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## FEMALE WRITER IN LATIN AMERICA: REFLECTION ON THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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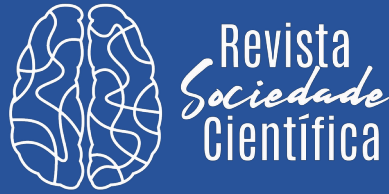
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### ABSTRACT

The cultural, political, social, economic marginalization of women and the little intellectual authority granted to them negatively influenced the writing, publication and dissemination of female writers' materials, but with the transcendental changes in Latin America, greatly influenced by the feminist movement, it made with a new configuration of social and cultural spaces, favoring the consolidation of feminist organizations and popular women's organizations. In addition, the increasing inclusion of women in the labor market reflected changes in the family and created a new collective imagination. With that in mind, this work aimed to evaluate and raise a reflection on the evolution of female writer literature in Latin America and the impacts generated in today's productions, the 21st century. Through research carried out through books and digital articles in a period from 2010 to 2022, it was found that women are gaining a little more space in the publishing market and becoming avid readers, however, even as the majority in the search for books, women still do not dominate the production of works in Latin American countries and still do not influence the favoritism of the male public.

**Keywords:** Feminine expression, Feminist movement, Literary freedom, Literary inclusion.



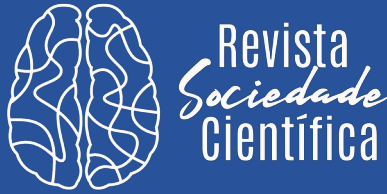
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

When addressing the inclusion and relevance of women in literature, the theme of social evolution that these women have contributed to and continue to do so in history is brought to light, not only within their own countries but also on a global scale. The feminism they are immersed in still promotes an increase in studies related to women and their portrayal in the literary field, especially when analyzing materials from the 20th century, a period marked by legislative changes that have become increasingly inclusive socially and politically for minority groups [20, 22].

Historically, female literature was already disseminated during the Middle Ages, with most of this literature taking the form of diaries, autobiographies, letters, protests, stories, and poems [30, 44]. When women wrote, they addressed experiences that were rarely discussed by men and expressed them in different ways. They wrote about childbirth, domestic work, relationships with men, friendships with other women, and also depicted themselves as girls and mature women, as wives, mothers, widows, lovers, workers, thinkers, and rebels. In these last two aspects, they highlighted the discrimination they faced and the pain and courage with which they confronted it [30, 8]. However, most women who wrote before 1800 did not see their writing as an aspect of their feminine experience or an expression of it, as culturally, writing was not an acceptable profession for women [58]. There were female groups interested in their writings, and women writers often knew and praised each other's works, but all these women depended, in some way, on men because they were the critics, editors, teachers, and sources of financial support [1]. Men had the power to praise women's works, bring them to the attention of the public, or ridicule them, and often condemn them to obscurity [58]. Around 1750, English women began to make inroads into the literary market, but writing did not become a recognizable profession for female writers until the 1840s [7, 15].

Indeed, another obstacle that hindered female literature was that until the 19th century, most women lacked sufficient education and leisure time to write [35, 15]. The

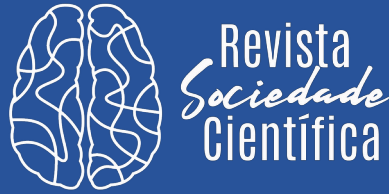


concept of the "artist" defined this role as masculine, and as cultures industrialized, women were increasingly educated [21]. With the use of printing technologies to produce cheaper books and expand the reading audience, it became more favorable for women to write [19]. Consequently, women produced some of the most popular novels in England, France, and the United States and became more visible as poets and playwrights. Their literary contributions began to gain recognition and appreciation in the literary world.

