



DEATH ON ADOLESCENTS' PERSPECTIVE

A MORTE NA PERSPECTIVA DE ADOLESCENTES

LA MUERTE EN LA PERSPECTIVA DEL ADOLESCENTE

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze how adolescents relate to death. **Method:** cross-sectional, qualitative study with eight state high school adolescents of Paraná, in October 2013. As a collection tool, semi-structured interviews were used and the data were analyzed from the perspective of Textual Analysis Discourse in analysis categories as Immortality; Death as Continuity of Life; Risk of Death and Death Irreversibility. The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Opinion number 035/2013. **Result:** adolescents think about their own death; they have knowledge of its causes; they have already lost someone important; and they think death should be discussed at school. Therefore, they think of death having uncertainties, avoid talking about it, suffer, but they do not demonstrate this feeling to adults, sharing the pain with each other. **Conclusion:** adolescents show fear to death of loved ones and feel the pain of separation. **Descriptors:** Attitude to Death; Adolescents; Young Man.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar de modo os adolescentes se relacionam com a morte. **Método:** estudo transversal, qualitativo, com oito adolescentes do ensino médio, estadual, no Paraná, em outubro de 2013. Utilizou-se como instrumento de coleta a entrevista semiestruturada, cujos dados foram analisados sob a ótica da Análise Textual Discursiva em categorias de análise como Imortalidade; Morte como Continuidade da Vida; Risco de Morte e Irreversibilidade da Morte. O projeto de pesquisa foi aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, Parecer n.035/2013. **Resultado:** os adolescentes pensam na própria morte; têm conhecimento de suas causas; já perderam alguém significativo; e opinam que o assunto morte deva ser discutido na escola. Portanto, pensam na morte, possuem incertezas, evitam falar no assunto, sofrem, mas não demonstram este sentimento aos adultos, compartilhando a dor entre si. **Conclusão:** os adolescentes demonstram temor pela morte de entes queridos e sentem a dor da separação. **Descritores:** Atitude Frente à Morte; Adolescente; Jovem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar de qué modo los adolescentes se relacionan con la muerte. **Método:** estudio transversal, cualitativo, con ocho adolescentes de secundaria, estadual, en Paraná, en octubre de 2013. Se utilizó como instrumento de recolección la entrevista semi-estructurada, cuyos datos fueron analizados sobre la óptica del Análisis Textual Discursivo en categorías de análisis como Inmortalidad; Muerte como Continuidad de la Vida; Riesgo de Muerte e Irreversibilidad de la Muerte. El proyecto de investigación fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación, Parecer nº 035/2013. **Resultado:** los adolescentes piensan en la propia muerte; tienen conocimiento de sus causas; ya perdieron a alguien significativo; y opinan que el asunto muerte deba ser discutido en la escuela. Por lo tanto, piensan en la muerte, poseen incertezas, evitan hablar sobre el asunto, sufren, pero no demuestran este sentimiento a los adultos, compartiendo el dolor entre sí. **Conclusión:** los adolescentes demuestran temor por la muerte de entes queridos y sienten el dolor de la separación. **Descriptores:** Actitud Frente a la Muerte; Adolescente; Jóven.

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INTRODUCTION

Death has been faced in different ways over time. The way a particular society faces death and its dead people plays a decisive role in the construction and maintenance of its own collective identity, since this integration with death is one of the most important elements in the formation of a cultural tradition.¹

In the past, people understood death as a natural, every day, domestic and family event.² However, from the second half of the twentieth century, death is no longer family and domestic becoming a forbidden issue. Implicitly, society attempts to deny death, which gradually becomes a taboo.³

Medicine in contemporary society does everything to delay death and, in many cases, it denies to the individual the knowledge that will die, as living forever would be eternal to human beings.⁴

Death does not scare man, but the lack of knowledge about it and one of the biggest challenges of the men is to learn how to deal with that reality.^{3,5}

Man is the only human being who is aware of his own death and the only one to think about to prepare for it. The biggest problem of this preparation is that in many cases, people begin to consider the idea of death only with the arrival of old age.⁶

