



## HEALTH AND DISEASE: PERCEPTION OF ADOLESCENTS THAT EXPERIENCED THE LUDIC AS A STRATEGY OF HEALTH EDUCATION

### SAÚDE E DOENÇA: PERCEPÇÃO DE ADOLESCENTES QUE VIVENCIARAM O LÚDICO COMO ESTRATÉGIA DE EDUCAÇÃO EM SAÚDE

### SALUD Y ENFERMEDAD: PERCEPCIÓN DE ADOLESCENTES QUE EXPERIMENTAN LO LÚDICO COMO ESTRATEGIA DE EDUCACIÓN EN SALUD

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to portray the perception of health and disease concepts meant by teens who participated in the outreach project "Ludic Health". **Method:** descriptive-exploratory study with qualitative approach conducted with 10 adolescents who participated for at least two years of the activities of the above mentioned project. Data collection was carried out in two stages: first, the adolescents were asked to shoot images that called for their impressions on "health" and "disease", and in the second stage, the adolescents participated in a focus group centered on the theme studied. For analysis of data, the technique of thematic analysis was used. **Results:** the participants have a broad meaning of health and disease concepts, coming close to the inseparable interpretation of health-disease process and relating these concepts to experiences in the project Ludic Health. **Conclusion:** adolescents may expand their view for the significance of health and disease, so that this may come close to concepts and actions of health promotion, aiming at a better quality of life. **Descriptors:** Adolescents; Nursing; Health Education.

#### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** retratar a percepção dos conceitos de saúde e doença significados por adolescentes que participaram do projeto de extensão Saúde Lúdica. **Método:** estudo descritivo-exploratório, com abordagem qualitativa, realizado com 10 adolescentes que participaram, no mínimo, dois anos das atividades do referido projeto. A coleta de dados foi realizada em duas etapas: na primeira, os adolescentes foram convidados a fotografar imagens que remetesse às suas impressões de "saúde" e "doença", e na segunda etapa, eles participaram de um grupo focal sobre a temática em estudo. Para a análise dos dados, foi utilizada a Técnica da Análise Temática. **Resultados:** os participantes apresentaram uma significação ampla dos conceitos de saúde e doença, aproximando-se da interpretação indissociável do processo saúde-doença e relacionando tais conceitos às vivências no projeto Saúde Lúdica. **Conclusão:** os adolescentes conseguem ampliar seus olhares para a significação de saúde e doença, de maneira que se aproximam de conceitos e ações de promoção da saúde, em busca de uma melhor qualidade de vida. **Descritores:** Adolescente; Enfermagem; Educação em Saúde.

#### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** retratar la percepción de los conceptos de salud y enfermedad significados por adolescentes que participaron del proyecto de extensión Salud Lúdica. **Método:** estudio descriptivo-exploratorio, con enfoque cualitativo, realizado con 10 adolescentes que participaron, en lo mínimo, dos años de las actividades del referido proyecto. La recolección de datos fue realizado en dos etapas: en la primera, los adolescentes fueron convidados a fotografiar imágenes referentes a sus impresiones de "salud" y "enfermedad", y en la segunda etapa, ellos participaron de un grupo focal sobre la temática en estudio. Para el análisis de los datos, fue utilizada la Técnica del Análisis Temático. **Resultados:** los participantes presentaron una significación amplia de los conceptos de salud y enfermedad, aproximándose de la interpretación indisoluble del proceso salud-enfermedad y relacionando tales conceptos a las vivencias en el proyecto Salud Lúdica. **Conclusión:** los adolescentes consiguen ampliar su observación para la significación de salud y enfermedad, de manera que se aproximan de conceptos y acciones de promoción de la salud, en búsqueda de una mejor calidad de vida. **Descriptor:** Adolescente; Enfermería; Educación en Salud.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), Law 8.069 of 1990, considers adolescence as the age correspondent to 12 to 18 years of age (Article 2º) and, in exceptional cases, when required by law, the statute is applicable in youths up to 21 years of age (articles 121 and 142).<sup>1</sup> The study of the universe of adolescents, despite of these definitions, shows that puberty events may occur in normal individuals of the same sex at different ages, featuring adolescence better than chronological age.<sup>2</sup>

