

THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ON THE HEALTH-DISEASE PROCESS IN SPIRITUAL VISION

As representações sociais sobre o processo saúde-doença na visão espírita

Las representaciones sociales sobre el procedimiento salud-enfermedad en la visión espírita

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify the Social Representatives about the health-disease process in Spiritism. **Method:** Descriptive study with qualitative approach. Users in the magazine concepts of the Social Representations according to Serge Moscovici. The data collection was performed through a semi-structured interview and the application of free set of free words and observations. **Results:** Spiritualism believes that it has gained health when we are harmonized with the divine laws. Any breach of divine law creates an imbalance in the human being. **Conclusion:** The Disease Associated with Social Representations, with the aim of being more exposed to professionals such as patient experiences, the way they assimilate their pathological condition and is a challenge for the articulation of strategies of approximation.

Descriptors: Nursing; Spiritualism; Religious freedom; Social perception; Religion.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Identificar as Representações Sociais sobre o processo saúde-doença no Espiritismo. **Método:** Estudo descritivo com abordagem qualitativa. Utilizados na pesquisa conceitos das Representações Sociais de acordo com Serge Moscovici. A coleta dos dados ocorreu através de entrevista semi-estruturada e aplicação da técnica livre associação de palavras e observação Livre. **Resultados:** O espiritismo crê que conquistamos a saúde quando estamos harmonizados conosco e com as leis divinas. Qualquer descumprimento dessas leis divinas gera um desequilíbrio no ser humano. **Conclusão:** A Enfermagem necessita reconhecer essas Representações Sociais, visto que elas irão esclarecer aos profissionais as experiências de pacientes religiosos, o modo como assimilam seu estado patológico e isto é um desafio para articulação de estratégias de aproximação.

Descritores: Enfermagem; Espiritualismo; Liberdade religiosa; Percepção social; Religião.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar como Representantes Sociales sobre el proceso salud-enfermedad en el Espiritismo. **Método:** estudio descriptivo con enfoque cualitativo. Usuarios en la revista conceptos de las Representaciones Sociales de acuerdo con Serge Moscovici. La recolección de los datos fue realizada por medio de entrevista semiestructurada y la aplicación del conjunto libre de palabras y observaciones libres. **Resultados:** el espiritismo cree que ha conquistado la salud cuando estamos armonizados con las leyes divinas. Cualquier incumplimiento de leyes divinas genera un desequilibrio en el ser humano. **Conclusión:** la Enfermedad asociada a las Representaciones Sociales, con el objetivo de estar más expuestas a los profesionales como las experiencias de enfermos, el modo como asimilan su estado patológico y es un desafío para la articulación de estrategias de aproximación.

Descriptorios: Enfermería; Espiritualismo; Libertad religiosa; Percepción social; La religión.

INTRODUCTION

Health and disease have been conceptualized and debated for centuries. In ancient Greece, it was believed that specific Gods were responsible for people's health or illness. The Greek people had their perception of health and illness and several other peoples also reflected on the reason for our illness and had their explanations. Human beings have always looked for ways to cure diseases that cause physical and/or psychological harm, in addition to seeking justifications for them. The provision of care to the human being must consider the socio-cultural and religious context in which he is inserted, as this is fundamental so that the needs of the patient can be met. Accordingly, each era lived by humanity presents particular ways of providing care to a sick individual and understanding of the health-disease process.¹

The health-disease process has historically been related to religious beliefs that express various concepts about it, always based on their dogmas. Health is attributed to divine blessing and illness to punishment or something from evil forces. Furthermore, sin is constantly associated with illness and this in some religions is a sign of atonement and trials that the individual must go through to rise spiritually. Thereby,

one perceives the various forms of ideologies related to the health-disease process present in religions.¹

