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SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON HEALTHY HABITS REPRESENTAÇÕES SOCIAIS DE ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS SOBRE HÁBITOS SAUDÁVEIS REPRESENTACIONES SOCIALES DE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS SOBRE HÁBITOS SALUDABLES

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ARSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the representational structure of university students on the healthy subject. *Method:* a quantitative, descriptive and exploratory study, based on the Theory of Social Representations, based on the structural approach or central core theory, performed with 100 university students. For the data collection, the technique of free evocations of words was used, the term inducer being the word healthy. The analysis was performed with the help of EVOC software. *Results:* it was evidenced that the healthy theme has the words physical activity, fruits, healthy eating, vegetables, water, sleeping and vegetables. *Conclusion:* the study allowed the understanding of the structure of the representations in question, demonstrating a pertinent objectification of the social actors on the healthy theme. *Descriptors:* Social Psyschology; Life Style; Health Behavior.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a estrutura representacional de estudantes universitários sobre o tema saudável. *Método*: estudo quantiqualitativo, descritivo e exploratório, fundamentado na Teoria das Representações Sociais, a partir da abordagem estrutural ou teoria do núcleo central, realizado com 100 estudantes universitários. Para a coleta de dados, utilizou-se a técnica de evocações livres de palavras, sendo o termo indutor a palavra saudável. A análise foi realizada com o auxílio do software EVOC. *Resultados*: evidenciou-se que o tema saudável tem as palavras *atividade física*, *frutas*, *alimentação saudável*, *verduras*, *água*, *dormir e legumes*. *Conclusão*: o estudo permitiu a compreensão da estrutura das representações em questão demonstrando uma objetivação pertinente dos atores sociais sobre o tema saudável. *Descritores*: Psicologia Social; Estilo de Vida; Comportamentos Saudáveis.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la estructura representacional de estudiantes universitarios sobre el tema saludable. *Método:* estudio cualitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio, fundamentado en la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales, a partir del abordaje estructural o teoría del núcleo central, realizado con 100 estudiantes universitarios. Para la recolección de datos, se utilizó la técnica de evocaciones libres de palabras, siendo el término inductor la palabra sana. El análisis fue realizado con la ayuda del software EVOC. *Resultados:* se evidenció que el tema sano tiene las palabras actividad física, frutas, alimentación saludable, verduras, agua, dormir y legumbres. *Conclusión:* el estudio permitió la comprensión de la estructura de las representaciones en cuestión, demostrando una objetivación pertinente de los actores sociales sobre el tema saludable. *Descriptores:* Psicología Social; Estilo de Vida; Conductas Saludables.

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INTRODUCTION

The healthy subject is not limited only to the absence of diseases, but it is based on the assumption that the health conception of each social actor is associated with the sociocultural issues and the meanings each person attributes to his life. Thus, health is a complex subject that runs through the physical, mental and social spheres. In this context, common biopsychosocial instability, during the transition between adolescence and young adults, can interfere with the health of the subject. On the other hand, university students, besides being in this transition, are exposed to the environment that provides new social relations and changes of behavior, which can favor vulnerability and health risks.2

The most prevalent unhealthy behaviors among individuals are inadequate eating habits, physical inactivity, alcohol consumption, and smoking. The adoption of healthy habits, such as balanced diet and physical activity, are important for the prevention of Chronic Noncommunicable Diseases (CNCDs).³

Knowledge about healthy habits does not necessarily predict in such practices. A study carried out with university students about the importance of caring for oneself relates the mastery over the subject, although they can not maintain these positive habits in health maintenance and some report that the lack of time contributes to the adoption of unhealthy habits.⁴

An adolescent study on the representational content of being healthy, through the Content Analysis Technique has demonstrated that the subjects in question have the perception of what it is to be healthy. In this perspective, it is important to understand the symbolic representations that university students have about healthy habits. Understanding the elements considered healthy is important to expand the knowledge and lifestyle consequently, reflection of the same for the health of the individual.

OBJECTIVE

• To analyze the representational structure of university students about healthy habits.

METHOD

Quantiqualitative study, based on the Theory of Social Representations (TSR), from the structural approach or central core theory. The TSR proposed by Moscovici over Social representations of university students...

the years, has been adding minor theories, such as central core theory, which has contributed to the conceptual, theoretical and methodological refinement of the study of social representation.⁶

The theory of the central nucleus considers that the organization of a social representation has peculiar characteristic, however, all representation is organized around a central nucleus, which brings elements that provide representation its meaning.⁷

Thus, the social actors of this study were 100 participants between 18 and 39 years old, being 58 women and 42 men, who were students of the State University of the Southwest of Bahia (UESB). The collection period was from September to November 2014.

The technique of free word evocations was used to collect data, using, as an inductor term, the word healthy. Participants were asked, to write the first four words or expressions that came to mind in relation to the stimulus received.⁸

The words or expressions from the evocation technique were typed and arranged in alphabetical order in Microsoft Office Word, version 2013, creating, the dictionary of words, which guided the categorization of evocations by grouping words with the same semantic value. After the word dictionary was created, the data was organized in Microsoft Office Excel, version 2013, constituting an analysis corpus.

