

## LIFE REPORTS ON ALCOHOLISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SELF-CARE

Relatos de vida sobre o alcoolismo: implicações para o cuidado de si

Relatos de vida sobre el alcoholismo: implicaciones para el cuidado de si

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To describe the social representations of alcoholic women about alcoholism and to analyze the implications of these social representations for the adoption of self care. **Method:** This is a descriptive-exploratory research with a qualitative approach, which uses the life history method to capture the social representations of the study subjects about the theme. The field of research was the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) of the city of Belém. The subjects of the study were 40 women and the inclusion criteria were: being in AA meetings, being in abstinence and being a woman. **Results:** Two strands were selected. The first highlights the daily struggles of alcoholic women to overcome the desire for consumption. The second aspect emphasizes the representation of self care as a starting point for nursing care. **Conclusion:** Alcoholic women live daily struggles to overcome the compulsion for alcoholic beverages.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Nursing; Alcoholism; Social Psychology; Nursing Care; Alcoholics anonymous.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Descrever as Representações Sociais de mulheres alcoolistas sobre o alcoolismo e ainda analisar as implicações dessas representações sociais para a adoção do cuidado de si. **Método:** Trata-se de uma pesquisa descritivo-exploratório, com abordagem qualitativa, que utiliza o método de história de vida para captar as representações sociais dos sujeitos do estudo acerca do tema. O campo de pesquisa foi o Alcoólicos Anônimos (AA) da cidade de Belém. Os sujeitos do estudo foram 40 mulheres e os critérios de inclusão

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foram: estar participando das reuniões do AA, estar em abstinência e ser mulher. **Resultados:** Duas vertentes foram selecionadas. A primeira destaca as lutas diárias de mulheres alcoolistas para vencer o desejo de consumo. A segunda vertente enfatiza a representação do cuidado de si como ponto de partida para o cuidado de enfermagem. **Conclusão:** As mulheres alcoolistas vivem diariamente lutas para vencer a compulsão por bebidas alcoólicas.

**DESCRITORES:** Enfermagem; Alcoolismo; Psicologia social; Cuidados de enfermagem; Alcoólicos anônimos.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** Describir las Representaciones Sociales de mujeres alcohólicas sobre el alcoholismo y analizar las implicaciones de estas representaciones sociales para la adopción del cuidado de sí. **Método:** Se trata de una investigación descriptivo-exploratoria, con abordaje cualitativo, que utiliza el método de historia de vida para captar las representaciones sociales de los sujetos del estudio acerca del tema. El grupo de investigación fue el Alcohólico Anónimos (AA) de la ciudad de Belém. Los sujetos del estudio fueron 40 mujeres y los criterios de inclusión fueron: estar participando en las reuniones del AA, estar en abstinencia y ser mujer. **Resultados:** Se seleccionaron dos vertientes. La primera destaca las luchas diarias de mujeres alcohólicas para vencer el deseo de consumo. La segunda vertiente enfatiza la representación del cuidado de sí como punto de partida para el cuidado de enfermería. **Conclusión:** Las mujeres alcohólicas viven diariamente luchas para vencer la compulsión por bebidas alcohólicas.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Enfermería; Alcoholismo; Psicología social; Atención de Enfermería; Alcoólicos anónimos.

## INTRODUCTION

The term alcoholism was first defined in 1849, based on the observation of subjects who consumed alcoholic beverages in an exacerbated way and for long periods, being understood as a pathological manifestation of the nervous system in the motor, psychic and sensitive areas.<sup>1</sup> Current concepts associate alcoholism with difficulty in controlling desire and consumption in an indiscriminate manner, accompanied by this dependence on mental, physical, behavioral and economic disorders.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it is important to highlight the construction of the positive conception of alcohol consumption in contemporary times, having as one of the factors the influence through advertisements, associating consumption with pleasure and the escape of negative feelings, making it difficult to identify consumption in a pathological way by the population itself, and even implies the importance of professionals' attention to these matters.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the view on the consumption of alcoholic beverages and the verification of incentives represent a difficult factor for people who are already undergoing treatment, as they are in constant struggle against their own desire for consumption that is encouraged and stimulated through communication vehicles daily.

