesso a tecnologias assistivas e capacitar profissionais para promover cuidado inclusivo. Também aponta a necessidade de ações de saúde pública que garantam acessibilidade e apoio adequados em sexualidade, reprodução e maternidade, assegurando direitos e qualidade de vida para essas mulheres.

DESCRIPTORES: Cuidado Pré-Natal; Gestação; Cuidado Pós-Natal; Tecnologia Assistiva; Inclusão Social.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the challenges faced by women with visual impairment during motherhood and the role of assistive technologies in supporting maternal care. **Method:** This integrative review was conducted between 2024 and 2025, using databases such as PUBMED, SciELO, LILACS, BVS, and data from the Ministry of Health. **Results:** Of the 1,152 articles found, 18 were selected for analysis. The results reveal persistent barriers, lack of information, and deficiencies in health services. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the importance of expanding access to assistive technologies and training professionals to promote inclusive care. It also highlights the need for public health actions that guarantee accessibility and adequate support in sexuality, reproduction, and motherhood, ensuring rights and quality of life for these women.

DESCRIPTORS: Prenatal Care; Pregnancy; Postnatal Care; Assistive Technology; Social Inclusion.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Describir los desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres con discapacidad visual durante la maternidad y el papel de las tecnologías de asistencia en el apoyo a la atención materna. **Método:** Esta revisión integrativa se realizó entre 2024 y 2025, utilizando bases de datos como PUBMED, SciELO, LILACS, BVS y datos del Ministerio de Salud. **Resultados:** De los 1.152 artículos encontrados, 18 fueron seleccionados para su análisis. Los resultados revelan barreras persistentes, falta de información y deficiencias en los servicios de salud. **Conclusión:** El estudio destaca la importancia de ampliar el acceso a las tecnologías de asistencia y capacitar a los profesionales para promover la atención inclusiva. También destaca la necesidad de acciones de salud pública que garanticen la accesibilidad y el apoyo adecuado en sexualidad, reproducción y maternidad, asegurando los derechos y la calidad de vida de estas mujeres.

DESCRIPTORES: Atención Prenatal; Embarazo; Atención Postnatal; Tecnología de Asistencia; Inclusión Social.

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INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy causes various changes in a woman's body and family dynamics, generating conflicting feelings and requiring preparation for the baby's arrival⁽¹⁾. Women with visual impairments face additional challenges, such as limited access to reproductive health information and the need to adapt their homes to care for their newborns and themselves during this period⁽²⁾.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines visual impairment as an eye condition that compromises one or more functions of the visual system, which may result in total or partial loss of vision. This condition can be congenital or acquired throughout life. According to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death, 11th revision, visual impairment (ICD 9D90) is classified into five categories based on visual acuity: mild, moderate, severe, blindness, and near visual impairment. However, in clinical practice, other criteria must also be considered, such as visual field, contrast sensitivity, and color perception. Also according to the WHO, blindness refers to individuals with little or no residual vision who depend on compensatory

skills, such as the use of canes, reading Braille, or the assistance of guide dogs. The other categories can be classified as low vision, although diagnostic criteria may vary from mild to severe⁽³⁾.

Visually impaired mothers experience ableism from family members, acquaintances, and health professionals, who question their ability to care for their children, claiming concern for the child's well-being. This stigmatization can compromise the bond between mother and baby⁽⁴⁾. Ableism, a form of discrimination against people with disabilities (PwD), restricts their autonomy and independence and encompasses architectural, communicational, instrumental, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers, attitudes present in a historically exclusionary society⁽⁵⁾.

Brazilian Inclusion Law No. 13,146 of 2015 guarantees assistive technologies—products, equipment, devices, resources, methodologies, strategies, practices, and services—to promote independence and quality of life for people with disabilities. For mothers with visual impairments, examples include screen reading software on smartphones and Braille booklets on pregnancy and motherhood⁽⁵⁾. Thus, the objective of this study was to seek evidence to describe the challenges and

difficulties faced by women with visual impairments during motherhood and the use of assistive technologies in these contexts.

