

## Rotarian's perception on substances alcohol consumption

Percepção de rotarianos sobre o consumo de substâncias alcoólicas

Rotarios percepción sobre el consumo de alcohol sustancias

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To understand the perception of Rotary Club members on alcohol consumption. **Methods:** a phenomenological study in Maurice Merleau-Ponty; conducted in two units of the Rotary Club in Bahia, Brazil, from September to December 2014, with 12 participants. The experiential descriptions were produced by Focus Group and submitted to Analytical Technique of Ambiguity. **Results:** The participants revealed: they recognize alcohol as a drug only if consumed excessively, everyday and causing damage to health; the consumption of the substance is naturalized to the point that goes unnoticed on various social contexts; and that the media has contributed to this naturalization. **Conclusion:** this is a worrying situation in the context of health as it places the people who consume alcohol in a “sociable” position, on the fringe of prevention and coping policies, which makes it necessary to promote public debate on the subject.

**Descriptors:** Public Policy, Mental health, Alcohol, Alcoholism.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** compreender a percepção de integrantes do Rotary Clube sobre o consumo de bebidas alcoólicas. **Métodos:** estudo fenomenológico em Maurice Merleau-Ponty; realizado em duas unidades do Rotary Clube no interior da Bahia, Brasil, nos meses de setembro a dezembro de 2014, com 12 participantes. As descrições vivenciais foram produzidas mediante Grupo Focal e submetidas à técnica Analítica da Ambiguidade. **Resultados:** os participantes revelaram: reconhecer o álcool como uma droga apenas se consumido de forma excessiva, cotidiana e que cause danos à saúde; que o consumo da substância encontra-se naturalizado, ao ponto de passar despercebido diante de vários contextos sociais; e que a mídia tem contribuído para essa naturalização. **Conclusão:** trata-se de uma situação preocupante no contexto da saúde, uma vez que situa as pessoas que consomem bebidas alcoólicas de forma “sociável” à margem das políticas de prevenção e enfrentamento, o que torna necessário fomentar debates públicos sobre a temática.

**Descritores:** Políticas Públicas, Saúde Mental, Álcool, Alcoolismo.

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## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Comprender la percepción de los miembros del Club Rotary sobre el consumo de alcohol. **Métodos:** estudio fenomenológico en Maurice Merleau-Ponty; realizado en dos unidades del Rotary Club en Bahía, Brasil, de septiembre a diciembre de 2014, con 12 participantes. Las descripciones experimentales fueron producidas por el grupo de enfoque y sometidos a la técnica analítica de ambigüedad. **Resultados:** Los participantes revelaron: reconocer el alcohol como una droga sólo si se consume en exceso, todos los días y causando daños a la salud; el consumo de la sustancia se ha naturalizado hasta el punto de pasar desapercibidos en diversos contextos sociales; y que los medios han contribuido a esta naturalización. **Conclusión:** esta es una situación preocupante en el contexto de la salud ya que coloca las personas que consumen alcohol en un "sociables" los márgenes de prevención y políticas de adaptación, lo que hace necesario promover el debate público sobre el tema.

**Descriptores:** Políticas Públicas, Salud mental, Alcohol, Alcoholismo.

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, alcohol consumption is a public health problem experienced by a significant population, with 2 billion people worldwide consuming the substance, and more than 7 million of them already display problems caused by consumption.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, a study showed that 34.7% of older adults had a harmful consumption pattern and 17.9% of them reported drinking daily, or almost daily.<sup>2</sup> In Brazil, the situation has not been different; a research developed by the National Anti-Drug Secretariat (NADS), in partnership with other agencies, detected that in 2005, 12.3% of Brazilians surveyed between 12 and 65 years of age were found to be alcohol dependents, and 74.6% %, had already consumed in the social sphere.<sup>3</sup>

In the state of São Paulo, a study with adolescents from public schools found that 55.3% of the boys and 61.6% of the girls had already consumed alcoholic beverages. Another worrying discovery found by the study was the mean age for onset of consumption, being 12.1 years.<sup>4</sup>

