

Challenges and achievements of women workers in the Antônio Júlio settlement

Desafios e conquistas das mulheres trabalhadoras do assentamento Antônio Júlio

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ABSTRACT The movement for Agrarian Reform gained momentum in the early twentieth century, shaped by the historical struggle of peasants for access to land, decent work, income, freedom, and social equality. The legacy of the slave system and deeply rooted discriminatory social structures delayed this process. Over time, however, social movements gained visibility and fostered important debates on the construction of a national development project aimed at improving the population's living conditions. This study seeks to examine the working conditions of rural women in the Antônio Júlio Settlement and to analyze how these conditions affect their health, their awareness of their rights, and the promotion of their well-being. This exploratory and descriptive study adopted a qualitative approach, using focus groups as the primary data collection method. The findings indicate that these women face limited access to health services, which exacerbates existing health problems and restricts disease prevention, treatment, and health promotion initiatives. At the same time, their rural way of life and work practices appear to function as protective factors for their physical and social well-being. Addressing these challenges is essential for the development and implementation of more effective public policies tailored to the specific needs of women workers in the agricultural sector.

KEYWORDS Women, working. Health promotion. Human settlements. Social conditions. Working conditions.

RESUMO O movimento pela Reforma Agrária ganhou força no início do século XX, influenciado pela luta histórica dos camponeses pelo direito à terra, ao trabalho, à renda, à liberdade e à igualdade. O regime escravocrata e as estruturas sociais discriminatórias atrasaram esse processo, mas os movimentos sociais conquistaram visibilidade e promoveram debates sobre a construção de um projeto nacional para melhorar as condições de vida da população. Este estudo tem como objetivo identificar as condições de trabalho das mulheres trabalhadoras rurais no Assentamento Antônio Júlio, analisando como essas condições podem impactar a saúde e qual é o seu entendimento sobre os seus direitos e promoção de sua saúde. Pesquisa exploratória, descritiva com abordagem qualitativa, que utilizou como ferramentas de coleta de dados as rodas de conversa. Observou-se que as mulheres têm acesso limitado aos serviços de saúde, o que agrava os problemas existentes e dificulta a prevenção e o tratamento de doenças, bem como a promoção de saúde, mas o modo de vida e trabalho no campo se constitui em fator protetor para elas. Abordar essas questões é essencial para elaboração e implementação de políticas públicas mais eficazes que atendam às necessidades específicas das trabalhadoras do campo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Mulheres trabalhadoras. Promoção da saúde. Assentamentos humanos. Condições sociais. Condições de trabalho.

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Introduction

Rural settlements are part of the agrarian reform process and are established on rural properties that failed to fulfill their social function and were subsequently expropriated or acquired by the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA)¹. Agrarian reform also produces transformative effects on social relations in the countryside, fostering economic and social development and strengthening community ties. These settlements represent a distinct form of production and social organization in rural areas, promoting significant changes in the lives of rural workers engaged in activities such as crop cultivation and dairy farming, among others. Production and processing are carried out collectively by the settlers themselves, with the dual objective of generating income through the commercialization of food products and ensuring subsistence for their families^{2,3}.

Life in the settlements is marked by a collective organization aimed at guaranteeing the right to land, with documents attesting to the length of time the group has existed and its organizational structure, as well as its interaction with public or civil entities². The Movement in Support of Rural Workers (MATR) is a national social movement engaged in the struggle for agrarian reform and is currently linked to more than twenty rural settlements. The Antônio Júlio Settlement, which is affiliated with MATR, constitutes the setting of the present study.