Adolescence is marked by intense physical, psychological, behavioral and social changes. It is the transition between childhood and adulthood, where many of the characteristics or habits related to adult lifestyle are acquired and/or consolidated.<sup>3</sup> In the pursuit of individual independence, the adolescent absorbs attitudes, actions and habits from the people who are closer to them, and there is a great variety of information and advice received. Media is a powerful source of information that may exert positive and negative influences on the behavior and education of adolescents.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, at the phase of adolescence, health education may prove to be an important ally in shaping adolescent meanings of concepts on health and disease, as well as in influencing their behavior. This should, therefore, be understood as an instrument of individual and collective liberation, able to promote people's autonomy and social transformation needed to achieve a healthier society.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to health education, interest in the subject needs to come from the initiative of the educator to nourish it, with emphasis on the games that provide a "situation of gentle learning". Children use games, the ludic, to demonstrate that they have learned something new to satisfy the need to materialise their imaginary world.<sup>6</sup>

From this perspective, ludic health education has been a tactic to cope with this situation, enabling the experience of new strategies that contribute to broad and positive training on the health-disease process with a more critical perception of their family and community context, aiming to promote healthier habits and environments.<sup>7</sup>

The work in favor of adolescents' health requires vision and a systemic approach to the needs of this group. Health should be understood in its broader meaning, with its many dimensions and multiple causal factors.<sup>8</sup> In face of the above mentioned reality, the

importance of using the ludic as a tool to engage the child and bring health knowledge to their daily lives is explicit.

In this sense, the ludic methodology in education acts as facilitator of assimilation and interpretation of knowledge taught to children, turning this into a learning that will settle throughout their lives when significant in the context of the children.<sup>6</sup> Among the professions dealing with health education, nursing stands out by being actively present in the care of users. The nursing professional, while agent of the health work process, has an important role in the issue of education for the promotion and protection of health.<sup>9</sup>

The nursing course of the Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL) started in 2009 the project called Ludic Health, an outreach project that is guided through participatory observation and assessment of the needs of children. The meetings take place once a week since then, at the headquarters of the Athletic Association of the Bank of Brazil in Maceió/AL (AABB). Health education activities were developed in the following themes: Hygiene and Health, Family and Health, Environment and Health, Domestic Accident Prevention and Healthy nutrition. The work won academic awards and funding from the UFAL, and those children who were aged between six and eleven years are adolescents between eleven and fifteen years old.

## OBJECTIVE

- To portray the perception on health and disease concepts meant by adolescents who participated in the outreach project "Ludic Health".

## METHOD

Descriptive-exploratory study with qualitative approach. Data were produced in two stages: 1) each participant made 10 free shots of what they associated with health and disease, and chose two of those pictures and attributed meanings to them. In this first stage the study took place in home residences, school and places of leisure time of adolescents themselves; 2) The study was conducted at the headquarters of the Athletic Association of the Bank of Brazil (AABB) with a single focus group, where six out of the ten adolescents who participated in the first stage. Data analysis was done by Thematic Analysis Technique.

The subjects of this study were ten adolescents aged between 11 and 14 years who participated for at least two years in the activities of health education carried out by

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Nursing students of the Federal University of Alagoas, with the project Ludic Health from September 2009 through May 2013.

The results of this study are presented and discussed in three thematic lines constructed from the testimonies of adolescents during individual interviews and during the meetings of the focus group. *The categories are: Portrait of Health from the perspective of the adolescent: be happy! Health promotion and quality of life behind the lens and Zoom: the importance that adolescents attach to education in ludic health.*

In accordance to the laws governing research with human subjects, included in Resolution number 466/12 CNS, the research was initiated only after the project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ◆ Portrait of Health from the perspective of the adolescent: be happy!

The concept of health<sup>5</sup> has been modified according to human life, but above all, it is a quality inherent to man and must be understood in its various meanings, and should be no longer reduced to "the absence of disease", simply. The healthy state encompasses many aspects such as prevention, promotion and protection of the health.<sup>4</sup>

The adolescents took photographs that were related to health and they attributed terms such as "Be happy" "Feel happy" and "Feel good" as the meaning of health. The photographs linked to health showed elements that adolescents said to bring the feeling of pleasure and well-being, such as tree tops with blue sky, the pet dog, a photo with the best friend, or the football teacher.