Indeed, in the modern era, female writers still face the challenge of being considered unacceptable in the literary world. They often have to write under pseudonyms and constantly prove the value and importance of their works. They are sometimes labeled differently from male writers, occasionally even categorized as plagiarizing them. Additionally, they continue to be the target of unethical comments [32]. These struggles are not limited to American women writers; they also persist in Asia and Eastern Europe, where literary art remains predominantly a male practice [39, 28]. While women now have more freedom to write, many of their struggles parallel those of 19th-century female writers. The challenges of sexism and gender bias persist, making it necessary for women to assert themselves and their work in a literary landscape that has historically favored male voices. Despite progress, there is still work to be done to ensure equal recognition and opportunities for women in the world of literature.

In Latin America, the story has not been different, but there has been a change in the last fifty years [56]. There are concrete indicators showing a greater prominence of Spanish and Latin American women in the world of literature [33, 61]. This phenomenon coincides and even intersects with numerous authors who travel periodically "from coast to coast," engaging in a back-and-forth exercise, to write and present their literary works on both sides of the Atlantic [47].

This trend is not only reflected in the increasing number of women writers publishing their books, but it is also seen in women gaining more space as readers and



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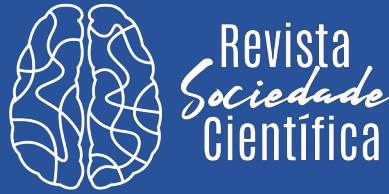
consumers of texts [33]. According to literary data, women have become regular readers in Portuguese and Spanish-speaking European countries [61, 47]. Countries like Argentina and Chile also follow the same profile, with female readers becoming increasingly eager for new releases in the market [36, 56, 14, 43].

In Brazil, the phenomenon of audiovisual programs presented by female artists and presenters has attracted a larger female audience [5]. Moreover, with the spread of social media, there is a growing phenomenon known as "booktubers," young people who use YouTube to share information about books and interact with other readers [54], drawing attention to the number of subscribers to channels featuring female influencers. This increased engagement of women as both writers and readers in the Latin American literary scene signals a positive shift in the representation and recognition of women's contributions to the literary world.

Observing this scenario, the objective of this work was to assess and provoke a reflection on the evolution of female-authored literature in Latin America and the impacts generated in today's productions, the 21st century, through a brief historical analysis of feminism, discussing data about criticism of "feminist" literature, and the "boom" of Latin American women writers and readers in contemporary times. This was accomplished through research conducted using books and digital articles spanning the period from 2010 to 2022.

## **2 FEMINISM IN THE LITERARY MOVEMENTS OF LATIN AMERICA**

Since the early days of great human civilizations, women have been writing and fighting to establish their place in various social segments, sometimes being silenced by the complex system of politics, economics, and power in different historical moments, fueled by a sexist culture. For over two centuries, the debate for equal legislative rights for women and men, as well as the emergence of influential figures in social discussions, has been gaining ground to foster greater respect and intellectual evolution [51].

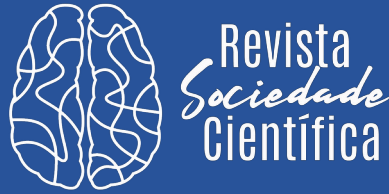


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In brief, there are indications that the term "feminism" was coined by the French philosopher Charles Fourier (1772-1837), and its usage began in the late 1700s [60]. The movement itself is characterized by three phases, also known in literature as waves: the first phase refers to the intense activity of women that occurred during the 19th and late 20th centuries in Great Britain and the United States, focusing on the fight for political and labor rights equality [55]; the second phase/wave, which started in the second half of the 1960s and lasted until the late 1980s, is linked to sexuality and the struggle against violence [41]; the third phase/wave - current - began in the 1990s and is mainly characterized by discussions related to cultural, social, and political issues concerning race, particularly the participation of black women in society, as well as the debate on difference feminism - focusing on disputes between the sexes, while other perspectives consider no inherent differences between male and female genders, with roles socially conditioned [23, 52, 60].

