

THE PERCEPTION OF ADOLESCENTS ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS IN THE FAMILY CONTEXT

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The consumption of alcohol and other drugs is increasingly frequent among adolescents. The study aimed to identify the perception of adolescents about the consumption of alcohol and other drugs within the family. In this qualitative study, focus groups were used to collect data. The five collaborators, between 12 and 15 years old, attended a social service center affiliated with a higher education institution in a city in the Médio Vale do Paraíba Paulista. The reports expressed the adolescents' perception, its contradictions and feelings on the theme and this perception was based on family members' habits.

Descriptors: Alcoholism; Adolescent; Pharmaceutical Preparations; Family; Public Policies.

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A PERCEPÇÃO DOS ADOLESCENTES ACERCA DO ÁLCOOL E OUTRAS DROGAS NO CONTEXTO FAMILIAR

O consumo de álcool e outras drogas é cada vez mais frequente entre adolescentes. O estudo objetivou identificar a percepção dos adolescentes acerca do consumo de álcool e outras drogas no âmbito familiar. Neste estudo qualitativo empregou-se o grupo focal para a coleta de dados. Os cinco colaboradores, com idade entre 12 e 15 anos, frequentavam um centro de assistência social, vinculado a uma instituição de ensino superior, de um município do Médio Vale do Paraíba Paulista. Os relatos expressaram a percepção dos adolescentes, suas contradições e sentimentos em relação ao tema e essa percepção pautou-se em hábitos dos familiares.

Descritores: Alcoolismo; Adolescente; Preparações Farmacêuticas; Família; Políticas Públicas.

LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS ADOLESCENTES SOBRE EL ALCOHOL Y OTRAS DROGAS EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA FAMILIA

El consumo de alcohol y otras drogas es cada vez más común entre los adolescentes. El objetivo del estudio fue identificar las percepciones de los adolescentes sobre el alcohol y otras drogas en la familia. En ese estudio cualitativo, grupos focales fueron usados para recoger los datos. Los cinco empleados de entre 12 y 15 años eran clientes de un centro de servicios sociales vinculado a una institución de educación superior en un municipio en el Valle Medio del Paraíba Paulista. Los informes expresaron la percepción de los adolescentes, sus contradicciones y sentimientos sobre el tema y esta percepción se basaba en los hábitos de los miembros de la familia.

Descriptorios: Alcoholismo; Adolescente; Preparaciones Farmacéuticas; Familia; Políticas Públicas.

Introduction

Interest on the theme – the perception of teenagers regarding alcohol and other drugs – originated from an initiative of university extension at the School for the Application of Elementary and High Schools, both linked to the sponsoring Institutions, called Santa Teresa Institutes, from a Salesian Teaching Network, located in a city located in the Paraíba Valley in the State of São Paulo. The institutional articulation sought to intervene in the educational process of the students approaching several techniques, among them, alcohol and other drugs.

Therefore, the authors elected the theme to work at the Application School with teenagers, seen that, over the last decades, the consumption of psychoactive substances became a matter of public healthcare, when from occasional

becomes physical and chemical dependency. The abusive consumption happens with the following variables: diversity and viability of acquisition, which results in even higher numbers of users, among them teenagers and young adults, according to recent studies⁽¹⁾.

The use of alcohol and other drugs was slowly been disseminated into all social classes, becoming a problem of great complexity and diversity in the fields of economics, politics, culture and healthcare, and the growing abusive consumption of these substances causes the families, as primary education givers, the challenge of providing their own guidance and fight the propagation, even been a private institution passive of several arrangements in this post-modern world, it still has the function of primary

socialization of children and teenagers⁽²⁻³⁾.

The family, which has the mission of preservation of the species, feeding, protecting, besides providing their teenagers with condition for acquiring a personal identity, has developed, throughout time, diverse duties of transmission of ethical, aesthetic, religious and cultural values, and the family must fulfill a role of transmitting habits, customs, ideas, values and patterns of society behavior⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾.

The family can protect the child from social influences until a certain period in time, but not in its totality, proving that the socio-cultural records are fundamental in the formation of the subject⁽⁶⁾. Therefore, the family and socio-cultural institutions must work together for the formation of the "me" of the subject, they may be allies or clash with each other. When the family and society cannot help each other in a successful elaboration, they can face possible situations of violence⁽⁷⁾.

Although the attention of the teenager is turned to social life, centered in the peer group and friends, to understand what they think, it is necessary to insert them into a family and socio-cultural context, since the family integrated in culture provide the basis for their development⁽⁸⁾.