In general, rural working women face limited access to health services, a situation that exacerbates preexisting health problems and constrains disease prevention, timely treatment, and health promotion initiatives. Previous studies have documented this reality, identifying that women living in rural settlements in the states of Pernambuco and Minas Gerais reported symptoms such as insomnia, frequent crying, and loss of appetite, indicating

significant psychosocial distress^{4,5}. Physical and psychological suffering was found to stem from conditions of poverty, early or unequal marital relationships, work overload, and experiences of domestic and sexual violence. Among these factors, marriage emerged as the primary source of distress, largely due to the triple workload imposed on women, encompassing productive labor, domestic responsibilities, and caregiving, roles that are socially expected and normalized within the community. Intervening in these realities through reflective dialogue is a way to foster critical awareness and, from this, to promote the social changes that are needed^{4,5}.

This study aims to identify the working conditions of rural women in the Antônio Júlio Settlement, analyzing how these conditions affect their health, as well as their understanding of their rights and of health promotion. The topic is particularly relevant due to its potential to reveal structural inequalities that shape the lives of rural working women and to highlight the economic vulnerabilities they experience. In many cases, these women work under precarious conditions and are exposed to health risks, including intense physical exertion and adverse weather conditions⁶.

Addressing these issues is essential to promoting sustainable improvements in the lives of these women workers and their communities. In this context, understanding the living and working conditions of rural women is fundamental. Many of these farmers have longstanding ties to family farming, with knowledge transmitted across generations, which constitutes the primary source of livelihood for them and their families. Analyzing their working and health conditions can provide valuable evidence to guide the formulation and implementation of more effective public policies tailored to the specific needs of rural women workers, thereby contributing to greater equity and social protection in the agricultural sector.

Materials and methods

The study adopted a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive design and was conducted during the first semester of 2025. Two field visits were undertaken to facilitate focus group discussions. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was held in the community space. The meetings aimed to encourage participants to reflect on their living and working conditions, health practices, and fundamental rights. Data collection techniques included participant observation, active listening, field notes recorded in a research diary, and activity reports prepared after each session.

The study involved women from the Antônio Júlio Settlement who are members of MATR. Participants were predominantly Black adult women, aged between 30 and 79 years, with low levels of formal education. Selection was based on availability, through open invitations extended to the women in the community. The analysis of the experience was conducted through systematization, a methodological approach grounded in the collective construction of knowledge and the principles of popular education. This approach recognizes participants as protagonists in the knowledge-production process and is structured around eight key elements: contextualization, singularity, intentionality, comprehension, collectivity, bonding, the unfolding of the experience, and the roles of those involved. The systematization process followed five stages: (1) the starting point; (2) definition of initial questions and the systematization plan; (3) recovery of the lived experience; (4) critical reflection on underlying factors; and (5) points of arrival, representing the main lessons learned and conclusions drawn from the experience.

This study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Fiocruz Brasília School of Government, in compliance with the legal and ethical standards governing research involving human subjects, and was approved under the (CAAE) No. 86446925.5.0000.8027 and Opinion No. 7460.692.

Results and discussion

Health and disease

In the first meeting, forty-five women participated, while eleven attended the second discussion group. Many reported health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes or pre-diabetes, as well as musculoskeletal (particularly spinal) and gastrointestinal disorders.

The participants stated that they were registered with and had access to the Unified Health System (SUS), which serves as the main provider for monitoring and managing their health status. All confirmed that they used the primary health care unit closest to their homes^{6,8}. However, they reported difficulties in accessing specialized treatment and in adhering to or following up on medical recommendations after the initial consultation, as illustrated in the following statement:

Every year there are breast cancer awareness campaigns. There's always a campaign—but why is it that most women still don't have access to an exam, a mammogram [...] an ultrasound? [...] I've had four strokes, I'm under neurological follow-up, and I had to involve Globo [a Brazilian TV network] at the Sobradinho hospital because I couldn't get an appointment with a neurologist. The healthcare system doesn't work. If I ask all the women here, each one has gone through something. So, literally, it doesn't work. But I want to emphasize breast cancer, which is what's most visible today. [...] 'Oh, but why don't you go?' Well then, make it easier. Everyone says, 'women have too many children'. Don't just leave condoms there—just throw them on the table. Talk to the women, explain it to them. It's about dialogue, like what you two are doing. That's very important. It's not about simply putting things out there and expecting people to come and get them.