Religious belief is capable of elaborating in the individual several conceptions about different subjects. It becomes a reference to explain events that have occurred in the world and is a motivating instrument for the restoration of the patient's physical and psychological conditions. Its influence causes innumerable ways to face an adverse situation, which can be positive for the human being, therefore, it is important not to ignore it. Nonetheless, if religious beliefs cause harm to the course of treatment, it is necessary to intervene wisely so that the patient can adhere to what was recommended by the health team. This must be done cautiously, to achieve this goal without offending your faith.²

Religiosity is observed in the daily life of the community and this reality must be considered when providing care, since each religion expresses different ideologies about what health and/or disease is and how they must be faced. Then, each health professional, when aware of the existence of different religions and their conceptions about the health-disease process, will know how to direct treatment and provide appropriate care.²

When we address specific knowledge from a particular social group, we immediately refer to the concept of the Theory of Social Representations. Social representations are defined as a way of interpreting the reality of a group, constructed by it. They have the function of characterizing and facilitating the communicability between the subjects of the group because the perception of an object will become consensual.³

The social representation will solidify knowledge, a vision of a social object corresponding to a collectivity and will help to capture the knowledge that is the common sense built by certain subjects, guiding their behaviors and facilitating the communicability between them. Social representation reveals cultural, social and historical aspects of the individual, being a way of knowing the reality that surrounds him and his perception.⁴

Given the aforementioned, it is essential to use the definitions contained in the Theory of Social Representations in this study because the health-disease process is conceptualized in different ways and understood according to the perspective of each existing culture in the world, which defend conceptions about the reason why we get sick and we are cured of a pathology. It is said that such ideas referring to the health-disease process are old, but due to the social dynamics, new representations emerge.

Hence, the idealization of the research emerged from the observation and study of the different conceptions of health and illness found in religious beliefs and the implications of such conceptions for the healing process. Since religions explain the health-disease process distinctly, based on their particular dogmas, it is necessary to recognize these concepts so that we know how to deal correctly and specifically with each individual who adheres to a religious belief.

This research meant to characterize the representations of the health-disease process according to the religious belief of Spiritism and analyze the implications of such social representations towards the spiritual healing belief.

METHODS

It is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach. Concepts of social representation were used according to Serge Moscovici, Denise Jodelet, and other researchers who work with it, where the procedural aspect was adopted. It was held at the *União Espírita Paraense* [Religious Organization for Studying Spirituality] and has as subjects seven individuals who self-declared to belong to the religious belief of Spiritism and agreed to sign the Informed Consent Form (ICF). People who do not belong to Spiritism and who refused to sign the ICF were excluded. The ICF complies with the Resolution No. 466/2012 from the National Health Council, which approves the guidelines and regulatory standards for research involving human beings.

Data collection took place through semi-structured interviews and application of the following technique: Free association of words and Free Observation. The semi-structured interviews were conducted through previously prepared questions that do not necessarily need to be answered in order, so they are considered flexible interviews. The interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the interviewees. Thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the collected material, where its method aims to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes, organizing and describing in detail a set of data, to interpret the various aspects of the research object. The thematic analysis does not follow a linear process, but recursive. Its structure comprises 6 fundamental steps: 1) Familiarization with the data, which occurs through the transcription of the data (if necessary), active reading of the data and annotation of initial ideas; 2) Code generation, which occurs through the systematic coding of relevant data; 3) Search for themes, in which there is a grouping of codes to transform them into potential themes; 4) Continuous review of the themes, as new ones are elaborated, generating a thematic “map” of analysis; 5) Definition of the themes, through the ongoing analysis aiming to improve the specifics of each theme; 6) Production of the report through an explanatory interpretation.⁵

The data were subjected to analysis and from this, it was allowed to create the following themes: The representation of health for spiritists: the importance of stability; The representation of the disease for spiritists: imbalance as a cause of sicknesses; The transgression of God's Laws and their implications to one's health from the spiritual standpoint.

This study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee under the protocol No. 195.868. To identify the reports, fictitious names were used to preserve the participants' anonymity.