Facing this scenario, questions emerge: when the initial contact and/or consumption happen inside their own family environment? What is on the teenagers mind? What is his perception regarding alcohol and drugs in this situation? To know and analyze the perception of teenagers facing the issue presented is of high social relevance, once the teenagers comes in contact with psychoactive substances in his own family circle, while a being that is going through a phase personality consolidation, is not receiving a clear and coherent formation, since this domestic experience is clashing with the education he gets in school, and even with said values recognized as correct and healthy by society, but also, by the World Health Organization. Therefore, the present study had as objective to aggregate knowledge for the elaboration of strategies in the early diagnosis and intervention among teenagers, in the fight against chemical substance dependency.

The study had the objective of understanding the perception of teenagers regarding alcohol and other drugs in the family circle.

Material and Methods

The present study is descriptive and empirical of a qualitative nature.

The participants of the study were five teenagers, from 12 to 15 years old, attending a social assistance center, maintained by a university in a city located at the Paraíba Valley, State of São Paulo. The number of participants was established by answer saturation, for being a qualitative research.

The inclusion criteria were: be between the ages of 12 and 15, consent form signed by an informed responsible party and attend the mentioned assistance center, as a regular attendee.

Initially, the Institution was contacted for formal authorization for participating in the study. The legal representative received a letter with the necessary explanations regarding the research and then signed the consent form - TCLE. Then, the work was submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Teresa D'Ávila Integrated Schools, under Protocol n°52/2008. The same procedure was made with the parties responsible for the participants, will all the requirements from Resolution n°196/96 were abided, of the National Health Council. The visits for data collection were scheduled in advance, by phone, at a time and date set by the Institution and convenient to the participants. The data was collected by one of the authors and six students from the ninth period of elementary school, participants of the Application School of the Santa Teresa Institute, previously approached.

For the data collection we used the qualitative technique of focal groups, in which the results seeks the group discussion. This method enables the analysis of the perceptions in an immediate reality, seeking the meaning and conjectures of the phenomena. They are proper for studies searching the understanding of attitudes, needs and feelings. In this technique, the most important is the interaction that is established among the collaborators⁽¹⁾.

In this study, the facilitator of the discussion in the focal group was one of the authors, in research activity in the capacity of scientific initiation. In the perspective of the focal group, the facilitator is the one that establishes and promotes the discussion, but does not conduct a group interview. Therefore, the role of the facilitator is to promote the participation of everyone, avoiding the dispersion of the discussion's objectives and the monopolization by some of the collaborators.

A total of three group meetings took place to discuss the issue of alcohol and other drugs in the family context, with duration of approximately 40 minutes each, during the months of April and June of 2009.

All the narratives and discussions were taped, transcribed and transcribed⁽⁸⁾. In order to preserve the identity of the collaborators, the authors opted to use only their initials.

A non-structured instrument with five questions guided the approached issues in the focal group meetings. The questions were led by the triad: What? What for? Why? Asking the collaborators to exemplify their ideas and try to deepen the discussion, in order to clarify their speech.

The analysis from the results obtained in the focal groups was made under a view of the phenomenological philosophical referential that seeks the description of reality, of living and the existing experience⁽⁹⁾.

According to the theoretical referential, the authors considered the words repeatedly used by the collaborators, the context in which the information was obtained, agreements between the collaborators' opinions, answers given based on the more relevant personal experiences than the vague impressions, main ideas, behaviors, gestures, reactions, feelings, values of a pedagogical, ideological and ethical nature, prejudices, difficulty in understanding

the questions asked, enthusiasms, and finally, difficulty in facing challenges, taking advantage of the venue for freedom of expression.

Results and Discussion

First meeting: “understanding the meanings”

The objective of the first contact was to investigate the meanings and perceptions related to the abusive use of alcohol and other drugs, in the family environment. For such, the technique known as brainstorming (explosion of ideas) was used motivated by the question: what is the first thing that comes to mind when we mention alcohol and other drugs?

According to the answers, the authors observed some conceptions that showed the collaborators’ knowledge about the objective of study, attributing different meanings, as described below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Perception of the teenagers regarding the meaning of alcohol and other drugs

Category of analysis	Collaborators
Understanding the meanings	Alcohol and drugs are the same, they are drugs... but, even knowing that many people use them (JB)
	Both are bad, but is also a way to be uninhibited, depending on who uses it (MR)
	They are destroyers of life and family (MT)
	They are things that are very close to every human being, that can be bad or not, you have to know how to use it (RS)
	It is something very bad, causes addiction and pain (BP)
	I have drank and smoked, but not to be depending on this (JB)
	The problem is that you can't tell if you are going to become addicted later (MR)
	If it was good, it wouldn't be called drugs (MT)
	Most people get in trouble, so I rather not take the chance (RS) There are better things in life. You can be happy without it, but you have to be strong to resist the temptations (BP)

Although having some difficulty in expressing theoretically the meaning of something present, lived in their everyday life, it was perceived that the collaborators defined drugs as something between “the bad and the forbidden”, but it could also be something good or not cause any harm.