Although the option for habitual alcohol consumption is something phenomenal, and in this sense, to escape the domain of explanation, science has been busy in pointing out some factors that can stimulate the consumption of alcohol, among them are: the association with moments of joy; the enabling environment; alcohol as a socializing agent and indiscriminate consumption. Other factors such as family problems, expectations about the effects of the substance, ineffective communication and the desire to know the effects of drinks due to the environment and the social context are also highlighted.<sup>5-7</sup>

However, alcohol consumption can have detrimental effects on the consumer, being responsible for a variety of physical and behavioral problems. These effects have been described as causing 4% of morbidities, ranking first in health risk in developing countries and third in developed countries. In this perspective, the occurrence of cardiovascular diseases, hepatic cirrhosis and accidents has increased due to drug consumption, causing great impact within the family sphere, and even in the social security system.<sup>6-8</sup>

In this context, it is observed that the consumption of alcoholic substances is a worrying health issue because it presents multifactorial determinants and conditioners, which requires the participation of all organized civil society in the elaboration of care strategies, as well as greater attention by public policies.<sup>(5-6)</sup>

Currently, public policies in force in Brazil provide guidance to assist people with mental suffering, including cases of problems arising from the consumption of alcohol and other drugs, through a Psychosocial Care Network (PCC), with the objective of articulating the various points of attention to health. This strategy was sanctioned as it transcended the understanding that health agencies alone would not account for the great demand of people with mental distress and that they should be articulated with other social sectors such as school, church, and non-governmental organizations in order to build a network for the promotion of comprehensive care in the context of drug use.<sup>(9)</sup>

Among Non-Governmental Organizations is the Rotary Club, a nonprofit philanthropic association that has excelled in providing social assistance to the local and global community. Its mission is to support the activities and projects of individuals and service delivery groups that seek quality of life, retain human integrity, and provide world understanding and peace.<sup>10</sup>

Given the potential of the Rotary Club to act as a care facility at PCC, there was a need to understand the perceptions of Rotary Club members about the topic under study. So we were led to the following question: How do members of the Rotary Club perceive alcohol consumption? To answer the question, we have defined as objective: to understand the perception of members of the Rotary Club on the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

## METHODS

Since it is a study dedicated to understanding human perception, we find in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theoretical-philosophical framework a satisfactory theoretical foundation, since the philosopher defends the idea that perception can only be described from those who really live it, considering that man, because he is in the world, is in the world that he knows himself and expresses his perceptions.<sup>11</sup>

Based on Merleau-Pontyan thought, the production of knowledge about a given reality emerges from a dialogical and intersubjective process, knowing that it always shows itself in part, that is, we never reach it entirely.<sup>11</sup> Thus, although there is a vast literature on drug use, this study presents a profile of this reality, with important significance, since it brings to the fore the voice of a social segment - members of the Rotary.

The study was carried out from November to December 2014 in two Rotary Club Service Centers located in a city in the interior of the state of Bahia, Brazil. Initially, for the selection of the participants, we visited the two clubs and presented the research project to all those present at the meetings; to those who met the inclusion criteria - to be a member of the Service Club, to have time to participate in the research - we invited to voluntarily participate in the

study. In each Rotary club, 6 members agreed to participate voluntarily, totaling 12 participants.

Thus, we set the date, time and place for the production of the descriptions. Participants, mostly women, married, Catholics and between the ages of 38 and 62, work in various professional areas, among them, nursing, veterinary medicine, medicine, administration and accounting sciences.

The production of the descriptions came from meetings of the Focal Group (FG) in the two Rotary Club, and the meetings were attended by their respective members. In order to stimulate the discussions, we use a script with the following guiding themes: 1) talk about their perception regarding drug use; 2) comment on how you see public policies in the context of drug prevention and coping; 3) Talk how you think it should be to care for those who use drugs on a regular basis. The group discussions were recorded, transcribed in full and validated.