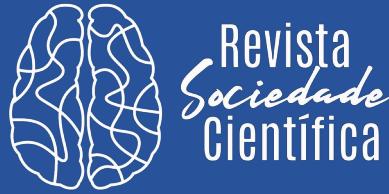
Understanding women's struggle in the world and, especially, in Latin America is essential to comprehend the current panorama in literature [25, 42]. The low presence of women in literary fields can be easily verified through awards; the most well-known international literary prize is the Nobel Prize in Literature, and from its creation in 1901 until 2022, it has awarded only 17 women compared to 102 men [9, 4, 48]. Another example is the most important recognition in the Spanish language, the Cervantes Prize, which has been awarded to only 6 women compared to 40 men since its creation in 1976: María Zambrano (1988), Dulce María Loynaz (1992), Ana María Matute (2010), Elena Poniatowska (2013), Ida Vitale (2018), and Cristina Peri Rossi (2021) [6, 46].

Although the first Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to someone from Latin America was given to a woman - the Chilean Lucila Godoy Alcayaga (1889-1957), under the pseudonym Gabriela Mistral, in 1945 - the trajectory of Latin American women in literature only began in the 1800s when most countries granted them access to good education, increasingly freeing them from the role of subalterns and the power systems that suppressed them [42, 48]. It is essential to highlight that there were



remarkable figures in Latin American literature preceding this period, who, due to their involvement in religious groups, had some access, albeit limited, to reading and writing [37]. One such figure is Juana Inés de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana, or Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695), a Mexican poet, playwright, philosopher, and nun who dared to challenge the norms of society and the Church of her time through her prose and poetry of undeniable literary value. She even advocated for women's right to education and intellectual development, the freedom to express their creativity and sensitivity [10, 49]. From the case of Juana Inés, it can be inferred that many other nuns wrote during that period, and their writings were possibly autobiographical, controlled by confessors and spiritual guides, who either supported them (by hiding, suggesting pseudonyms, or taking credit) or discouraged them.

Another problem of suppression during that time was related to social status and interracial relationships [7]. A climate of intolerance and hegemony of male discourse was predominant in the 19th century, leaving several female authors at the mercy of conspiracies and persecutions [30]. For example, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y Arteaga (Cuba, 1814 – 1873), the author of the book "*Sab*" (1841) - with a protagonist slave of the same name - faced challenges. She was the founder, director, and main editor of "*Álbum Cubano de lo Bueno y lo Bello*", a literary magazine that advocated feminist ideas and strongly supported Cuban journalistic work done by women [57]. Juana Manuela Gorriti (Argentina, 1816-1892) sought to narrate about love and the horror of the civil war through her writings (ARIAS, 2022). Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera (Peru, 1845 – 1909) wasn't against Catholicism but criticized the ostentation of high fashion by bourgeois women on religious holidays. Her critique was about how religion was manipulated by high society, and she also did not believe that religion should have a predominant role in women's education, as was typical at that time [3]. Maria Firmina dos Reis (Brazil, 1859-1917), the author of the book "*Úrsula*" (1859), was considered the first Brazilian abolitionist novel and passed away blind and poor at the age of 95 [11].



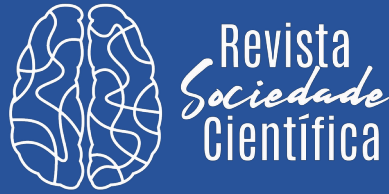
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Since Latin America was generally a colony of exploitation, there were few women in the New World, and those who arrived faced precarious conditions concerning work and family. This reality, in turn, shaped the female perspective of the social issues to be faced in those historical moments, leading to different approaches to themes when compared to the same period in European countries, the United States, and Canada [33, 25]. Over the centuries, Latin American female writers produced material advocating for independence, against military dictatorship and censorship, and in favor of democratization [23]. Their writings not only addressed social and political challenges but also contributed to shaping the region's literary landscape and reflecting the diverse experiences and struggles of Latin American women throughout history.

As a conclusion to the topic, it can be said that feminism has served as a pathway for transforming the role of women from various perspectives: black women, intellectuals, mothers, homosexuals, etc., and this is relevant to literary content.