According to an estimate projected in 2016 for the consumption of alcohol by individuals (from 15 years old) in liters of pure alcohol, is pointed out that Brazil is the sixth country in the American continent with the highest alcohol consumption (8.9 liters), being higher in 2.5 liters than the world average (6.4 liters). Furthermore, the report indicates that treatment coverage for alcohol and other drug

use disorders is not adequate, although it indicates the need for more work on the measurement.<sup>4</sup>

In this regard, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) emerged in 1935 in the United States as forms of sharing experiences lived by alcoholics, becoming disseminated throughout the world and a treatment modality for people dependent on alcohol. This social support makes it possible to combine scientific knowledge with the empirical knowledge of the group, providing and enabling the individual to control and improve their health.<sup>5</sup>

Aiming to present the report of alcoholic women during their treatment, seeking to identify how they understand this care, recognizing the daily factors that influence the treatment and how the meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous positively influence their lives in maintaining abstinence. The Theory of Social Representations (TSR), which was used as a theoretical contribution, allows identifying through the various forms of communication of the subject what a given object represents for the environment in which it is inserted, in order to work on individual perceptions to understand behaviors that guide the reality of the group. This theory of social psychology allows the nursing professional to better recognize the reason why groups behave in a certain way, in order to provide assistance that actually meets the needs of the individual in all its aspects, that is, holistic care.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, aiming to reveal the nature of the female universe that is oblivious to alcoholism, it collaborates for nursing investigations on a theme of broad social importance, seeking to cover its individual specialties and mockery about alcoholism, pointing to progress in the kind of life. Thus, the objective was to describe the Social Representations of alcoholic women about alcoholism and, further, to analyze the implications of these social representations for the adoption of self-care.

## METHODS

This study is descriptive-exploratory, with a qualitative approach, and uses the life history method to capture the social representations of the study subjects about the theme. This method is configured as an aspect of oral history, being an authentic and efficient instrument of investigation when the researcher attributes a scientific aspect to its study.<sup>7</sup>

The life story consists of the narrative told by the individual, serving as a bridge of interaction between he/she and the social environment, having as its main characteristics the concern with the link between researcher and individual. Thus, there is a production of meaning for both the researcher and the researched. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows investigating the object of study by apprehending the subjective universe of a certain group of individuals. This type of study is based on a dynamic relationship, a living interdependence between the individual and the object, an inseparable link between the objective world and the subjectivity of the individual.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, through the capture of the reports of the studied population, we know if the objective reality that surrounds it. The historical

method makes it possible to understand the universe of adolescents from their past, with the construction of their social representations about alcoholism, which will be essential for their attitude towards the social practice of alcohol consumption.

The research field was Alcoholics Anonymous in the city of Belém. The study subjects were 40 women. The inclusion criteria were: to be participating in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, to be abstinent and to be a woman. The data collection period was from March to July 2017.

The technique of collecting narratives for the production of oral sources was the semi-structured interview, a fundamental technique for capturing data, since the speech that emerges from its realization reveals structural categories, principles, values, norms and symbols and at the same time, it has the magic of transmitting, through a spokesperson, the representations of specific groups, under specific historical, socioeconomic and cultural conditions.<sup>7</sup> In the works of social representations, it is necessary to work with a social group, because only in it consensual knowledge is developed. For this reason, the number of research subjects needs to be representative of a group.

The data saturation technique was used, which concerns the repetition of speeches as a way of delimiting the sample of this study. At the end of the interviews, transcription was performed.

Thematic analysis technique was used to organize the data. This was developed in six stages: 1) Familiarization with the data, which occurs through the transcription of data, 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 in order 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.<sup>8</sup> Through data analysis, it was possible to create three themes that synthesize the representations of alcoholic women, which will be discussed below.