Among the experiences that transcended throughout the meetings, the theme "alcohol consumption" caught our attention. In view of this, we devoted ourselves to discuss the theme in the present study. Although we counted on the total of 12 participants in the Focus Groups, we only used the speech of 8 of them, because they expressed the perception about the phenomenon of alcohol consumption.

For the understanding of the experiential descriptions we use the Analytical Technique of Ambiguity, which is based on the theory of the intersubjectivity of Merleau-Ponty. It consists of a perceptive exercise, which seeks to identify the theses held in the descriptions as naturalized truths. It is a question of making the unreflective processes constituting the intuitive experiences that precede language, that is, through this technique, seek to find in the text the underlying essential meaning, suspending the theses that things are already in themselves.<sup>12</sup>

The analysis of the experiential descriptions occurred according to the perspective of the deep figure gaze, as in the observation of a work of art, of a landscape. As we focus on the figure that jumps to our eyes, perception omits the background, from which other figures may emerge, so that in order to perceive the figure, we have to stick to its contour.

From this perspective, we follow all the steps proposed by the technique, namely: 1) organization of experiential descriptions in text form; 2) thorough and exhaustive reading of texts; and, 3) category objectification. The reading of the material flowed freely, allowing the phenomena to show themselves from themselves; which means that we experience the perceptual experience during reading and in this we recognize as intercorporeal generality, seeking to suspend the theses considered as absolute truths.

The research has been approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the State University of Southwest of Bahia, under opinion number 111/2011, and has complied with all the recommendations of Resolution 466/2012 that deals with research with human beings. (13) All participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Term, and to ensure anonymity, we chose to identify them with names of the world's top mountains, including Annapurna I,<sup>1</sup>

Manaslu,<sup>1</sup> Lhotse,<sup>1</sup> Cho Oyu,<sup>2</sup> Makalu,<sup>2</sup> K2,<sup>2</sup> Monte Everest,<sup>2</sup> Dhaulagiri.<sup>2</sup> The numbers 1 and 2 were used to distinguish participants from different Rotary Clubs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study participants uncovered the perception of "drug", in a general context, as any substance used in an excessive, everyday way and that causes damage to physical and mental health, as evidenced in the speeches:

*For me drug is everything that you daily use and that can bring harmful consequences to the health of that person, and to that of who is around it. It can be drug: drugs, anabolic, can be drink or cigarette, can be everyday drugs like crack, marijuana, heroin, etc. All this in an excessive way, that provokes the necessity of the use so that the person can remain satisfied [...]. So ... In my view, it is everything that people use on a daily basis, excessively, and that will cause malaise, which can lead to death and other consequences, not only to it, but also to the social cycle in which he lives. (Annapurna I)<sup>1</sup>*

This view appears mainly in the lines referring to drugs considered as lawful consumption, since it is considered sociable in the various contexts, as we see below:

*[...] drugs are called licit and illicit drugs. In fact, that drug that we usually use as cigarettes, tobacco, cachaça, beer is a drug, but only when in a proportion, when it is harmful and excessive. And there are drugs, like crack, that makes you become dependent. (Manaslu)<sup>2</sup>*

*We cannot see alcohol as a drug, that's the problem, because it's legalized, we think ... You do not see it as a problem. (Cho Oyu)<sup>2</sup>*

As regards, specifically, the consumption of alcoholic substances, the participants only considered it as a drug if used excessively, if it causes damage to health, and also if there is an association with an illicit drug.

*Maybe associating alcohol with a drug, speed up those effects and these actions. (Makalu)<sup>2</sup>*

*It is so common, that you do not treat alcohol itself as a drug, when you come to treat as a drug is something that has already constituted an addiction, but before addiction is all very normal. (Lhotse)<sup>1</sup>*

Thus, the speeches reveal that the consumption of alcohol is naturalized.