### **3 CRITIQUE OF "FEMINIST" LITERATURE AND THE "BOOM" OF LATIN AMERICAN READERS AND WRITERS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES.**

The term "feminist" literature denotes, by its definition, political connotations and is related to the struggle for rights and equality. Historically, women writers, like various minorities, had their manuscripts marginalized and obliterated, largely due to sexist thinking, resulting in a small number of books published by them throughout the history of literature [31]. To aggravate the situation, as the public space was limited to men, women had to focus on their more domestic situation and bring the feminine voice of the oppressive scenario presented in each era into literature, a striking fact because it is through these analyses that the female consciousness is often rediscovered, the reality of the surrounding environment, and the social misery experienced by minorities [63]. In addition to these themes, another topic condemned by critics is eroticism in female productions, which, as pointed out by them, causes discomfort among critics and

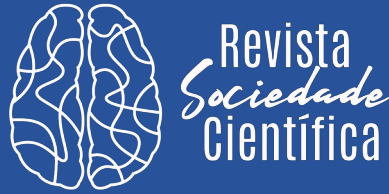


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readers due to ancient prejudices, unlike what happens with male writing, which is embraced by patriarchy, preventing women from writing about their own bodies or pleasures [40]. Thus, literature authored by women becomes a counteraction to authoritarianism, patriarchy, and sexism [31].

With globalization, cultural mixing, and social evolution, the scenario in favor of reading women authors should have improved, but even in modern times, male interest in reading female authors remains low, and this possibly has an influence since their primary education. In Brazil, there is a growing number of professional women, and studies report that in a gender comparison, they show greater internal coherence both in career choices and development [38]. It has also been discussed that there is a predominance of female audiences in basic education [18, 53]. One of the possible shortcomings in the inclusion of female literature for the general public might be that in basic education, professionals, including female teachers, only prioritize major classics with male authors and do not even mention temporal, thematic, linguistic, or philosophical similarities with female authors. Therefore, the Brazilian curriculum or the rigid management of a national institution covers readings of Machado de Assis (1839 - 1908), Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902 - 1967), Erico Verissimo (1936 - 1975), Jorge Amado (1912 - 2001), but it could also suggest the inclusion for debate of their contemporaries, such as Maria Firmina dos Reis (1822-1917, as mentioned earlier, the first black novelist in Brazil), Rachel de Queiroz (1910 - 2003, the first woman to enter the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1977 and the first woman to be awarded the Camões Prize), Lygia Fagundes Telles (1918 - 2022, one of the greatest representatives of postmodernism), Hilda Hilst (1930 - 2004, Brazilian poet, fiction writer, columnist, and playwright).

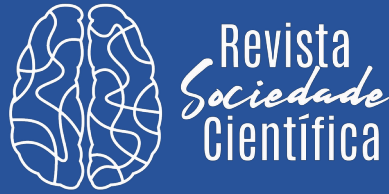
If the majority of the male audience does not expose themselves to the voices of women, that is, if these men are not listening, observing, or reading women, how can they grant them any authority? How do they know if women are competent to be on an equal professional and linguistic level? These questions are based on the research of



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Mary Ann Sieghart (2022) [50]. The first study to examine this was published by Lisa Jardine and Annie Watkins (2006) [34] from Queen Mary University, where they interviewed a hundred academics, critics, and writers about their fiction reading habits. The result was that four out of five men they spoke with said the last novel they read was written by a man, while women were almost equally likely to read a novel by a male or female author. When asked about the last novel they read by a female author, most men found it difficult to remember or did not know how to respond. In the same study, the researchers asked the interviewees to name the "most important" novel written by a woman in the last two years, and many men admitted to having no idea. The authors composed both the modern literary canon and the male-dominated canon, so these men read only half of the canon, while women experienced everything. The researchers question whether these men might have thought that novels written by women were not as good, but how could they know if they were not even reading them [50, 34]?