METHOD

This integrative review was guided by the following question: "What are the challenges and difficulties faced by women with visual impairments in the context of motherhood?" To answer this question, we searched for articles that addressed motherhood among women with visual impairments, from pregnancy to postpartum, including the use of assistive technologies in these situations. Articles published in the last five years, in Portuguese and English, were included based on titles and abstracts relevant to the topic. Articles outside the established period and/or that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

The search was conducted using Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) in Portuguese and English. The following terms were used in Portuguese: pregnancy, blind women, women with low vision, prenatal care, reproductive health, blind pregnant women, maternity, visual impairment, postpartum, breastfeeding, mother-child relationships, blind parents, nutrition, blind

Integrative Review

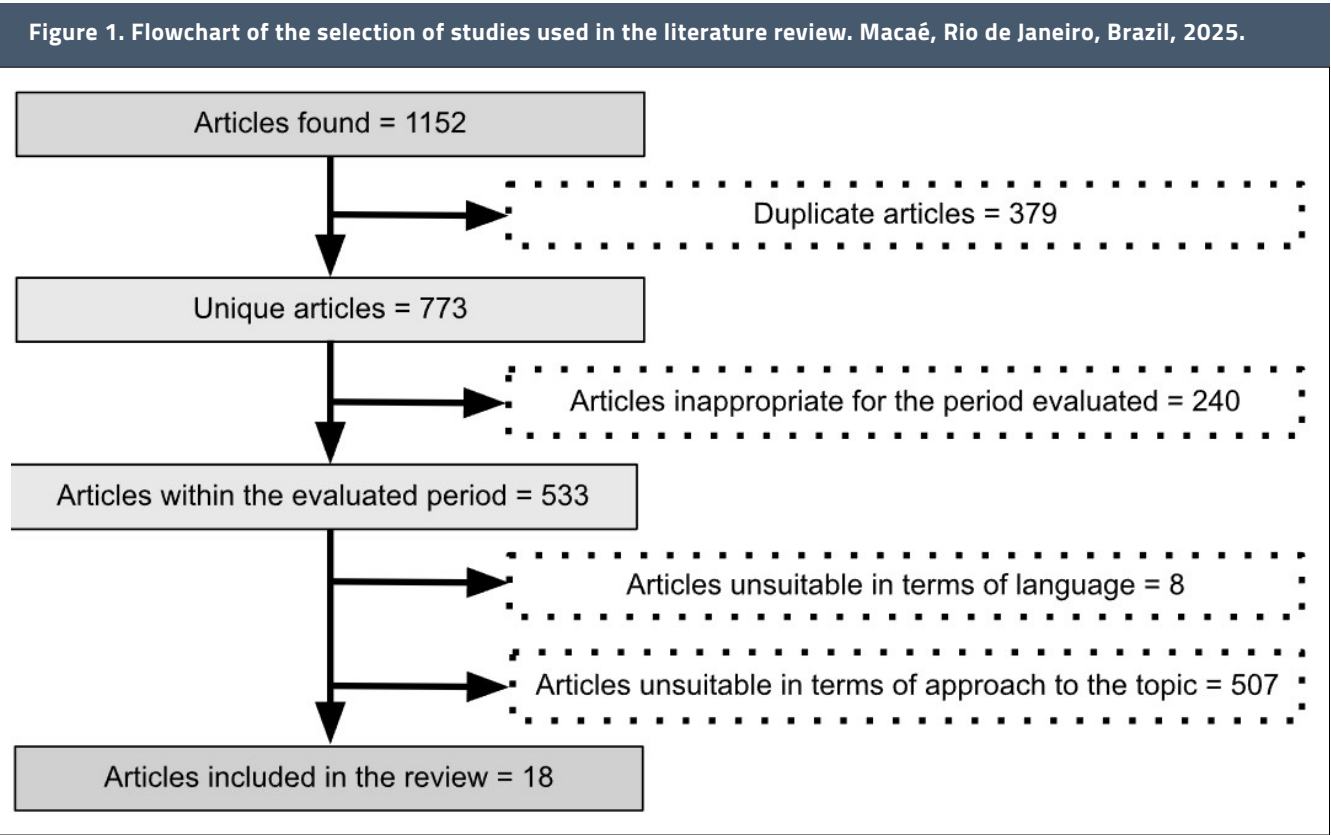
Viana LS, Silva TCR, Cristal BC, Alves C, Pratti T, Coelho KSC, Pontes U
A View of Motherhood Among Women with Visual Impairment: An Integrative Review

people, food, technology, blind and low vision, gestational period, pregnancy, childbirth, people with disabilities (PwD), assistive technology, post-caesarean complications, congenital visual impairment, acquired visual impairment, and diseases related to acquired visual impairment. The descriptors in English were: sexual health, self-help devices, pregnancy, blind and visually impaired women, perinatal, sexual and reproductive education for blind women, motherhood, impairment.