It is important to highlight that adolescence is a time of rewards, but also many losses. Among them, there are the three mourning: mourning for losing child's body, mourning for the lost children's identity and mourning for childhood parents also lost.⁷

Adolescent intellectual maturity allows them to have the idea about death, but the fear of dying or losing someone important produces intense suffering. According to the author, the adolescent denies this fact challenging death, placing at risk all the time, trying to prove his omnipotence in with the death and masking his real weakness.⁷

Since adolescence is a time of construction of identity⁸, it is necessary to approach the topic of death, especially because this stage of development is marked by great exposure to risk situations that put life and death side by side. And also because it reflects about the fragility of men with death, making them rethink their behavior and wanting to change.

Due to the great difficulty in coping this issue by the men, it is necessary to approach the issue to map the concept of adolescents about this topic, outlining their perspectives

before the finitude. Thus, the objective of the study was elaborated:

- To analyze how adolescents relate to death.

METHOD

Qualitative and cross-sectional study, and applied nature. The qualitative method, different from the quantitative analyzes the semantic meaning of the statements responding to guiding questions such as: what? Why? How? It seeks to analyze the conceptions and perceptions of people about a particular phenomenon, thus it is called as interpretative. Qualitative research also promotes an approach to the researcher with the phenomenon to be studied.⁹

In the cross-sectional study, all measurements are made at a single time. To implement this study, the researcher must identify the question to answer, define the population to study, a sample selection method and, finally, define the phenomenon to study and methods of measurement of the variables of interest. This type of study is used to describe population characteristics taking into account their variables and distribution patterns.¹⁰ The applied research aims to provide knowledge for practical application, for the solution of specific problems¹¹

The population investigated in this study was 71 adolescents enrolled in the 3rd grade of high school. The choice of this population was because of a possible cognitive and emotional development to understand the issue, and because they had philosophy classes in their curriculum. This subject is important by having the study of problems related to human existence.

The sample were eight students, with equal representation between the two groups, according to the criteria of voluntary participation, diversity, religion and structural feasibility and time of the study.

Respondents were between sixteen to eighteen years old, two students were sixteen years old, three seventeen and three eighteen. According to gender, there were five male and three female; as skin color, there were five white, two blacks and one brown; religion: seven Catholic and one non-Catholic; marital status: eight singles; occupation: seven students and one administrative assistant; number of children: they did not have.

The study was conducted in a state school of Basic Education, which has approximately 1,110 students, with 457 of the Elementary

School, 303 of High School, both during the daytime, and 350 students of the Adolescent and Adult Education (EJA) during the evening.

Initially, the school board was contacted to request consent to the research in the school environment. Then, there were explanations to students about the goals of this research and choice of those who would be part of the sample, according to the established criteria.

Data were collected through a semi-structure interview, containing 24 questions adapted from the validated research instrument¹²; the schedule included several aspects of the topic including: facing death and close people, immortality, escape and proximity to the subject.

The students were individually interviewed and their statements were recorded and transcribed with the intention to maintain secrecy as to the identity of respondents, and the names of the students were coded.

After collecting and analyzing data, the results were shown to the participating students and their classes, from a debate addressing: the fear of death, its imminence, its divine, organic hand, the immortality of the mind, unprepared man to face the loss of someone, escape and old age. This moment aimed to provide reflection and awareness of the issue. However, students’ impressions of this time are not reported in this work, being part of another study.

To understand the reports, the Textual Analysis Discursive was contributions chosen.¹³ The authors suggest a data understanding technique to generate new understandings of

the investigated context by establishing conceptual categories.

After exhaustive reading of the interviews, categories of analysis were formulated. The obtained categories were: Immortality; Death as Continuity of Life; Risk of Death; Death Irreversibility.

Based on the questionnaire two more categories were formulated: Contact with Death; Death at School.

To ensure the confidentiality of the students’ identity who participated in the study, they were encoded by the letter E followed by numbers 1-8 which is equivalent to the number of students interviewed, E1 = student 1 and so on. The letter Q followed by numbers 1-24 indicates the number of questions in the interview, with Q1 = question 1, and so on.