When considering this topic, it should be noted that reading different authors with alternative perspectives serves to gain a broader view of the world in which one is immersed or to generate intellectual enrichment [40]. With the lack of reading women authors, especially the male audience may be at a deficit in gaining a human and/or cultural perspective. To illustrate this, a study in Chile analyzed the gender difference in reading test scores in the System for Measuring the Quality of Education (Simce) between 2006 and 2014 and concluded that women significantly outperformed men in all three levels of education analyzed (4th grade, 8th grade, and 2nd year of high school). The same study also showed that there is a basis for the male audience to experience more difficulties in subjects related to Humanities, especially languages, as they progress in their education [26]. It is in school where democratic access for boys and girls happens, and it is the responsibility of educators to facilitate teaching that breaks down barriers of prejudice and demystifies stigmas [62]. This alone is a warning sign that there should be a reevaluation of the methodologies employed and the content

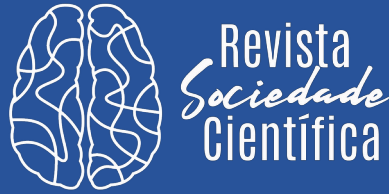


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taught, and this scenario could be improved by including women authors, including contemporary ones who better resonate with young people in the technological world, for example, María Joseffa Ferrada with the book "*Kramp*," Camila Valenzuela with "*Nieve negra*," Isabel Margarita Bustos with "*Jeidi*," etc [40].

From the 1980s to the present day, with increased literacy rates and access to information provided by the internet, the democratization of literature has been favored, leading to the expansion and dissemination of Latin American women authors. This has changed the rigid foundations of educational systems and brought to light previously forgotten women writers, now recognized as part of "good literature" and the "literary canon" [24, 43]. Through the referenced works, it is evident that the feminist movement remains alive and widespread in Latin American countries, with new demands and claims from women in contemporary times. They have faced challenges over the years, both within their own societies and within the movement itself. It is through this process that women have gained access to higher education and engaged with scientific research [31, 63]. In this way, alliances are formed to innovate their ideas and seek new spaces in literature.

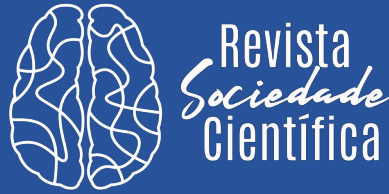
It is worth mentioning that in the 1990s, there was a "*boom*" in literature written by women in Latin America, particularly expressed through four novels: "*La Casa de los Espíritus*" (1982) by Isabel Allende (Chile, 1942 - ); "*Arráncame la vida*" (1986) by Ángeles Mastretta (Mexico, 1949 - ); "*Como agua para chocolate*" (1989) by Laura Esquivel (Mexico, 1950 - ); and "*Nosotras que nos queremos tanto*" (1991) by Marcela Serrano (Chile, 1951 - ). Critics point out that the magical realism that began in Latin America with Gabriel García Márquez's novel "*Cien Años de Soledad*" had a feminine expression in the book "*La Casa de los Espíritus*," which was widely recognized by critics and initiated a discourse that fascinated the 1990s: love, intimate environment, and cuisine [27, 29, 16].



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However, in the era of globalization, in the first decade of the 21st century, with the end of utopias and the consolidation of neoliberal discourses, there is a greater intolerance towards cultural, religious, and ethnic differences, in which exclusion and marginalization encompass larger sectors of society. This scenario is reflected in literature [27, 29]. The themes then expand to fantastic texts blending with the realism of local culture, controversies in marriage, denial of motherhood, questioning of the female body, invasion of intimate and public space, defense of a Latin American cultural and historical identity against a civilization that denies diversity and cultural difference. Examples of authors who address such themes are Alejandra Pizarnik (Argentina, 1936 - 1972) with the books "*Árbol de Diana*" (1962) and "*Los trabajos y las noches*" (1965); Luisa Valenzuela (Argentina, 1938 - ) with the books "*Como en la guerra*" (1977), "*Cambio de armas*" (1982), and "*Cola de lagartija*" (1983); Rosario Ferré (1938 - ) with the books "*Papeles de Pandora*" (1976), "*Maldito amor*" (1986), and "*La casa de la Laguna*" (1996); Laura Restrepo (1950 - ) with the books "*Historia de un entusiasmo*" (1986), "*Dulce compañía*" (1995), and "*La novia oscura*" (1999); Marcela Serrano (Chile, 1951 - ) with the books "*Nosotras que nos queremos tanto*" (1994) and "*El albergue de las mujeres tristes*" (1997); Lina Meruane (Chile, 1970 - ) with the book "*Sangre en el ojo*" (2012), among many others.