In this critical reflection on women's fundamental healthcare needs, the effectiveness of breast cancer preventive care is called into

question. The participant problematizes the mismatch between the appealing and highly visible discourse of health promotion and the concrete realities of accessing such care, particularly the difficulties involved in scheduling diagnostic exams and specialist consultations⁸.

Another issue raised concerns the physical strain associated with agricultural labor and its repercussions for health.

Today, I'm limited in many ways. I lost 70% of the muscle strength in my right arm; I only have 30% left. I'm currently on medical leave because of work, you know? Weeding [...] The doctors say it's temporary—I hope so. But I spent almost two months without knowing what it was like to wash myself with my right hand. [...] I could only tie my hair at ear level, because I had to lower my hand like this to do it. Do you understand? I suffered a lot. Then the CT scan and MRI showed the problem. I'm undergoing treatment now—physiotherapy and follow-up care. Because of my age, when I went on leave, it automatically turned into retirement. That's why I have to provide proof of life, you know? Always. And this leaves me with many limitations in working in the farm.

Based on the reports, the illnesses manifested in their bodies are directly related to their work and to the long-term repetition of the same movements, which has intensified the process of becoming ill. Additionally, studies show that rural women assume more unpaid labor than men, particularly domestic work. This further burdens their bodies, as they not only care for family members but also participate in the struggle to secure land⁹.

The women expressed a desire to deepen their understanding of emotional health, particularly in learning how to recognize emotional and physiological responses within themselves. In this regard, studies have demonstrated how territorial and social vulnerability affect mental health and contribute to the emergence of physical symptoms^{4,10}. Hence, the relevance of the social determinants of health framework, which emphasizes

the collective and historical-social dimensions of the health-disease process. This perspective helps illuminate women's vulnerability within a patriarchal social structure, as well as the specific challenges faced by settled women in regulating and sustaining their mental health. The following statement raises important reflections on the preservation of mental well-being:

One thing I notice... I'm a teacher, and when we have meetings, I see many issues related to women's emotional health. What is this emotional health? How are my emotions? How am I doing? What about my self-love? How am I valuing myself? Women go through very vulnerable situations—at home and on the street. If you go to get your car fixed, you're treated differently. So this self-care, this self-love, is what I suggest in this area: to encourage women to look at themselves and say, 'I love myself', 'I take care of myself', 'I will not allow myself to be mistreated', 'I will not allow myself to be oppressed', because this is necessary. That is also emotional health.

In light of the issue raised by the participant, emotional health emerges as a fundamental dimension in understanding women's health and illness processes. Within the context of a patriarchal society, self-knowledge and critical awareness of the social dynamics that shape everyday life are essential for developing strategies for protection and health. While the reality of these vulnerable women does not provide adequate resources for their protection, it is essential to develop and expand self-knowledge and community awareness to prevent foreseeable patriarchal violence^{4,10}.

Rural work

Family farmers' income varies according to factors such as land size, type of cultivation, location, and market access. According to Serra¹¹, rural settlements generally face precarious infrastructure and poor soil conditions. However, the Antônio Júlio settlement

benefits from its proximity to the city, which facilitates commercialization, although it still encounters challenges related to water supply, energy, and infrastructure. In this settlement, agroecological practices are adopted throughout agricultural production, meaning that crops are grown without chemical fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, or pesticides.

The settlers strive to promote a healthy way of life both for themselves and for those who consume their products. In this settlement, each family is individually responsible for managing its land and production. According to the women in the second discussion group, love for the land and for agricultural work is transmitted across generations. In one testimony, a settler stated that:

I have two granddaughters, and they're still little. [...] One day she said, 'Grandma, it's so good to live in the farm, isn't it? Grandma, we don't go hungry here, do we? We can get eggs, get the chicken, get the pumpkin. If you want herbs, if you want to make lunch, just go and get them'. So they've already realized that here it's possible to live without depending on money. That's why we have to plant and produce. We can't be lazy. We have to work. And they help with everything, with tidying up.