The research obeyed the ethical precepts of Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (Conselho Nacional de Saúde), being approved the Research Ethics Committee (Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa) of the Federal University of Pará (Universidade Federal do Pará – UFPA) under approval No. 1531926 in 2016.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To understand the results analyzed, we must at first understand the representations of a social object are full of elaborations of figures and expressions deemed socialized. Therefore, the elaboration of images and languages is represented through acts and situations that are common to a group or become common. Emphasizing that at first the subject has passive performance, that is, at the moment when alcoholic women seek sobriety, they suffer or receive

an action instead of executing them, therefore, the knowledge and their new elaborations about the disease alcoholism are unconsciously apprehended in their consciousness, thus making them active, through their speeches, actions and behaviors, principles of the theory of social representations, where the individual is transformed from the universe and his knowledge must be valued,<sup>9</sup> thus starting to approach the findings.

### Daily struggles against the pleasures of alcohol

This topic seeks to analyze how daily struggles are achieved, since alcoholism has long been a central point in the lives of women interviewed, a compulsive addiction. Then considered by them to be a disease without a cure, a consensual knowledge based on reified knowledge acquired in their social group, which rooted in their lives the certainty that the achievement of abstinence in their lives must be daily, since at any moment the return to drinking can happen.

The most important way of coping was objectified in meetings, where the anchoring of the daily search for their ‘treatment’ in alcoholics anonymous is essential for the daily achievement of abstinence.

*I take care of my sobriety by going to meetings every day.*  
(Amethyst).

*Attending alcoholic anonymous meetings, you know. Because our secret is to go there at our meeting, we go to... if it's possible to be in a meeting every night, is better.* (Crystal).

The fellowship provides these women not only with coping with drinking, but also with a new reformulation of life. This reformulation based on literature has great representation given that the members are faced with other alcoholics who performed the same recovery method and sees success, wanting the same for their lives. So, in anchoring these women, the best life-changing method is attending meetings and literary methods suggested by alcoholics anonymous.

Knowledge is based on 3 pillars: religion, science and the experience of its members, that is, it has the two thinking universes presented in social representations. Reified knowledge presents science and erudite thinking, where not all members of society are authorized to represent it, as it has logical and methodological rigor.<sup>10</sup>

The consensual universe are intellectual activities lived through habitual social interaction, and don't have logical limits spontaneously conceived by the group members.<sup>10</sup> Thus, within the “Alcoholics Anonymous” fellowship, the experience of life as an alcoholic has the function of developing behaviors and communication between the members of the group, spontaneously adding knowledge about alcoholism and thus sobriety.

The system of interpretation of alcoholism in the group is incorporated as a facilitator of communications, diffuser of dialogicity, adding the particularities of its members to their

imagination, taking root in the social environment of the fellowship, becoming the experiences about life as alcoholics an instrument of custom sharing and peculiarities of a member or the whole group.<sup>9</sup> In the analysis of the interviews, it was noticeable the rooting of compulsion, where there is a need to do everything possible not to consume any alcoholic beverage, where the certainty of returning to compulsive consumption is anchored in their lives, as we see in the excerpts below.

*Avoid the first sip for 24 hours. [...] I've accepted my condition as a patient and decided to take action not to return to the first sip. (Agate).*

The sharing of experiences is conducive to building a representation about a given social object. This transmission does not necessarily need to be carried out through dialogue, as it is possible to communicate through gestures, symbols and meanings that can be presented in actions and behaviors.<sup>11</sup> Communication can differentiate, translate, interpret and make representations of another person. It is possible to identify represented images and vocabularies, allowing exchanges and fixation of ideas.