The search was conducted in the PUBMED, Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO), Latin American Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), and Virtual Health Library (VHL) databases between April and June 2024 and February and March 2025. Publications from the Ministry of Health websites were also considered. After screening by titles, abstracts, and full reading, eligible studies were organized using Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS

A total of 1,152 articles were identified from the cross-referencing of descriptors in the databases. In accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 18 articles were selected for the literature review (Figure 1), whose information is summarized in Table 1. To systematize the data, the results were organized into the following topics: pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum.



Source: Prepared by the authors, 2025.

Table 1. Characterization of the studies used in the literature review. Macaé, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2025.			
YEAR	AUTHOR	TITLE	MAIN CONSIDERATIONS
2020	Bezerra et al.	Access to health services by blind mothers: from challenges to lessons learned	Qualitative research conducted in Fortaleza, Ceará, which sought to analyze the primary health care offered to mothers with visual impairments. Reports were collected from twenty women, revealing difficulties in accessing health care facilities and services, as well as a lack of skills among health professionals to provide personalized care to children of blind women.

2020	Nicot et al.	Prenatal tactile three-dimensional ultrasonography for visually impaired women	A study that sought to make motherhood more inclusive for visually impaired women through the use of 3D prints of fetal ultrasounds. Since it is known that blind people have a more acute tactile perception, it was clear that the use of this accessible technology made the medical consultation an emotional moment, allowing the creation of strong emotional bonds.
2020	Santos e Ribeiro	Transition of blind women to motherhood from the perspective of Transition Theory	Qualitative research, which included the participation of blind women in open interviews using the Life Narrative method, analyzed in light of Transition Theory. From this perspective, the main experiences and feelings experienced in the new phase of life when becoming mothers were analyzed in the transition to motherhood.
2020	Tavares et al.	Visually impaired mothers and breastfeeding: literature review	An integrative review that identified scientific production on breastfeeding practices by mothers with visual impairment and discussed the difficulties faced by these mothers and by professionals in guiding them, as well as the use of and access to assistive technologies.
2021	Barros e Tamariz	Seeing AI app as a mobile learning resource in teaching English to people with visual impairment	Study aimed at researching the study and learning of people with disabilities in text reading and image description activities through an audio description app such as the Seeing AI assistive technology.
2021	Diamanti et al.	Perinatal care in women with vision disorders: a systematic review	Systematic review developed with online searches in the Medline and Scopus databases. Information on perinatal care received by blind women was analyzed, detecting their dissatisfaction and highlighting that the training of professionals should be modified to ensure adequate care.
2021	Mascarello et al.	Analysis of early and late maternal complications associated with the mode of delivery using a propensity score	Main considerations: A prospective cohort study conducted in Pelotas, RS, with the aim of evaluating the main postoperative complications and risks associated with surgical delivery compared to vaginal delivery. The study indicated a significant increase in the number of elective cesarean sections and, as a limitation of the research, pointed out that the information was collected in 2004, thus it may differ from the current profile of women.
2021	Nicot et al.	Using low-cost 3D-printed models of prenatal ultrasonography for visually impaired expectant persons	This study sought to make both motherhood and fatherhood more inclusive for people with visual impairments through the use of 3D prints of fetal ultrasounds. It was observed that the use of this accessible technology made the prenatal period a time of great social and emotional value. In addition, the study also discusses low-cost, good-quality materials that could be used to make fetal molds.
2022	Commodari e La Rosa	Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Partner Support in Visually Impaired Women	A qualitative study aimed at exploring the experiences of visually impaired women with regard to motherhood. The study points out that these women demonstrate a desire to be recognized and accepted as women and mothers in their social environment, highlighting that family and social support contributes to greater self-confidence in these women with regard to motherhood.
2022	Corrêa, Jurdi e Silva	Mothers with disabilities and motherhood: daily life, support networks, and relationship with school	This is an exploratory qualitative study that investigates the perceptions of women with physical and visual disabilities who are mothers living in Santos, São Vicente, and Praia Grande. The study uses narratives as a method to understand motherhood, support networks, and family relationships with school from the perspective of the participants themselves.
2023	Corrêa, Jurdi e Silva	Narratives of women with physical and visual disabilities about their motherhood	This is an exploratory qualitative study that investigates the particularities of the pregnancy and postpartum cycle of women with disabilities living in Santos, São Vicente, and Praia Grande. Data collection was carried out through narratives, allowing for a broader understanding of the participants' experiences, including their interpretations and meanings. The analysis revealed positive and negative aspects in childbirth and postpartum care related to the reception received.
2023	Lima et al.	Challenges in childbirth care for women with disabilities: an integrative review	An integrative review of the literature conducted in 2023 to identify limitations in childbirth care for women with disabilities. The selected studies highlighted the lack of preparation of professionals, the absence of prenatal guidance, and inadequacies in care environments, reflecting economic, physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers that compromise the safety and quality of care.