In recent years, women have been gaining a little more space in the publishing market. According to studies, there has been a considerable increase in published female authors in Brazil, but not significant; between 2005 and 2014, only 29.4% of books from the three main publishers in Brazil (Rocco, Record, and Companhia das Letras) were authored by women [13]. Another highlight in the publishing market was the Mondadori Publisher, which has maintained a collection dedicated to Latin American literature since 2016 and includes Mexican writer Fernanda Melchor (1982 - ), winner of the 2019 Anna Seghers Prize with the book "*Hurricane Season*" (2017), translated into Portuguese and also featured in the final list of the 2020 International Booker Prize. Another highlight was the Moinhos Publisher, which launched fourteen female authors

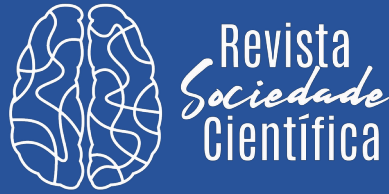


from three Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador) into the Brazilian market. However, the increase indicated by the research still does not reflect the presence of women in the publishing market: in 2012, the Pró-Livro Institute pointed out that 57% of Brazilian readers are women, but even as the majority in book consumption, women still do not dominate the production of works in the country [59, 12, 17].

Over the last twenty years, Brazilian publishers have paid more attention to the fictional production of Latin American women writers from different generations, bringing the Brazilian reader closer to important titles produced in neighboring countries. Translations of novels, short stories, essays, and poems originally written in Spanish will continue in the following years, thanks to a careful look at what is most representative in Latin America [31, 63, 45].

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Latin American literature has already earned a solid place in the universe of letters, serving as a space of liberation for today's women, a result of the resistance and persistence of those who came before in the struggle to end the suppression of their human rights. The claims put forward by feminism have also opened new doors for considering literary practices, investigating how women are represented, breaking away from the patterns defined by the patriarchal society in the construction of female characters. In the case of the publishing industry, some legitimations that may seem neutral and objective actually respond to dominant patriarchal criteria, but this situation is changing with the debates surrounding the topic that arise in Latin countries, and also due to a demanding female audience seeking more information in the literature of their fellow Latin women. Authors have also been able to broaden the themes of their books, thus attracting a diverse and younger audience, but one that still needs guidance from parents and teachers aware of the importance of discussing social inclusion issues.

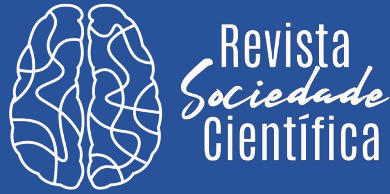


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The development of reading diverse authors is now more essential than ever. Therefore, it is necessary for schools, universities, and libraries not to neglect the promotion of reading national and international authors, men, women, and individuals of other genders, with the aim of forming competent and critical readers capable of accessing texts on their own and prepared to undertake the necessary learning to optimize their personal, social, and professional development.

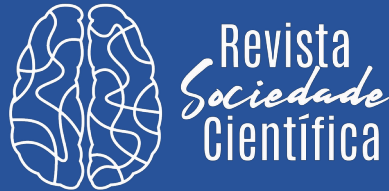
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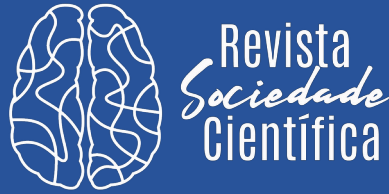
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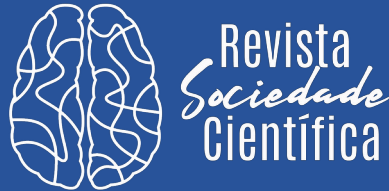
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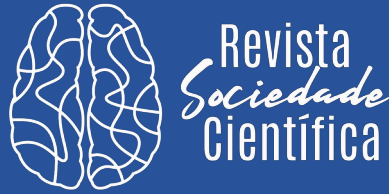
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