RESULTS

The representation of health for spiritists: the importance of stability

Spiritualism believes that we achieve a healthy status when we are harmonized with both ourselves and the divine laws as well. The organism will be in full operation when the spirit is balanced, thus reflecting a quality bodily health. Therefore, the importance of practicing attitudes that keep us in tune with God, in other words, spiritually stable.

So, the human being acquires health when he seeks to harmonize with divine works and spiritism is fundamental to make the individual aware of modifying habits harmful to his organism and to educate his spirit.⁶ The following statements express the spiritists' belief concerning stability as essential for one's health:

So, health comprises this energetic stability of that perispiritual body associated with the mind, with thinking, the way you shape your thoughts in the good things, in the optimism, in the joy. (EE1)

It is the stability of body, mind, and spirit. (EE2)

It is being balanced within us because the inside makes the outside feel balanced. So, the stability is within us. We can only have stable health if we have a stable interior as well. (EE3)

Spiritists affirm that we are immortal spirits that survive physical death. Considering such assertion, the diseases have their origin in the spirit, the body being the place where the sicknesses flow. In this manner, the spirit is the one who gets sick and the body reflects the pathological state of the sick spirit, as well as health resides in the spirit and is reflected in the spirit as the following statement reveals:

[...] I would say that being healthy is a state of stability that resides in the soul, in the spirit, and not in the body. (EE4)

Thereby, spiritual stability is achieved when we are progressively moving towards our evolutionary purposes. This is achieved when the intellectual and moral aspect of the human being is developed, which facilitates becoming a balanced being and consequently acting wisely and performing good deeds.⁷

According to the spiritist doctrine, being healthy is the well-being of the spirit and the body. It is what we call integral well-being. It is when you spiritually and your body corresponds to stability. (EE5)

Physical and spiritual stability. (EE6)

It is the perfect stability of the soul, but it does not mean that there is no disease in the body. By health, within

the spiritist doctrine, it is understood that the soul is at peace, that the soul is in balance, the body might have a disease, it may even be with a serious disease, it might be in a terminal phase, but the soul, the spirit is serene, it is calm, it is resigned, even though physical pain is present in the body. (EE7)

The representation of the disease for spiritists: imbalance as a cause of sicknesses

According to the spiritual standpoint, the disease has its origin in the spirit, as well as the health. So, all the sicknesses are in the spirit and the body receives the consequences of a certain pathology that has its genesis in the soul. For us not to be affected by sicknesses, according to the interviewed spiritists, it is necessary to take care of the spirit, through the practice of good actions and charity, fundamental factors for not getting sick. Some statements below portray what was exposed:

[...] The disease is generated by this imbalance. So, when I am not in harmony with myself, when my thoughts are fixed on afflictions, difficulties, vicissitudes, I start to overload the body from an energetic point of view. (EE1)

It is the imbalance of the body, it is the mental imbalance, the disturbances of the spirit. We are a complete being before the nature of God. (EE2)

It is the imbalance of our interior, which is reflected in our exterior through all imbalances that might happen in the physical body. (EE3)

Other statements expose the concept of sickness as an effect of a spiritual imbalance:

The disease represents the imbalance. The disease is the difficulty that the being has in having its energies balanced, and it passes exactly through the main part that is the spirit, and the second part, which is the body. (EE5)

So, disease is nothing more and or less than our imbalance, our lack of understanding about the God's Laws. (EE2)

If there is an imbalance in the psycho-emotional part of the being, there is an impact on the physical part as well. Thus, maintaining the stability of feelings, thoughts, and actions is essential. (EE6)

The imbalance comes from a series of human imperfections such as hatred, sorrow, and disrespect for the God's Laws. The individual who feeds these feelings and proceeds this way, will have his conscience reproducing in his body the spiritual sicknesses and that is why the more the human being is attached to worldly life the more he is susceptible

to spiritual imbalance and, because of that, be susceptible to get a pathology.⁷

[...] If you are fine-tuned to these laws, it promotes well-being and happiness. Being outside these circumstances leads to a breakdown because something is incomplete, something is not filled and, therefore, because this part is missing, it generates imbalance and consequently the disease. (EE6)