Integrative Review

Viana LS, Silva TCR, Cristal BC, Alves C, Pratti T, Coelho KSC, Pontes U
A View of Motherhood Among Women with Visual Impairment: An Integrative Review

2023	Mheta, Sibiya e Nkosi	Experiences of Women with Disabilities in Accessing Maternal Healthcare Services: A South African Case Study	Key considerations: Qualitative case study conducted in South Africa, reflecting the challenges faced by women with disabilities in accessing maternal health services. The study emphasizes that women with disabilities face even greater difficulties than men with disabilities, as they suffer stigma related to their sexuality and, therefore, do not need reproductive health services.
2023	Vieira et al.	The challenges faced in breastfeeding for blind women: an integrative review of the literature	A literature review that highlights the importance of breastfeeding and the difficulties encountered by women with visual impairments in breastfeeding their babies, whether due to a lack of support, clarification, or even because they believe they are incapable of motherhood. It emphasizes the lack of educational materials, care, and dissemination of information by health professionals, in addition to the promotion of accessibility for blind mothers.
2024	Acar et al.	Challenges Faced by Mothers With Visual Impairment From the Preconception Period Through the Postpartum Period	The study investigated the challenges faced by mothers with visual impairment in Turkey, from the preconception period to the postpartum period. Through interviews with 17 mothers, difficulties related to the decision to have children, inaccessible pregnancy tests, dissatisfaction with health professionals, varied emotional reactions, and challenges in personal and baby care were identified, in addition to social pressure and unmet expectations in all phases analyzed.
2024	Carvalho et al.	Simply mothers: shared construction of prenatal technologies for women with visual impairments	A study conducted in Belém, Pará, with the aim of developing educational assistive technologies on prenatal care for women with visual impairments. DOSVOX was used as a communication resource, and it was concluded that the use of assistive technologies provides inclusion, autonomy, and respect for these women, in addition to assisting nursing professionals during prenatal care. It was reported that the small number of participants was a limiting factor in the research.
2024	Makeroufa e Diamanti	Exploring perinatal care and birth experiences in women with visual impairment: A retrospective study	A retrospective descriptive study focusing on women in Greece with visual impairment who gave birth after 2005. The article highlights the health challenges faced by women with visual impairment during pregnancy, pointing to the need for better education and professional training for more inclusive health practices.
2024	Roscoche et al.	Validation of assistive technology for mothers and fathers with visual impairment: focus on infant food introduction	A methodological study conducted in Brazil to evaluate assistive technology for complementary feeding of infants, aimed at mothers and fathers with visual impairments, biological or adoptive, aged 18 years or older. The results indicated the effectiveness of the approach in promoting health and providing guidance on food introduction.

DISCUSSION

Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a process that impacts women's physical and psychological health, bringing about changes in the body and new responsibilities ⁽¹⁾. The transition to motherhood requires quality, humanized health care throughout the entire journey of motherhood, before, during, and after pregnancy, as this period requires constant adaptation for women and their families ^(2,6).

Women with visual impairments face stigma and ableism, which tend to limit them from exercising their sexual and reproductive rights ⁽⁷⁾. Therefore, to ensure their dignity during the gestational process, it is crucial to promote adequate

professional training, reproductive health education, provide adequate prenatal care, and ensure accessibility to ultrasound exams.

Reproductive health care is essential for women's health, including those with visual impairments, who have the right to exercise their sexuality autonomously, safely, and pleurably. However, they face physical and communication barriers in health care and in the social environment, which increase their insecurity. Thus, it is evident that more studies are needed to address the sexual and reproductive health of these women ⁽⁸⁾.

Prenatal care consists of a set of preventive actions aimed at promoting health, focusing on a positive outcome of pregnancy for both mother and child

^(1,9). For pregnant women with visual impairments who seek autonomy and face attitudinal barriers, prenatal care is an ideal time to receive support and guidance on the role of motherhood. The discovery of pregnancy can be a critical moment, marked by fears that persist throughout the pregnancy, including diverse family reactions, ranging from acceptance to abandonment by partners, reflecting doubts about the ability of women with visual impairments to bear and care for children ⁽²⁾.