*Unless the person is past the limits, it is already creating a problem, but other than that, it is natural to be home and have a drink, get friends and serve, go to the party and people drink. So ... There's a trivialization. (K2)<sup>2</sup>*

*I think alcohol is what we most trivialize, but cocaine, marijuana, crack, I think they are already heavier. (Cho Oyu)<sup>2</sup>*

*We see such a great naturalization of the use of alcohol as a permitted drug. (Monte Everest)<sup>2</sup>*

In the context of drug consumption, the media is indicated as a contributory factor for the naturalization of alcohol consumption, as revealed by the following statements:

*The naturalization of alcohol is coming into our house, through television, this does not happen in my house, but in other homes. (Dhaulagiri)<sup>2</sup>*

*The alcohol we know is used so, at home, daily, even the television stimulates, the guy comes home, puts a dose of whiskey, that is, passes to society that it is a natural thing, a good, relaxing thing. A very chic thing, a little bar in the house; Then the guy comes home, puts a dose, we see this much in TV dramas, then a banalization of alcohol as a drug. (Cho Oyu)<sup>2</sup>*

The speeches also highlight the concern about alcohol consumption, as it is considered a gateway to other drugs.

*You see, it's sad to say that sometimes we talk about licit and illicit drugs, but in fact, it starts with licit ones, which is alcohol, which is smoking, and big drugs begin to emerge in this game, a Very serious problem in society. (Manaslu)<sup>1</sup>*

*I think alcohol is a gateway, yes. (Annapurna I)<sup>1</sup>*

In general, the descriptions reveal the complexity of the alcohol consumption phenomenon, whose influence is the sociocultural, political, economic, ethical-legal context, among other dimensions.

Regarding the definition of the term “drug”, the National System of Public Policies on Drugs defines them as any substance and / or product capable of causing dependence upon contact with the organism, being specified in the national laws.<sup>14</sup>

In a different perspective, the study participants reveal the thesis that drugs are all substances used daily, excessive and harmful to both the health of the consumer and the health of society in general. This perception points to the consumption pattern as an important factor for classifying a substance as a drug.

Thus, substances defined as drugs by Brazilian legislation, such as drugs and alcohol, in the view of the participants of the research, would only be characterized as such if consumed in great quantity and in continuous frequency, causing damages to the consumer, the family and the community.

With regard to the issue of licit and illicit drugs, the participants' statements reveal that substances considered to be illegal and for sale are more easily considered as drugs; while those of free trade, such as alcohol, is perceived only as a drug at the moment when consumption becomes harmful to the consumer. In this sense, the participants do not even

consider alcohol as a drug, because it is legalized. They emphasize that only the excessive consumption of alcohol can be characterized as a drug, and that they only recognize it as such from the moment that consumption becomes an addiction.

According to Merleau-Pontyan thought, human perception comprises the interweaving of the sensitive world (impersonality, feelings) and of the cultural world (personality, social judgment, rationality), which constitute poles of human nature.<sup>11</sup> In view of this understanding, we conceive that the cultural value given to alcohol by Brazilian society, to the point of being linked to various social manifestations, such as celebrations, business situations, cultural events, association with great national symbols,<sup>15</sup> influence so that it is not perceived as a drug.

The National Policy on Drugs itself, in its various articles, indicates a concern only with the consumption of illicit drugs and with undue consumption of licit drugs.<sup>(16)</sup> When referring to undue consumption of legalized substances, the policy ignores the fact that drugs are substances that cause changes in the body, such as alcohol, which, regardless of the amount used, produces changes at the physiological level. Therefore, determining a consumption pattern for alcohol is a concern, because it puts people who consume in a “sociable” way outside the actions advocated by public policies, which contributes to their becoming vulnerable to habitual and abusive consumption.

In the context of alcohol consumption, a specific policy was defined defining alcoholic substances as any substance with an alcohol content equal to or above 0.5 degree Gay-Lussac, that is, 0,5 milliliters of alcohol in 100 milliliters of mixture.<sup>16</sup> Thus, we understand that a small amount of ingested alcohol is capable of causing changes in the body and that the consumption pattern cannot be considered as a criterion for classifying alcohol as a drug.