The representations created in a group have cultural and historical characteristics, but with consensual knowledge, that is, knowledge of common sense idealized as knowledge produced by a group based on the traditions and consensus of its members.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, avoiding the first sip for 24 hours is a method adopted by alcoholic anonymous fellowship members not to drink again, something that is already defined and shared by its members. And according to what was identified in the interviews, the method works as if it were a "medical prescription" prescribed by the fellowship, where members have the daily challenge of complying with the prescription, as if the daily dose was administered at each meeting.

Within 24 hours the temptations are intense and difficult to deal with. In all places are found symbols that remind us of pleasure. Something representative found was the influence of the media, in which the advertisements of alcoholic beverages represent something tempting for the consumption of alcohol, as we can see below:

*Those who see the advertising there, think that they do not know that alcoholism is a disease, they go on that intuition, right, that is on television. (Jade).*

Advertisements can be responsible for rooting social standards, in which they show society objects, attractive and interesting behaviors for each person. This is no different for the consumption of alcoholic beverages, where they propagate situations caused by alcohol, but associated with pleasure, leisure and success, what arouses in the cognitive of people the curiosity to live the same that is being propagated, represented in their consumption actions. This interest is also aroused in the cognitive of women, where they recall the objectifications of the pleasures of alcohol, which makes

it tempting, but the negative experience with alcoholic beverages is stronger.

The group "Alcoholics Anonymous" has great representation in the fight against the consumption of alcoholic beverages, however they compete with the media. The media play an important role in the transfer and transformation of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Being characterized by its great development of the knowledge of the daily life of society with technological arguments and massive urban characteristics.

A social representation is elaborated basically by two determinant processes (anchoring and objectification) that allow to make real what was only conceptual, in which the excess of existing concepts is filtered and fixes the one that symbolizes its living moment, and still have in the cognitive a reference that establishes and organizes their actions in an environment classified according to their psychological need. Therefore, the media transmits an image that can be objectified in the imaginary of the subject who idealizes to live the same that was transmitted to it, anchoring in his drunken actions and satisfaction of his/her ideology.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the media have a great power in the control of society and even in politics, therefore, the consumption of alcoholic beverages can become representative for many, since the ideology passed through are the benefits acquired with alcoholic beverages, in which socialization and momentary conquests are part of the consumption of alcohol, threatening the sobriety of alcohol of the ones who fight for abstinence.

### **The representation of self-care as a starting point for nursing care**

Alcoholics Anonymous is an institution with great representation in the lives of these women that has become a method of self-care, one of the first choices. Alcoholics anonymous hold daily meetings and have as a treatment method the sharing of experiences through life reports, showing that the experiences of living with alcoholism are very similar among members, changing only the rapporteurs. This encourages them to make an analysis of their lives, of all its consequences, aiming that their new actions are fundamental for sobriety.

The interviews showed that alcoholization transformed the lives of these women, many of whom lost their identity, individuality and vanity, as alcoholic beverage occupied all the importance of their lives. The experiences with alcoholism contributed to the construction of new life goals in search of self-care, care which were lost during alcoholization. It is interesting to highlight that even though they are women, and the anchorage in society is that the female gender values vanity, the reports showed that sobriety is the main care provided to themselves, seeking this in the meetings of alcoholics anonymous.

*Firstly, my participation in the meetings, which is my treatment, which is for the rest of my life. (Ruby).*



The self-care presented by the interviewees portrays well the objectives proposed by self-care, where the individual must have attitudes that lead to transformative actions that come from within, needing to know itself.<sup>13</sup> These are new representations focused on their current priorities, lost with alcoholism and now objectified through living with their group of alcoholics anonymous.

Sobriety is represented as a priority, which makes the search for your goals constant, thus, the proposals made by the AA are accepted, aiming at their goals and anchoring their achievement. This adherence has great intentions, because human beings have a thinking capacity, so they act according to their intentions, so even though alcoholism is common to AA members, they do not act in the same way as the phenomenon, so they link themselves with unpredictable actions.<sup>14</sup>

The abuse of alcoholic beverages was responsible for the carelessness of the body, therefore the care with the physical, but they anchored that the care with the mind, with spirituality, is related to the failure of abstinence, where the strengthening of this method of self-care is fundamental for sobriety.