They express love and gratitude for the territory they have conquered. This shared emotional connection to the land reveals the central role of territory in shaping social relations of appropriation, production, use, and representation of geographic space. It is closely linked to everyday production decisions, serving as a foundation for life projects and for creating the material and symbolic conditions necessary for sustaining life within the territory¹².

Rural work can function as a protective factor for women's physical health and that of their families, through the consumption of healthy foods, as well as for their mental health, by providing meaningful and satisfying activities.

[...] one of the things I love most is taking care of the land, being there, keeping everything growing. It's very good; it brings well-being. It's wonderful to do what you love. Wonderful. It's therapy, from the soul to the world.

Another important aspect highlighted by the women concerns the production of healthy food as both a source of sustenance and income. Caring for the land requires time, financial investment, and dedicated effort, demanding careful management from the women in the settlement. As they stated, *"It's work, but working and not earning money is impossible, right? How can you live?"*. The roles performed by rural workers vary according to the territory and type of cultivation, but generally include soil preparation, planting, irrigation, care of crops and animals, and harvesting, whether manual or mechanized. These tasks form part of the daily routine of the women in the settlement.

On some properties, particularly in family farming or smallholdings, workers also engage in processing products for their own consumption and/or for sale. In the Antônio Júlio Settlement, beekeeping is practiced as well, generating valuable products and additional income. This activity plays a fundamental role in plant pollination, thereby supporting agricultural productivity and contributing to local biodiversity¹³.

Out of necessity, many rural women supplement their income through urban employment. Beyond their productive roles, they also engage in social struggles, often in ways that are not always highly visible, advocating for improved working conditions, access to healthcare, water supply, schools, health centers, and the expansion of public policies within the settlement^{2,4,9,13-14}.

The lack of technical assistance, limited access to credit, the absence of regulated markets, and precarious infrastructure, such as roads and storage facilities, lead many settled families to depend on external activities to supplement their income. This scenario

creates a dynamic of economic vulnerability that weakens the original purpose of the settlements, which is to ensure autonomous means of production and subsistence within their own territory¹⁴.

When a settlement is designed to promote the productive autonomy of families, the need to seek employment outside the community reveals shortcomings in its planning, whether due to insufficient plot sizes, limited access to credit, or the absence of effective policies for marketing production. Conversely, when the model initially incorporates the possibility of supplementing agricultural income with other sources, income diversification may function as a risk-reduction strategy. The problem intensifies when off-settlement income begins to replace agricultural activity, transforming the settlement into merely a residential area without sustainable productive foundations. It is therefore essential that public policies distinguish between healthy diversification, such as value addition, cooperative organization, and the consolidation of family-based agro-industries, and dependency dynamics that undermine the objectives of agrarian reform¹⁴.

In this context, state actions must prioritize productive projects aligned with the characteristics of the plots and local resources, supported by continuous technical assistance. Strengthening local production chains is equally essential, through incentives for agro-industries, cooperatives, and marketing strategies that enhance income generation within the territory. Investments in infrastructure, education, and technical training are crucial to reducing forced migration, while policies that ensure decent working conditions, transportation, and social protection provide greater security for families. Additionally, initiatives that promote youth engagement and gender equality, along with institutional support mechanisms—such as public procurement programs, minimum price guarantees, and accessible credit lines—are fundamental to consolidating the economic and social sustainability of settlements¹⁴.

Fundamental rights

Upon acquiring their long-awaited plot of land, the settler often prioritizes the restoration of dignity, then turns to cultivating food to ensure family subsistence and, eventually, to selling any surplus. Subsistence farming—frequently undervalued—has historically constituted a fundamental basis for securing food, sustaining life, and upholding dignity, which are core pillars of human rights. Despite its significance, this connection is seldom emphasized in public debate. Chonchol¹ notes that between the 1960s and 1980s, Western powers directed their attention to regions affected by chronic famine as part of humanitarian response efforts.