The corpus of analysis was directed to the EVOC Software, version 2005, in order to organize the terms produced according to the hierarchy underlying the frequency and the mean order of recall (MOR). The reports generated by the program allowed the construction of the framework proposed by Vergés, the framework of four houses.⁹

The frame picture houses, as the name already supposes, is formed by four quadrants in which the terms are arranged. In the first quadrant, in the upper left quadrant, are organized the most frequent terms, usually the central nucleus of the representation under study. In the upper right quadrant are the terms termed the first periphery, so the second periphery is the terms inserted in the lower right quadrant. And the contrast elements are arranged in the lower right quadrant.⁶

Regarding ethical questions in the research, this study obeyed the legal precepts contained in Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council⁹. Therefore, the

research project was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the State University of the Southwest of Bahia (UESB), under Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Assessment (CAAE) of 13899513.5.0000.0055 and favorable opinion of n° 274,122.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When analyzing the corpus formed by the evocations of the study participants, in response to the term healthy inducer, 300 words were revealed, being 193 equal and 107

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different. The average order of evocations, called rang, was 2.50, while the mean frequency was 11, and the minimum, was five.

In the framework of four houses, constructed by the Evoc software, are arranged the frequency of appearance and the natural order of evocations. This schematic construction allows to observe the contents of the social representation, as well as the structure and the hierarchy of its elements, as described in figure 1.

| Central elements | | | First periphery elements | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------|--|
| Average frequency > =11 / OME < 2,5 | | | Average frequency >= 11/ OME >= 2,5 | | | |
| | Freq | Rang | | Freq | Rang | |
| Physical activity | 35 | 1.74 | | | | |
| Fruits | 27 | 1.70 | | | | |
| Healthy eating | 21 | 1.48 | | | | |
| Vegetables | 21 | 1.61 | | | | |
| Water | 15 | 2.33 | | | | |
| To sleep | 12 | 2.08 | | | | |
| Vegetables | 11 | 1.81 | | | | |
| Contrast elements | | | Second periphery elements | | | |
| Average frequency < 11/ OME < 2,5 | | | Average frequency | Average frequency < 11/ OME >= 2,5 | | |
| | Freq | Rang | | Freq | Rang | |
| Friends | 10 | 2.30 | Happiness | 6 | 2.50 | |
| Welfare | 9 | 2.00 | Recreation | 6 | 2.50 | |
| Love | 5 | 1.80 | Juice | 5 | 2.60 | |
| Laugh | 5 | 1.80 | | | | |
| Salad | 5 | 1.80 | | | | |

Figure 1. Four houses of adult evocations to the healthy inducer term. Jequié (BA), Brazil, 2014.

The elements arranged in the upper left quadrant are considered the central nucleus of the representation, since they were those that appeared with higher frequencies in the evocations. These elements characterize what is more concordant and stable of representation, thus less sensitive to changes in relation to the external context or the daily practices of subjects.¹¹

In the central core of the representation of healthy, the words: physical activity, fruits, healthy food, vegetables, water, sleeping and vegetables are evident. It should be noted that not only food-related issues appear in this quadrant (fruits, healthy food, vegetables, water and vegetables) but also those related to lifestyle in general (physical activity, healthy eating and sleeping).

Prevention of diseases resulting from inadequate eating habits has been at the heart of the dietary guidelines. The consumption of vegetables, vegetables and fruits has been shown to be important for the prevention of CNCD due to the presence of nutrients essential for the physiological functions of the organism.¹²

Physical activity is at the core of the social representations of university students in this study and is an important mechanism for healthy living, as it works to promote health and prevent disease. On the other hand,

physical inactivity increases the risk for the onset of CNCD and, in addition, it decreases the life expectancy.

Still in the central nucleus, is evidenced the word sleep. The quality of sleep impacts directly on the health of the individual. A study carried out with university students emphasized the poor sleep quality of these subjects and the importance of inserting them socially into health education actions in order to restore healthy sleep.¹⁴

In the second periphery, the words happiness was the most evoked. The TSR was used in a study with university students in order to understand health, thus, the word happiness was also found in the representations. Happiness is related to the healthy body in an integral way, extrapolating from the physical and emotional aspects.¹⁵

The word friends was the most relevant in the elements of contrast, which highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships in the lives of the social actors in question, being fundamental for health in general. Friendship has been considered an important factor in the social and emotional life of university students, being a means of minimizing homesickness, insecurity and loneliness. ¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Data analysis allowed identifying the words physical activity, fruits, healthy food, vegetables, water, sleeping and vegetables as the likely central elements of social representations of college students about the healthy subject. Such elements can be used for the meanings of the healthy attitudes of the social actors in question.

In addition, the results found in this study allow us to affirm that the university students, participants of the research, present a pertinent objectification about the healthy subject, since it brings fundamental elements for the promotion of health and prevention of diseases.

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