When two of the collaborators reported that alcohol and other drugs could cause disinhibition, could cause harm depending on how you used it, we noticed that these elements are a part of their family and social environment, and they are already making up their minds regarding the relation the adults living with them have. Therefore, drinking socially can provide the person a pleasant moment of relaxation, disinhibition, as long as you know how to use it.

Second meeting: “how to live with the alcohol and drugs at home reality”

The question that set apart the second meeting was: - what do you think about the consumption of alcohol and other drugs by family members or head of the families?

The reported showed different perceptions regarding

the issue, in the family environment, attributing values like more freedom for men and greater control to the women, expressed in Figure 2 below.

The statements revealed that it was the addiction of a

Figure 2 – Presentation of the perceptions of teenagers in relation to the existence of alcohol and other drugs in the family and among friends

Category of analysis	Collaborators
Living with the reality of alcohol and drugs in the family and among friends	If the parents want to use alcohol and/or other drugs, they can't forbid their children (JB)
	I have already drank at home with my parents, but my mom would get upset, wants to forbid it, but it is worse, what cannot happen is to become addicted, like many parents out there (MR)
	My dad gave me a drink to taste, but my mom said if I keep doing it, I would end up like my dad, and to be a dad like that, better not be (MT)
	It is like the saying: do as I say not as I do. But that is not fare. Young people think: if it's not good, then why my dad does it? (RS)
	It is horrible having this at home, it messes everyone's life and it does not seem like family (BP)
	My cousin was a good guy, but did not come out well. My aunt and my mother were worried sick, but do not talk about it, they just say it is bad (JB)
	My dad is the worst, I think, but at home we pretend it is normal so we don't make the situation worse (MT)
	Maybe the world would be a better place if we didn't lose people this way and talked openly (RS)
	The family suffers because of one person, my father causes many problems, besides the shame, my siblings and I suffer, what can you do (BP)
	Several friends are right in the middle of it, and sometimes is upsetting thinking about it, that is why I rather not think about it, most of the time (MR)

close relative, for example, the father or cousin that made the issue part of the household’s routine, but always in an obscured and secretive manner, as discussed before.

Third meeting: “how I see myself in this context”

In the third and last meeting, a synthesis was made with the collaborators of the two previous meetings and their objectives. It was also requested that they made a final evaluation orally, also considering, the perceived feelings and emotions, and what the focal group meetings represented to each one (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Presentation of the teenagers’ perception on how they see themselves facing the issue of alcohol and drugs

Category of analysis	Collaborators
How does the teenagers see themselves in the context of alcohol and other drugs	I know I have had my experiences with alcohol, but I don't want to take this to my family, when I have one, it is not nice, you lose all credibility with you children (JB)
	I don't know if my family will be always straight, sometime I am not, but I want the best for them, when it happens (MR)
	I'll be everything I wanted my dad to be, but isn't (MT)
	Don't know about tomorrow, but I know I try to do things right today for the future (RS)
	Our parents make mistakes and we suffer for it, if we do the same thing, our children will suffer like us (BP)

In their narratives contained the feelings and emotions from a view “within themselves” (authors’ sidebar), which expressed the expectations of a near future, imagining their lives as possible parents of families, inserted in the context of alcohol and other drugs.

Discussion

The speeches posted above express that the improper use of alcoholic beverages is considered a serious public healthcare problem, the use can be a destroyer of lives and family. On the other hand, in a vulnerable social situation the person can be drawn to the pleasant effects of drinking, and have higher probability of addiction, specially if the person does not have enough information⁽²⁾.

The idea that alcohol can be harmless comes from the certainty that been a psychoactive drug, it can be consumed by the person with no problem. However, it can lead to physical and chemical addiction depending on the quantity and frequency of consumption, causing many serious consequences, organic as well as psychological and social, making it as harmful as the other drugs considered stronger⁽³⁾.

In the first meeting, the facilitator of the focal group, like the other researchers, brought small texts or phrases that approached the concepts of alcohol and other drugs – object of this study – as strategies to enable and increment the debate.

The differences of opinions in the teenagers’ speeches confirmed that the perception is an autonomous unit and universal entity of every human being, and depend on the subjective space and cultural context.

During the teenagers’ speeches, when they were referring to the defining elements like: ethnic origin, family history, stage in the cycle of life where the gender relations happen, established in the universe they live in, for the process of molding the subjectivity of the I, are extremely important in forming the concepts that will define the posture of these teenagers facing life⁽⁴⁾.