When it comes to Agrarian Reform, it is important to highlight that the settlements that are already structured present concrete evidence of advances in food security. Among the positive indicators, the reduced infant mortality rates and the presence of fairs – both agroecological and conventional – in nearby municipalities stand out. These elements have been the subject of study by specialists in various parts of Brazil, highlighting the significant role of these territories in expanding access to healthy food and improving the living conditions of settled families¹⁶.

In theory, access to land contributes to food security, restores dignity, and upholds the right to life. However, settlers are not always fully recognized as rights-bearing subjects. In Brazil, public policies designed to guarantee social rights are often mistakenly perceived as welfare or charity. This perception reinforces a logic of sociability grounded in the notion of ‘favor’, whereby beneficiaries are expected to request and express gratitude for what should be guaranteed rights. Such a dynamic ultimately undermines citizenship and contradicts the principles of social justice¹⁷.

The realization of the right to life cannot be reduced to mere access to land. When guaranteed through public policies, such access should not be framed as welfare, but

understood as the outcome of collective mobilization and resistance. This struggle is not about favors or concessions; it is about the fulfillment of legitimate rights that affirm workers as full subjects of citizenship¹⁸.

Malagodi¹⁹ highlights the violations of fundamental rights concealed within the narrative of the 'backwardness of rural people', as rural populations are denied access to essential services such as healthcare, quality education, and transportation—services more readily available in urban areas. This discourse perpetuates the mistaken notion that the countryside is inherently backward. However, the services guaranteed to urban populations by the State are financed by taxes derived from the wealth generated through human labor, including that produced in rural areas²⁰. It is therefore urgent to recognize the rights historically denied to rural populations and to expand public policies that ensure full citizenship, valuing the countryside as an integral and indispensable part of society rather than a marginal space.

Another fundamental right that is frequently violated concerns the health of rural women, which is often neglected and insufficiently addressed in public policies. More broadly, the health needs and living and working conditions of rural populations are rarely prioritized by municipal governments. Essential medical treatments, which should be readily accessible, often require settlement residents to travel long distances to urban centers. Yet adequate and reliable public transportation, necessary to guarantee their right to mobility, is not consistently provided to settlers²¹.

It is important to highlight the existence of the National Policy for Comprehensive Health of Rural, Forest and Water Populations (PNSIPCFA), which establishes principles and guidelines for public policies aimed at improving the health conditions of these vulnerable populations and reducing risks associated with work processes and agricultural technological changes. Over the years, transformations in land use driven by economic development strategies have significantly affected the

quality of life and health indicators of these groups. However, despite the existence of this policy framework to safeguard fundamental rights, limited social awareness hampers collective mobilization for its effective implementation. Additionally, challenges related to public budget allocation constrain the execution of the proposed actions, undermining the full realization of its objectives²².

Social organization and health promotion

Throughout the research, it was observed that the social movement—in this case, MATR—constitutes a space recognized by participants as promoting health, safety, justice, and equality. Appreciation for the movement's role in supporting women was unanimous among those involved.

About 22 or 23 years ago, in Renascer, I was expelled [...]. When I arrived here [in Antônio Júlio], I saw my little shack down there. I spoke to our coordinator—whom I consider today like a second president, you know? From MATR. He said, 'You're not going to stay down there'. He took me by the hand and said, 'You'll stay here', and placed me where I remain settled to this day. And I say with pride that I am MATR to the core. I am settled here.

The accounts emphasize women's autonomy in agricultural activities and the sense of well-being derived from their relationship with the land. However, advancing age limits their ability to perform physically demanding tasks. The presence of family members is perceived as a health-promoting factor, enabling the sharing of labor and strengthening community bonds. This collective dynamic supports land care, food preparation, and production oriented toward family needs, reinforcing the sense of security and trust associated with MATR^{23,26}.