*Self-care I think it's being careful with me, with my body, with my actions, with my deeds, I think I have to be very careful with my behavior (Jade).*

The care with the mind is something suggested by the AA group, seen as extremely important so that the individual does not fall on alcoholic beverages, where they believe that when the subject is with the thoughts in order, the strengthened spirituality and the conscious behavior distances themselves from alcoholic beverages, conducted by thinking universes (reified and consensual), in which AA knowledge based on scientific and religious pillars (reified) and knowledge processed by the individual (consensual) work together to shape the reality in which these women live.<sup>10</sup>

The reports make us reflect that the care with their thoughts and their minds directly reflects on their actions, constituting their rules of existence, where they return to themselves after their alcoholic life, where it was reflected on their carelessness, but the focus on care, through his thoughts and behaviors, is based on their subjective, anchored on their new goals, of which life change and sobriety stand out.

"Alcoholics Anonymous" is an institution of great influence for new behaviors acquired by these women and also in the search for their methods of self-care. It is an institution that values the sobriety of its members, but does not prevent them from seeking new methods of self-care. In fact, they suggest that they seek health care, which is often damaged by the abusive consumption of alcoholic beverages.

*Take care of my health, right. Because after alcoholism, I had many health consequences, you know. I already had health problems, but as I drank, I did not take care of my health. (Sapphire).*

The search for health care are new methods used to take care of yourself, lost with alcoholization. The members

of alcoholics anonymous add a consensual knowledge of the health compromise caused by the abuse of alcoholic beverages, acquired socially and mainly through their experience, but it was strengthened with the knowledge reified soon after joining the fellowship.

The rehabilitation proposed by AA must not only be focused on group meetings, so it is oriented to its members who seek health professionals for health care. Nursing is a profession entirely linked to care, which prioritizes the care of its clients, therefore the self-care presented by these women can be the starting point for the care of alcoholic women.<sup>15</sup>

Nursing professionals are rooted in their knowledge about care to provide advice that corresponds to the person who needs to perform professional care with theoretical and practical basis.<sup>16</sup> The then care based on technical-scientific principles and the empirical knowledge presented by women can be processed so that comprehensive care is performed<sup>15</sup> and through the communicative relationship between the nurse and this woman, the woman will promote beyond biopsychosocial care, but will also enhance her sobriety, reducing the physical problems generated by alcoholism.

## CONCLUSION

The AA group is an effective mean of support so that its members can control their impulses for alcoholic beverages, as it promotes and traces with its objective members, with daily sobriety being the main one. The adhesion of the members to the AA's proposals is strengthened by reflecting their own experience together with the experience of other people, thus forming the creation of a social representation about alcoholism, which, for them, is considered a disease without cure, therefore, a constant battle.

The self-care to maintain sobriety is strengthened through the exchange of experiences, making the AA members' view of alcoholism well solidified. Thus, we can highlight the relevance of recognizing the subject's view of the object of study, so that more effective ways can be sought to trace an appropriate care.

The deponents' conception of alcoholism points to mind care as being extremely important for treatment, which is an unquestionable factor. However, proving necessary to consider health care in its general aspects, a factor encouraged by the support group itself and which can be provided through nursing care through the promotion of self-care in a holistic way.

It is important to highlight that the social construction of the patient as a passive being has gradually been deconstructed, an important aspect to be appreciated in the care model in which he considers the being as a whole, reflecting on the nursing care that seeks to reach and considers beings in their physical, psychological and social aspects, within a historical context, something of extreme importance for the provision of adequate care, since this assistance, as well emphasized by the interviewees, needs to start from the inside out and, therefore, add the technical scientific knowledge of nursing with the empirical knowledge of alcoholic women to

identify, understand and recognize the ways in which these women perceive themselves, the alcoholism in society and its reflections on their own bodies.

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