However, although prenatal care is an ideal time to provide instruction, women with visual impairments face difficulties in their prenatal consultations, which are limited to physical and routine examinations, analyzing only

the abdominal circumference, weight, and auscultation of the baby, in addition to other recommended tests and vaccines, without taking into account the necessary and essential dialogue to guide pregnant women, which includes information on care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. In addition to the informational barrier in communication, there is the issue of infantilization, in which the visually impaired pregnant woman is disregarded by the professional performing the procedure, and all dialogue occurs only with the accompanying persons⁽¹¹⁾.

In view of compliance with accessibility, a principle of the Unified Health System (SUS), measures to adopt assistive technologies for good communication with visually impaired pregnant women and for their good understanding are important allies for the preservation and exercise of citizens' rights. With regard to prenatal care, there is a study in the literature on the development of a booklet called "Simply Mothers: Guide to Prenatal Care for Visually Impaired and Blind Mothers," made available to blind women in order to guide them. The study also includes a version of the booklet aimed at health professionals, called "Simply Mothers: Nursing Care Guide for Prenatal Care for Visually Impaired and Blind Mothers," aimed at improving health promotion and care by these professionals. The development and handling process took place through WhatsApp and DOSVOX, a system developed to assist people with visual impairments⁽⁹⁾.

Finally, another potentially accessible means of inclusion and dignity for blind pregnant women is 3D ultrasound imaging, which is gaining prominence as an important assistive technology tool that allows these women, through their sense of touch, to have contact with their baby's features, which would otherwise be shown in images, making it impossible for them to access through their sense of sight. Ultrasound, in addition to being essential for monitoring the baby's de-

velopment, is also an important moment of connection between the parents and the child being born. In this sense, it is of utmost importance that mothers with visual impairments are not deprived of this moment^(11, 12).

Childbirth

Childbirth is a critical phase in the transition to motherhood for blind women, representing a significant challenge, from access to basic information to legal guarantees. The loss of vision during or close to pregnancy amplifies these challenges, as women will need to deal with a double transition, generating fear and uncertainty about their ability to fully exercise motherhood⁽²⁾. The support network, both from health professionals and family members, is not always sufficient to mitigate these insecurities.

The search for autonomy is not limited to the moment of delivery, but intensifies during this delicate period, when blind women often feel more vulnerable. A careful approach by the healthcare team, including participation in decisions and access to information, can provide security and peace of mind, allowing women to feel like protagonists. A holistic and humanized approach, respect for limitations, and guaranteeing the right to a companion are essential for a positive experience and to minimize discomfort⁽¹³⁾.

Unfortunately, inclusive practices are rare. Women with visual impairments face psychological and obstetric violence, including insecurities about loneliness, dependence on strangers in the hospital, and fear of baby switching⁽¹³⁾. The lack of accessibility, adequate support, the right to a companion, and the absence of clear information about the delivery process exacerbate these situations, contributing to feelings of incapacity, fear, and isolation⁽¹⁴⁾.

Health professionals tend to opt for cesarean sections for blind women, even when vaginal delivery is feasible, under the justification of reducing suffering.

This practice, often decided without explanation and without considering the woman's preferences, reveals the team's lack of preparation and constitutes obstetric violence⁽¹⁴⁾. Unnecessary cesarean sections can lead to postoperative complications, prolonged hospitalization, and difficulties in postoperative care, increasing the challenges of the postpartum period⁽¹⁵⁾.

The lack of assistive technologies is also a significant problem. Applications such as Seeing AI could improve the experience by offering audio description features. Inadequate accessibility in healthcare environments, such as the absence of tactile maps with sound features, is another important barrier⁽¹⁶⁾. Healthcare professionals recognize the need for accessibility and the importance of complying with standards that ensure the safe and autonomous use of public services, employing Braille and other assistive technologies. They also affirm their commitment to expanding their knowledge and developing initiatives that can improve this interaction⁽¹⁷⁾.

A review of the challenges faced by blind mothers during childbirth reveals significant gaps in communication and accessibility. Experiences range from positive, with staff working together to provide comfort and dignity for the patient, to negative, with reports of obstetric and psychological violence⁽¹³⁾. The lack of promotion of autonomy and accessibility significantly impacts the mental health of these women, reinforcing stigmas and exclusion still present in society⁽¹⁷⁾.