The Dry Law, instituted in Brazil in 2008, strengthens this argument when dealing with the need to reduce automobile accidents related to alcohol consumption and determines the application of penalty for the driver who presents 6 decigrams of alcohol in concentration per liter of blood or one tenth of a milligram per liter of air expelled by the lung.<sup>17-18</sup> Given this scenario, we perceive that low values of alcohol in the body are considered sufficient to provoke changes in the state of consciousness.

Given the changes in the social context and the permissibility of alcohol consumption, the participants' descriptions still show that consumption is naturalized in our society, being considered common the consumption of alcoholic beverages in homes, parties and social interactions.

In this scenario, Brazilian culture made alcohol consumption banalized, and a citizen can consume an alcoholic substance and justify his act by being in a sociable environment.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we perceive that social understanding regarding alcohol consumption is intertwined with socio-cultural formation, and therefore, it has been considered natural in modern society.

The participants also concurred with the idea that the naturalization of alcohol consumption has been

influenced by the media, especially by telecommunication vehicles. They emphasize that with the passage of time, the information regarding the banalized consumption come to modify the way of perceiving and the relation of the people with the alcohol.

The media plays an important role in creating social norms, which determine collective activities. With regard to the consumption of alcohol, this is not different, since the media can act in different ways, from the creation of beliefs to the organization and dissemination of public policies of prevention and coping with consumption. From this perspective, the media can, on the one hand, disseminate misinformation about consumption and, on the other hand, contribute to the strengthening of policies.<sup>15</sup>

In this same perspective, the advertisements of alcoholic beverages contribute to the banalization of alcohol consumption, establishing it as a natural and desirable practice in the life of Brazilians. Alcohol-related advertisements are more frequent than non-alcoholic advertisements. Those aimed at young audiences seek to demonstrate the anxiolytic effect and, when it comes to beer advertisements, relates them to major national symbols, such as football.<sup>19</sup>

Taking into account the entire political, economic, social and cultural context in which the consumption of alcoholic substances is inserted, we perceive in the participants' speech that alcohol is characterized as a stimulus to the consumption of substances considered as illegal consumption. Alcohol is seen as a "gateway" to illicit drug use. Some studies corroborate this notion, demonstrating that the majority of illicit drug users had alcohol as the first choice drug, but there are some cases in which consumption did not occur to the detriment of alcohol consumption. Therefore, there are still controversial disagreements about the thesis that alcohol is a gateway to other drugs.<sup>20-21</sup>

In this sense, the Harm Reduction Policy, instituted in 2005, points out the need to develop health education actions with the objective of providing information and counseling to drug users about the resulting problems, taking care to guarantee the autonomy of the people, such as whether or not to consume, what substance to use and how often. Specifically with regard to the consumption of alcoholic substances, the policy foresees the need to intensify the promotion strategies, which should occur from the intersectoral perspective.<sup>22</sup>

Because it was a phenomenological study, the contents that appeared in a repetitive way in the participants' speeches revealed socioculturally constructed theses, translated as clichés, saturated discourses. It was up to us to suspend these theses and propose the transcendence of a naturalistic worldview about the facts for a critical-reflective view, through the questions used during the focus group meetings, which cast doubt on the participants' conviction and revealed several ambiguities inherent to their perception of the subject of the study.

## CONCLUSION

The results indicate that Brazilian society, in its different social environments, has attributed to the consumption of alcoholic substances a great cultural value, the reason why the substance has gone unnoticed as a drug.

The fact that members of Non-Governmental Organizations, which compose the Psychosocial Care Network, recognize harmful alcohol consumption only when it is assessed as "undue", is of concern, since it places people who make "social consumption" out of prevention and coping with drug use. All of these issues, coupled with the media's emphasis on alcohol consumption, have contributed to the consumption of the substance being naturalized and viewed as "harmful" only when it becomes a gateway to illegal drugs.

We therefore consider it necessary to promote public debate on the subject of "drugs" and their consumption, which should include, *inter alia*, the approach to the possibility of short-term and / or long-term harm to health, as well as discussions on social perception about the issue and the people's decision to consume them or not.

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