In accordance with Resolution CNS 466/2012 of the National Council of Health, which regulates research with human beings¹⁴, signing the consent form was requested to the research participants and the board of the educational institution. Given the inability of the student to sign, permission from their legal guardian was asked. The research began only after review and approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Northern Paraná - Campus Luiz Meneghel under number 035/2013.

RESULTS

Here, there are the categories and units and analysis subunits as well as their respective summaries:

1st Category: Immortality - desire expressed by words or attitudes that demonstrate belief in the perpetuity of life.

Subcategory: Think about Death	
	Yes. E1, E3, E5, Q4 (Do you think the possibility of happening to you?)
Unit of themselves	<i>I think, as everyone you know, is a matter, you know, when you're born you already know that one day you will die.</i> E2, Q4
	<i>I think.</i> E4, E8, Q4
	<i>Ah no, no.</i> E6, Q4
	<i>Yes, I think.</i> E7, Q4
Summary	It is clear that 7 of the 8 respondents think of their own death.

2nd Category: Death as continuity of life - death as a possibility of continuing the fullness of life.

Subcategory: Life after death	
	[...] ah, I think it has some life on the other side, after all, so many people say they see things right, then there it has to exist. E1, Q12 (For the friends, do you believe you can help each other? How?)
Unit Passage to another life	[...] I think so, that when a person dies. it is going to a better place [...] E2, Q7 (Each person has a different way of dealing with death. When you have this experience, how did you handle that?)
	[...] you lose the person you know, you will not see it only if you die too and go to heaven or not. E8, Q8 (Why is it so hard to talk about death?)
Summary	It is inferred that according to the responses given to death, for these students, there is a sense of transposition to another realm of existence beyond death.

3rd Category: Risk of death - what has the potential to cause death.

Subcategory: Factors leading to Death	
	[...] I do not drink, I do not smoke [...] E3, E4, E7, Q21 (Do you do something to save your life?)
Unit Knowledge of Causes	[...] I do not drink, I do not smoke, I do not go out, I do not like to go out because in crowded places there is always confusion, to travel rarely, only if it is quite safely [...]. E5, Q21
	[...] in the relationship I protect me, I do not use drugs, I do not use syringe, I have never done a tattoo [...]. E6, Q21
	[...] I do not flirt with others woman ... because here ... it is dangerous [...]. E8, Q21
Summary	It is noticed that most students are aware of what can lead to death and take preventive measures.

4th Category: irreversibility of death - state of impossibility of reversal.

Subcategory: The end of everything	
Unit uncertainties	[...] there is no way of knowing how the other side is, right [...]. E1, Q8 (Why is it so hard to talk about death?)
	[...] death, you will not come back, you will die and I do not know what will happen there, after I die, it is unknown [...]. E4, Q8
Síntese	Analyzing student responses, it is clear that death is surrounded by mysteries and uncertainties concerning the final destination of man.

5th Category: Contact with death - experiences of intimate relationship with people or animals in death situation.

Subcategory: Other’s death	
	[...] my best friend died [...]. E2, Q6
	[...] when I lost my grandfather, for example, my friends helped me to enforce, because I fell. E3, Q12 (For the friends, do you believe you can help each other? How?)
Unit WHO?	[...] Father in law, father of my boyfriend and [...]. E4, Q6
	[...] my two grandparents have died [...]. E7, Q6
	[...] my grandmother died [...]. E8, Q6
Summary	It is notices that almost all students have experienced the loss of someone important.

6th Category: Death at School - approaching the subject within the school context.