Teenagers associated concepts that are a set of actions that promote health and improve the conditions that cause well-being, actions responsible for promoting health.<sup>10</sup> One of the photographs taken by a boy, the adolescent A03, recalled to mind the game of "marbles" in the house sidewalk, which is, in his opinion, a reminder of what was healthy in his childhood: a game. One of the teenagers stood as follows:

*I am smiling. That is health. It is to be happy. (A01)*

The word health, seen as a term, is complex and can present different definitions and interpretations.<sup>4</sup> Only one adolescent took the picture with something related to the disease, the image of a container that residents of her street use to put garbage to be collected:

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*If we do not throw trash away, in the trash, that is disease! Because trash cause diseases, for example if we are close the trash we can get a disease, rat disease, that tetanus too! To be near the trash is bad to health. It is health and disease. (A05)*

The other adolescents took pictures that they reported to be health-related only, and in the context, explained associated elements that related also to disease. During the focus group meetings, the meanings attributed to the disease during the time to talk about the photographs were trash, violence, insecurity and poor nutrition. The concepts of health and disease are not words with opposite and completely separated meanings for these adolescents, according to their speeches, as can be seen in the following passages in which adolescents report:

*I myself, I just know that health and disease walk close together. (A02)*

*I'm aware that I am not to run as I used to [...] It's not quite disease, but it is not good for health [...]. (A05)*

Despite not knowing the term health-disease process, they make a broad approach of their thoughts to the concept. For many teenagers, health would still be "the absence of disease". However, in this study, adolescents attributed meaning to health and disease as interrelated phenomena that are part of their daily lives and define their quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

### ◆ Promoting health and quality of life: behind the lens

Adolescence is characterized by a period of physical, psychological and social vulnerability with complex changes in the process of human development.<sup>2</sup> The promotion of health and quality of life are essential in the lives of adolescents.

When asked what is the promotion of health, they responded that, in the project they learned that the quality of life promotes health:

*We should go more often to the doctor in the unit, even not being ill, exercise [...] all of these things [...]. (A01)*

They believe that the activities that make them feel good correspond to health promotion. According to Buss<sup>10</sup>, health promotion is the search for dignified and appropriate living conditions with changes of individual processes that can promote the quality of life and health.

*I pack, I like dressing up, it makes me feel good. It's for my quality of life. (A07)*

Terms associated with healthy quality of life appeared numerous times, terms such as "Nature is health", "Cleanliness is health",

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"Friendship is health" and "Exercise is health". All these, which were themes of activities worked during the Ludic Health project and that, during discussion of the focus group, they assigned or remembered some activity with the group when they were children and related it to the spoken term:

*Quality of life is to prevent oneself, eat well, vegetables, fruit [...]. (A02)*

These teens already have a wide view of the concepts of health and disease, considering contextual factors, but when they talk about health promotion, many still reduce disease prevention and individual actions to a good nutrition or physical activity for the well-being and promoting health<sup>11</sup>.

The adolescents relate the terms quality of life to their social relations. Regarding the friendship, in the opinion of these adolescents, their reports show that friends influence the quality of life of adolescents and they exalt love to be linked with such relationships.<sup>11</sup> The same can be observed in the speech of one of the adolescents who participated in the focus groups in this study:

*The friendship. We are friends since childhood, and it makes loads of good! It is good for the heart, to have someone to share things. To be happy. It's healthy. (A07)*

*Be happy, friend, good family, no drinking [...] eat well. I try. (A04)*

The perception of quality of life that adolescents have is influenced by the consumerist logic of capitalism where the lifestyle voted as healthy makes money the key for the acquisition of healthy lifestyle habits.<sup>11</sup> The same can be seen during the speech of the adolescent A02 during the discussions of the focus group, when asked about what it is, in their opinion, to live with quality of life.