Postpartum

Motherhood for women with visual impairments is seen as a major challenge due to difficulties related to caring for their children (feeding, hygiene, administering medication), monitoring them (accident prevention, observing signs of discomfort), and transporting them (medical appointments, daycare, social engagements). These women face

stigmatization and prejudice, which can lead to insecurity about their ability to care for their children properly. However, it is important to recognize that they are fully capable of caring for their children, even with support from family and health professionals^(10, 18). Visually impaired mothers compensate for their lack of vision by using other senses with greater precision and demonstrate determination and creativity in developing strategies to care for their children independently⁽¹⁰⁾.

Access to adequate information to assist visually impaired mothers during the transition to motherhood is another challenge, since most health education information is in visual formats, which may not be accessible or properly formatted for reading using assistive technologies (AT). Health education approaches should be tailored to individual needs, ensuring that the knowledge conveyed is assimilated and applied in everyday life. For blind people, it is essential to emphasize communication that stimulates the remaining senses, such as smell, touch, and hearing, going beyond traditional orientation practices^(10, 19).

Breastfeeding offers biological benefits to the baby and strengthens the mother-child bond, being essential for promoting child health worldwide. International organizations recommend exclusive breastfeeding for up to six months and complementary breastfeeding for up to two years⁽¹⁸⁾. The challenges faced by women with visual impairment regarding breastfeeding include family prejudice, lack of health education, lack of humanized care, insufficient dialogue with health professionals, abandonment by partners, and insecurity in handling the newborn^(13, 18). In addition, physiological difficulties such as breast engorgement, insufficient milk production, and lack of nipple preparation during prenatal care, combined with stress and uncertainty in performing the maternal role, can compromise breastfeeding. In cases where exclusive breastfeeding is not feasible, the use of

artificial formulas poses new challenges, such as preparing bottles without adequate support⁽¹³⁾.

In this context, the importance of improving and incorporating AT to develop functional skills and facilitate activities for people with disabilities is evident. It is believed that the use of educational technologies helps to increase mothers' knowledge about breastfeeding and their confidence in the process. The introduction of food to infants of parents with visual impairments is an additional challenge due to the lack of adequate guidance from health professionals, which can result in early weaning and inadequate management of complementary feeding⁽²⁰⁾.

To fill this gap, the AT "Caring for your baby's feeding" was developed and made available on an accessible web page, with features such as screen magnification, color contrast, voice synthesizer (Dosvox), and TxT/Word files for Braille printing. This AT was evaluated among visually impaired mothers and fathers, biological or adoptive, aged 18 years or older. The results indicated the effectiveness of the approaches in promoting health and providing guidance on food introduction, suggesting its widespread adoption as a strategy to support these caregivers⁽²⁰⁾.

Reports on motherhood among women with visual impairments highlight the importance of support networks, the challenges faced, and the adaptations made in caring for children. These formal and informal networks are essential for overcoming barriers and include family members, friends, neighbors, and health professionals. The relationship with the school emerges as a critical aspect, which can either facilitate or hinder the participation of these mothers in their children's education. School-family communication, predominantly written, represents an obstacle, requiring adaptations that, in general, come from the mothers themselves. The period of children's literacy is particularly challenging due to the lack of inclusive strategies in

educational institutions. In addition, the organization of the home environment and autonomy in childcare are fundamental, favoring the development of adaptive strategies by children, in line with the literature on the differentiated proximity between parents with disabilities and their children^(13, 21).

Finally, it is worth noting the lack of training for health professionals in dealing with people with disabilities, a serious problem that requires urgent solution through the preparation of these professionals from their academic training^(10, 18). It is the responsibility of health professionals to provide educational guidance, monitor and guide mothers in the postpartum period, and be attentive to identifying problems, implementing appropriate interventions⁽¹⁹⁾. However, in order to develop effective strategies, it is crucial to first identify the specific needs of these parents in order to build interventions that adequately meet their needs.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the research, it was evident that women with visual impairments face various barriers, ableism, stigma, marginalization, and infantilization at all stages of motherhood. Often, these women are denied their rights, guaranteed by law, and need to fight against countless obstacles imposed on them. Although assistive technology tools exist, they are limited and often difficult to access, either due to financial cost or difficulty in finding them. It is believed that health professionals should provide comprehensive, personalized, and accessible care to women with visual impairments, assisting them in achieving safe and inclusive motherhood. Therefore, from the undergraduate level onwards, courses should be offered that expose students to the care and reality of people with disabilities. In addition, research and scientific work on the subject should be promoted.

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