The transgression of God's Laws and their implications to one's health from the spiritual standpoint

The spiritist believes in Laws established by God which must be obeyed for universal harmony to be maintained. Such Laws are immutable and just for humanity that if fulfilled would become a fully happy being, but when I did not fulfill them, it is predestined to suffering and the most diverse forms of sicknesses. Accordingly, this is the cause for the great martyrdom of humanity, so, we must become aware of the laws that govern the universe.

Alan Kardec, in question No. 621 of "The Spirits' Book", asks the higher spirits where the God's Laws are written, and they answer: "In the conscience".

One of the laws that spiritists preach is the law of cause and effect, which explains that every consequence has an origin that might come from this or past incarnations and that we cannot escape from. Hence, if we do a harmful act to ourselves or others, we will necessarily suffer from the effects of this attitude, with a way to harmonize and re-educate ourselves to this law.

Some reports demonstrate the above-mentioned:

Any transgression of divine laws, they produce a consequence, an effect. So, we will be held accountable for our actions, if we act in goodness, if we use our intelligence, our talents to sow hope, consolation, encouragement, solidarity, love, then logically, my gathering will be an abundant gathering of welcome, of love, of acceptance by those who are bound by divine laws. (EE1)

[...] By the moment I run away from these laws, By the moment I take another path, it is logical that there will be imbalance. (EE2)

Yes. Because we were born to obey these laws since they were created as reference codes for our happiness. When we disassociate from it, then we are unhappy. (EE3)

The divine laws are perfect, then, no transgression fails to have an answer. (EE4)

The derangement that man makes against the God's Laws, precisely leads to imbalance. If you comply with these laws, it promotes well-being and happiness. (EE6)

Because the supreme law is the law of love, the major law that Christ brought to us, and if a person breaks this major law, which is the law of love, naturally he is bringing the consequences upon him, because there is also another divine law which is the law of cause and effect, and there is another divine law that is the law of justice. So, there is nothing that human beings do that is not seen by the justice of God. Likewise, there is no action in this existence or any other that has no consequence. (EE7)

It was noticed that any nonconformity with those divine laws creates an imbalance in the human being, which he must adjust to redeem his debts and, so, find true happiness towards spiritual evolution. It is the main objective of the incarnation for spiritists.

DISCUSSION

The reports show that to be healthy is to have your body, mind and spirit in stability and good thoughts and feelings produce inner harmony, responsible for adjusting the organism. It was emphasized that a priori stability is achieved internally or spiritually and consequently the body will come into stability. Common sense is necessary, avoiding any kind of exaggeration and self-knowledge in order to have a discipline and obtain a quality of life. This will be beneficial to the individual, as it will generate positive energy.

Commonly, social representations as systems of interpretation that direct our resemblance to the world and to others, assist and equip social behaviors and communications. In addition, they interfere in actions as variable as the diffusion and appropriation of knowledge, in the individual and collective advancement, in the definition of personal and social identities, in the expression of groups and in social transformations.⁸

Achieving full stability requires abdication and effort, and man must behave appropriately with Christian morals and follow divine laws. Thus, spiritual stability - which is an appropriate attitude before divine universal laws - is up to evolved beings. Until we reach that stage, we will hesitate here and there in our performances and, with each imperfection, we will endure the consequences of what was imperfect, including, while incarnated, the Spirit in uneasiness ends up causing spiritual sicknesses in the physical organism. The degree of suffering is equivalent to the level of imperfections and, according to this law, the more quickly we improve, the less we will suffer bitterness.⁷

According to the statements, the belief in balance as the generator of health is quite strong in spiritism, the interviewees are convinced when affirming that health depends on spiritual stability and, so, when there is inner peace, the body will also present well-being. Consequently, a healthy individual for spiritists is one who first of all has a healthy spirit, culminating in a healthy body and mind.