Subcategory: Approaching the issue	
Unit Approach at school	<i>I don´t think so.</i> E1, Q22 (Do you think the school should address the subject of death?)
	<i>I do.</i> E2, Q22
	<i>Ah! Talk a little.</i> E3, Q22
	<i>I think so.</i> E4, E6, Q22
	<i>Yes.</i> E5, Q22
	<i>Hum it should, it should.</i> E7, Q22
Unit How?	<i>Oh I do not think so.</i> E8, Q22
	[...] <i>talking, lecturing</i> [...]. E2, Q23 (If so, how? If not, why?)
	[...] <i>just playing</i> [...]. E3, Q23
	[...] <i>in addressing drugs in the beverage within the consequences leading to death</i> [...]. E4 Q23
	[...] <i>Not that death itself is, you know, but more monitoring and support to be given to another who lost a loved one</i> [...]. E5, Q23
Summary	[...] <i>they can do lectures, talk to students all this, ask them their opinions, I think this is an exchange of experiences</i> [...]. E6, Q23
	[...] <i>lectures</i> [...]. E7, Q23
	It was concluded that most of the students agree that the issue should be discussed in the school environment and that this discussion should occur from lectures and guidance.

DISCUSSION

The idea of immortality present in adolescents can be understood as a psychological defense before the death of themselves and others.⁷ Life after death is seen as compensation for leaving the earthly life with all its links, a way to keep their memory always living, it is the eminent reaffirmation of immortality.

Many adolescents understand death as continuity of life.¹⁵ As discussed previously, adolescence is a phase of human development in which the thematic life and death are not disregarded.⁶

The respondents were aware of the risks to which they are exposed and how to avoid them. However, their intense demand for different experiences and sensations are vulnerable.⁶

Although they have enough knowledge and maturity to understand the process of death and its irreversibility, adolescents have uncertainties about what will happen after death, as every human being

With the development of three main mourning, adolescents acquire have the idea of time, accepting their course, they are able to identify past events as belonging to them and recognize the concept of irreversible and natural death⁷.

According to the answers of respondents, it became clear that they have experiences related to death. They are present in all

families, regardless of race, color, social status or religious belief.

Death is an irrevocable, irrefutable and hopeless fact. All living human beings in mortal condition are subject to it, leaving the man to try to do it naturally, especially next to loved ones.

The man, in fact, in his quality of being finite, lives in a constant and continuous process of death. During this process, there are some aggravating as old age, disease, among others, that abruptly withdraw the beloved of the family life, causing immense pain and suffering to the rest of the family.⁷

It was possible to observe in this study that adolescents interviewed accept talking about all the issues surrounding death: mourning, risk factors, prevention, among others. The death itself is not commented. This position facing death confirms that it remains a taboo.

Finally, regarding to the perceptions of adolescents about death, most of them believe that the issue should be addressed at school.¹² It is understood that the school is a socio-cultural space, cognitive and affective, able to influence adolescent identity formation by multiplicity of symbolic resources and the construction of major affective ties to insert it in society.⁸

This study aimed to investigate the perception of adolescents about death. From the data obtained it was possible to define some questions about the topic. Regarding

FINAL REMARKS

death, adolescent is aware of what is death, knowing its causes, aware of the risks, but take on behalf of the experiences of different sensations. They know that everyone is subject to it, have uncertainties about the death and the process of dying, do not want to discover its mysteries, avoid talking about it with people close to them and not think about their own death because they believe it is far away.

As for the mourning, adolescents showed suffering with death, but they prefer not to expose their feelings, not sharing their pain with adults. Sometimes they find support in friends because they share the same ideas, feelings and thoughts. The demonstration of pain reveals fragility and emotional dependency. Adolescents expressed concern over the death of loved ones and fear to the possibility of separation from loved ones.

In the interview with the students, it could be realized their arrangement to talk about it, wanting to express their opinions and a great need to be heard. In some lines, they even revealed that they think of death, even only verbally, since in later reports there was contradiction to speak of immortality.

In this quick contact, all were left free to express their opinions, feelings and outbursts; were heard carefully about their fears and anxieties without decisions values.

During the study, it was realized how important the participation of a multidisciplinary team to monitor the development of these adolescents was, as also establishing dialogues, because it was clear that they have a concern with social problems such as use of alcohol, violence, delinquency and drug use. Based on their wishes, it is interesting that these issues were present in the school context.

It is noticed that greater depth studies should be implemented so that the adolescent has a vision of his death to live a life with more quality and perspective of achievements.

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