*Life with quality [...] I want to enrol the young apprentice next year to study, help at home and pay the gym [...]. (A02)*

#### ◆ **Zoom: the importance that adolescents attach to education in ludic health**

Education needs to be understood as an instrument of individual and collective liberation, in order to promote the autonomy of persons and to promote social transformation.<sup>12</sup> Health education permeates the activities of all health professionals, and it is an essential element in the work process of nursing professionals<sup>5</sup>. The ludic helps the academic student in the handling of the subject, promoting measures of intervention for the reality of situational diagnosis of the worked area.<sup>13</sup> With health education,

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subjects are able to reframe their knowledge and with this exercise self-care with autonomy.<sup>14</sup>

*I'll take on louse, on brushing your teeth, take care of nature, mainly. That's what I remember most. It is playing that we were learning better (A07)*

While focused not only on what they understand about health and disease, but also on the influence that they believe the Ludic Health project has on their understanding of these two terms, the adolescents assigned to the project their knowledge on exercise, personal hygiene, care with the waste and about their life projects:

*We learned health and we use to speak much about the future, to be good.(A04)*

It was observed in a group of adolescents followed by a NGO that the coexistence between the participants strengthens the ties so that they begin to see themselves as a group or a social network.<sup>15</sup>

Adolescents reported that only in the project they had the opportunity to learn certain subjects such as respect people with disabilities, and a girl exemplified with what she thinks about the quality of life of these people:

*The person that has no arms, has less quality of life, also [...] suffers more. (A06)*

This speech was released during the focus group associated with the memory of the activity on respect for people with disabilities where the movie "Finding Nemo" was seen, in 2010. This is a perception that the adolescent clearly associates to the content worked in the ludic health project, since teenagers are generally healthy and do not have physical limitations and do not usually make references to it if not worked or experienced before.<sup>15</sup>

Most adolescents acknowledged that the project was important to activities worked on citizenship, the importance of studying and also the importance of respecting the family. Relevant issues in childhood are often carried through adolescence and through the rest of the life<sup>7</sup> and issues about family are striking, as these still represent a support for life, even when that coexistence is not a positive experience for the teenager.<sup>2</sup>

The teenager who feels desire to seek the health service needs first feel like an active integrant of the process.<sup>4</sup> This has always been one of the main objectives of the project Ludic Health, to promote health in order to promote health so that those involved were subjects that actively participate in the process. The speech of female adolescent was:

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*We should go more often to the doctor in the health unit, even not being ill, make exercises, several things. (A01)*

Speeches about the importance of the social environment for their health emerged: *"Trash in the right place, not having sewage, our house, if it was easier to get there, to get there by a street, to be possible to take the bus". (A05)*

The term health promotion has been used precisely for this purpose, to represent a political and social focus around the health-disease process.<sup>10</sup> The strategies are critical to achieve meaningful goals aimed at improving the quality of life of adolescents with a view to professionals committed with the social promotion of health. A teenager still put that her understanding on health and disease has been modified during the project:

*I myself, I only know that health and disease go one close to the other due to the project, that the aunt was always saying that health is not when we are not sick, or disease is when there is no health. (A04)*

Health education in a playful manner has proven to be a transforming tool, helping to build ideas and concepts, turning habits into attitudes that reveal this new way of thinking.<sup>5</sup> It is possible to see that the participatory methodology arouses the interest and attention of adolescents<sup>16</sup>, they identify this type of methodology by the word "game". Health professionals have great importance and influence over the health of adolescents. The perception that teens have on health directly influences their actions.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study made possible to portray the perception of health and disease concepts meant by adolescents who participated in the ludic health project. These attach terms like welfare and happiness to the term health and, in turn, pollution and waste to the term disease. They do not rule out the meanings of health and disease, relate meanings and make approximations to the concept of health promotion.

The potential of the ludic as a health education strategy that contributes to the promotion of adolescent health was evident. Adolescents have a wide view on these issues, despite that the biomedical model still has an impact on their concepts and attribute experiences and knowledge related to health care and the terms health and disease to the Ludic Health project.

It can be stated that nursing students and teachers exercised an important role in involving children who are now teenagers to

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empower them with the awakening to concepts of quality of life, health promotion, and health-disease process. Health education is inherent to nursing and studying the effectiveness of methods that enhance this practice, such as the playfulness, is of great contribution to the work of nurses.

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