In dialogue with the literature, analyzing social systems is important because it enables an understanding of the configuration of

social actors, as well as the signs and symbolic systems that guide group identity and action. Through the women's collective, it was possible to observe that MATR adopts a critical and vigilant stance toward power relations, particularly from a gender perspective. This posture emerged as a distinctive feature of the movement, as it reflects a willingness to confront past practices, reassess trajectories, and affirm shifts in mentality within different social groups²⁵.

Understanding the community to which one belongs and strengthening connections with the territory are closely linked to health promotion, mutual support, and the creation of sustainable and healthy environments, both ecologically and socially. In this sense, engaging with the territory as a space of transformative potential implies acting upon it in ways that foster healthy living contexts and guide the implementation of public policies aimed at land sustainability and local development^{12,26}.

Beyond protective actions, MATR also adopts internal practices such as requesting a 'Clearance Certificate' from participants, aimed at getting to know those who share the same struggle and understanding each member's trajectory in order to offer appropriate support. According to one of the movement's members, there is a persistent stigma and stereotype associated with those who fight for land—an image that negatively affects the movement and its legitimacy:

Now, with the internet—everyone has a phone, everyone records everything—things have decreased. They started setting rules. When the police arrived [...] I was there, my husband and the boys were in front, and they immediately said, 'What are you doing here? You know there are only criminals here. How can you be in a place like this?'. They generalized. But our focus is to keep teenagers away from drugs and in school. The concern is to find work for the mother who is unemployed. If she cannot make a living from the land, what should we, as a movement, do? We must unite and help that family—that is our obligation. Our camp was

very organized. We had circle dances, music classes for the children, a playground. Where we were, everything was very well organized.

This dynamic of health, care, and safety in the relationship between subject and territory is reflected in MATR's membership process, which requires a 'Clearance Certificate'. The purpose is to understand the background of those who wish to join, recognizing that, once integrated, they will share the movement's identity and serve as references for safety and care within the community. For the construction of a healthy bond between community and territory, assessing each individual's potential contribution becomes essential. In this sense, the movement grounds its actions in the protection and care of its social group, as well as in the stewardship of the acquired lands. Such practices strengthen collective organization in favor of health promotion and foster a sense of familial belonging, even within a context of extreme vulnerability, limited resources, and ongoing stress related to the struggle for fundamental rights^{26,27}.

Women's struggle

The women's narratives revealed a process of transformation in both their health and their construction of identity throughout their life struggles. According to their accounts, becoming a woman within these contexts is a profound and often painful process, marked by physiological and emotional symptoms such as insomnia, frequent crying, anxiety, depression, physical and mental exhaustion, and emotional outbursts. These experiences emerge alongside their social trajectories, culminating in moments of rupture with prescribed gender roles, that is, the expectations imposed by society regarding how women and men should behave.

From this perspective, women who develop critical awareness and seek to change their lifestyles and patterns of action often face the tension of breaking with established norms.

Such ruptures may expose them to stigmatizing interpretations and social disapproval, revealing the costs associated with challenging deeply rooted gender expectations^{4,26 - 28}.

Yes, but... If anyone disagrees with me, please raise your hand and say why. Physical exhaustion, mental exhaustion. Because it's not easy. You enter an area and at first everything seems fine, peaceful. Then, suddenly, the police arrive, the landowner threatens you... eviction. This mix of feelings causes a lot of pain and frustration. To finally become settled, you go through a storm of emotions.

I got pregnant at 15. At 20, I came to Brasília. When I arrived, their father left me alone [...] I worked two jobs. I slept about four hours a night to take care of and support my children. I never let my son go to the traffic lights or work for someone earning almost nothing. [...] In my thirties, I would wake up, take my children to daycare or preschool, and go to work. At night, I came home, put them to bed, and went back out to work at a snack bar until midnight. I had a two-bedroom apartment, my children studied at good schools, I had a car. They dressed like the children of the married women in the building [...] I was a single mother with two children, and we lived well. [...] Later, I bought a restaurant, and my children worked there with me.