Concerning the representation of the disease for spiritists, it originates from bad thoughts, vicissitudes and afflictions,

which will result in a negative energetic charge to the spirit that after the sum of all this energy will imply a disease to the human being. Through the connection between soul and body, what affects the spirit is reflected in the systemic bodily organization, which is the explanation of why a sick spirit causes a body pathology.

The influence of the spirit in the matter and the seriousness of the spiritual evolution to encompass the absolute stability. Until we achieve this stage, we will hesitate here and there in our performances and, with each deficiency, we will bear the consequences of what was incomplete, including, while incarnated, the Spirit in uneasiness ends up causing spiritual sicknesses in the physical organism. The degree of distress is equivalent to the level of disabilities and, according to this law, the more quickly we complete ourselves, the less we will suffer bitterness.⁷

This is an interpretation that they built and the way they explain the process of illness. Social representations pronounce a set of concepts, propositions and explanations, caused in everyday life in the course of interpersonal communications. It is the analogue, in our society, of the myths and belief systems of traditional societies; they can also be accepted as the updated version of common sense.⁹

Hence, the social representation about the illness present in several testimonies of the interviewed spiritists is identified. According to interviewees, the spiritual imbalance is significant for the manifestation of pathologies, and it is necessary to abandon harmful habits, in addition to practicing the teachings of Christ as a way of maintaining organic stability.

With regard to the transgression of God's Laws and their implications to one's health from the spiritual standpoint, all attitudes, according to the interviewees, whether good or bad, have a future impact on our lives. So, it is the individual's responsibility to their happiness or unhappiness later, depending on what you sow in the present. As a result, sicknesses materialize due to man's mismatch with divine laws, and, according to the law of cause and effect, any disharmony generates a consequence that will necessarily affect people.

Spiritists express this representation about the reasons why we got sick, share this interpretation with each other, characterizing this group. In this respect, disease is the result of infractions and misfit the God's Laws, this idea about the disease was built by the spiritists from a common vision and helps in the interaction between its members since they share the same convictions.

Spiritual stability is an infallible mechanism for keeping us in connection with God's Laws and as a result achieving spiritual progress. Nevertheless, in order to achieve this development, an intimate reform is necessary, where each human being makes a self-assessment of himself and seeks to modify his lower habits and feelings. Suffering will be imposed according to the individual's erroneous attitudes in this or previous existence and the more evolved the less he experiences afflictions and sicknesses.⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Hence, every religious belief has its explanation on getting sick and how you can recover your health. Such explanations are passed on from generation to generation, perpetuating issues related to the health-disease process. Many religious people become more attached to their religion in a time of illness, acting in a more spiritual way and seeking to establish greater contact with the divinity through prayers, readings of books like the Bible, remain resigned to their state pathological and cultivating good thoughts to establish a connection with God. The theory of social representations is important in the sense that it provides subsidies to capture the representations of these religions about health and disease, thus, this theory corroborated for the apprehension of some views on the disease that individuals carry and expose mainly when they are in suffering because of acquired pathologies.

So, each researched religious group will have representation concerning the health-disease process and this particular conception is the common sense that they have about an object. Addressing specifically of the analyzed group, we can say that spiritual balance is a source of health and the spiritual imbalance responsible for the spiritual sicknesses that affect people.

Nursing professionals must recognize such social representations, since they will elucidate the experiences of religious patients, as well as the way these patients assimilate their pathological state. Bearing the aforesaid in mind, nursing professionals might readily overcome the challenge of articulating approach strategies. Given this information, nurses are able to intervene according to the needs of each patient, so that caring services can be provided with quality, and it is possible to establish bonds between professional and patient, aiming at both care efficiency and health recovery.

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