In their speeches, the teenagers revealed experiences of people close to them who use psychoactive substances and expressed their perception regarding the issue. Even been in the 21st century, it is observed that discussing the issue brings negative feelings as if it was forbidden to talk about it, since it brings to the surface non-positive experiences, therefore, it is preferable to steer away, repudiate, making the dialogue about it at many times a “taboo” (authors’ sidebar) by their own family.

In synthesis, these arguments can be clustered as relief, showing that there is little or no dialogue about it in the family. The issue is usually approach more by the mothers, many times, they speak about drugs with their child as if it was a fantasy, as an alert or prohibition, which also happens a lot in issues regarding sexuality⁽⁵⁾.

Therefore, the cultural construction for the issue of alcohol and other drugs in the family environment is extremely important, since many studies reveal the influence in the parents’ attitude on their children, the higher consumption of alcohol and history of alcoholism

among teens happens when there is a previous family history on alcohol abuse. Thus, children of alcoholic parents present more behavioral problems when compared to children from parents who are abstinent of alcohol. This suggests that the parents’ consumption of alcohol can be a risk factor for the development of their children’s addiction⁽⁶⁻⁷⁾.

According to the reports, we detected that the use of alcoholic beverages starts early, between the beginning and mid-adolescence. Normally it starts with a group of friends or even at home, since many teenagers try alcohol during infancy, offered by parents during meals, as described before. To avoid this from happening, it is necessary that even more resources be applied in order to minimize this serious public health care problem⁽¹⁰⁾.

It is visible that the experimentation of alcoholic beverages with the family and the later use with friends seems to be incorporated to the adult behavior. On the other hand, another study has shown that families that are regular consumers of alcoholic beverages, specially the ones with a medium or high alcoholic content, the teenagers did not experiment alcohol with the family. A possible explanation for this fact is that for the family, beverages with high alcohol content might not be suitable for the experimentation of children and teenagers. Since members of these families abuse alcohol, the teenagers do not drink with them for not been able to consume the same time of beverage and the same quantity as the adults. These families have the tendency of intolerance to drunkenness among their teens. Therefore, the families contradict themselves on the rules imposed by them⁽¹¹⁾. In this research, it was on the indirect experiences that the teens formed their perceptions regarding the issue.

Some studies affirm that when the rules imposed by the parents regarding the consumption of alcohol and other drugs are clear, they reach an elevated degree of efficiency in the prevention of alcoholism. On the other hand, parents who do not express rules regarding alcohol have the propensity of having children drinking abusively. The permissiveness or the interest of the parents in the consumption of alcohol by their children influence their alcoholic habits⁽¹²⁾.

The heavy use of alcohol is higher in males in comparison to females; as for social classes, the A and B social stratus had more consumers; heavy users of alcohol presented greater lag in school. The study also revealed that fathers drank more than mothers⁽¹³⁾.

The current average age for the first experience with alcohol has happened very early, around 12 years old, which is concerning, since the sooner the contact with alcohol starts, the higher probability of acquiring substance addiction, besides been the gateway for the consumption of others⁽¹⁴⁾.

Therefore, the importance of the environment and family structure can act as possible protection factor against the heavy use of alcohol, a study identified lower use in teenagers that in some form or another, felt supported and understood by the family⁽¹⁵⁾. It is explicit that the example is certainly the greatest reinforcement for

learning, and not only theorization, and both of them must be always aligned.

Final Considerations

Among the different statements found we verified that the idea of alcohol and drugs and the larger contact of these teens really happen in the bosom of the family and friends, and it is clear how this reality involves them intensely.

It was unanimous when all of them referred having lost someone due to alcohol or other drugs. This construction is the result of multiple historical, social and cultural factors the build a network of a specific social meaning, enabling the manifestation of all and any expression, according to the role portrayed in each act.

The debate showed how the understanding of alcohol and other drugs is given by how these teens act and think, which is related to every aspect of their lives. As cultural beings – how to act, think and feel, they express the meaning according to their view of the world, revealed in accordance to the network of specific meanings to the group they belong to. Therefore, their manifestation is represented in the subjective models of the “I see myself”.

Therefore, we conclude that the perception of these teenagers regarding alcohol and other drugs does not happen in an illusory, fantasy manner, but set in events intrinsic to the family, marking the present, and probably, the future trajectory in their lives.

The issue of alcohol and other drugs among teenagers is inserted in the family context, when it is not well structured with dialogue, example and boundaries, can become the causing agent of a great emotional tear in their lives. Therefore, the components related to family must be considered in the implementation of education actions of this age group, seeking behavioral changes related to the consumption of drugs.

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