Another important aspect concerns women's dedication to their families, often prioritizing the needs of others while setting aside their own. In this regard, one study highlights the central role women play within the family system as primary caregivers and sources of support. Even when they assume heavier workloads, this is frequently perceived as expected behavior, reinforcing the notion that domestic and caregiving responsibilities are 'natural' extensions of women's roles within the logic of gendered care²⁸.

Among the women who shared more detailed life histories, recounting both their youth and current challenges, differences emerged in the pace and demands of life across age groups. Women under 50, particularly in

middle adulthood, reported greater physical capacity and a heavier workload, managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. In contrast, those in late adulthood and old age described the need for more assistance with manual labor and a stage marked by greater reflection on their life trajectories. Engaging with their narratives made it possible to identify and understand distinct needs associated with different life stages—youth, middle adulthood, late adulthood, and old age.

An important aspect to emphasize is the role of support networks in women's struggles, providing both emotional and practical assistance. During the second meeting, marked by greater participation from women over 50, participants reported receiving help from family members in managing daily tasks, health concerns, work demands, and family matters. However, widowed and single women did not always have a guaranteed family support system. Even so, they expressed confidence in relying on neighbors and fellow members of the social movement as sources of support in situations of immediate need or unforeseen circumstances.

Rural workers are often portrayed in the media through stereotypical images—depicted as disorganized, ignorant, poorly dressed, or incapable of proper communication—and rural territories are frequently associated with violence. In response to these representations, the women question the absence of a critical and nuanced social perspective on their lived reality, which cannot be reduced to media narratives or equated with the experiences of other movements²⁸.

This prejudice also has a lot to do with the State, with the State itself. There's the issue of people who aren't part of the movement, who don't belong to any kind of movement, and there's the pressure from the State, from the police. 'Ah! They're all trash, bums, bandits!'. The media spreads this. The media portrays them as invaders, as scoundrels.

When I came in, a lot of people we knew were saying... 'My God, are you crazy?'. They were

talking to my son, 'You're going to let your mother get involved in this business, you don't know what's in there. It's full of criminals'. Drug dealers, and all that. And I said, 'Well, you're the ones who are mistaken. That only exists in the area you hang out in'.

Based on the participants' statements, the stereotype disseminated by the media about rural workers reinforces a negative and generalized social image. However, such portrayals often refer to isolated cases that may or may not be linked to the struggle for land. In contrast, the lived reality described by the women is that of a cohesive group whose members know one another, feel secure in their coexistence, and remain united in the collective pursuit of their rights^{25,28}.

Final considerations

This study sought to analyze the experiences of women in the Antônio Júlio Settlement, focusing on the activities they perform in their territories, their working conditions, and the impacts on their health. With regard to rural labor, it became evident that the challenges faced by these women stem from historical inequalities that continue to shape their realities. Although legal frameworks address unhealthy working conditions and are applicable to women's rural labor, there remains a need for training initiatives to inform them about their rights. Moreover, the development and implementation of more effective public policies tailored to their specific needs are essential.

Although specific legislation exists to protect the safety and health of rural workers, its effectiveness remains limited due to widespread informality, insufficient oversight, and persistent gender inequalities in rural areas. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and raising awareness among female workers about their rights are essential measures to

mitigate the impacts of unhealthy working conditions and to ensure the proper enforcement of existing regulations. Furthermore, recognizing and valuing women's labor in rural contexts is fundamental, as this recognition can help guarantee access to basic rights, including personal protective equipment, hazard pay, and maternity protection policies.

Therefore, it is expected that this study will contribute to strengthening the debate on the need to improve existing regulations and to implement public policies that foster safer and more equitable working conditions for women in the rural sector. Protecting these workers not only ensures the safeguarding of their individual rights, but also contributes to the country's broader economic and social development. Moreover, it highlights and reinforces the role of rural social movements as key actors in building support networks, advocating for rights, and promoting health and collective well-being.

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Authorship contributions

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