



Everyday representations of young people about peripheral areas

Representações cotidianas de jovens sobre a periferia
Las representaciones cotidianas de jóvenes acerca de la periferia

Elda de Oliveira¹, Cassia Baldini Soares¹, Leandro Leonardo Batista^{II}

¹ Universidade de São Paulo, School of Nursing, Postgraduate Program in Nursing. São Paulo, Brazil.

^{II} Universidade de São Paulo, School of Communications and Arts, Department of Public Relations, Advertising and Propaganda and Tourism. São Paulo, Brazil.

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: to understand everyday representations of young people about the peripheral areas, with the purpose of establishing topics to drug education media programs. **Method:** Marxist approach, with emancipatory action research and the participation in workshops of 13 youngsters from a public school of the peripheral area of São Paulo. **Results:** there are contradictory everyday representations about the State's role, which, on the one hand, does not guarantee social rights and exert social control over the peripheral areas and, on the other hand, is considered the privileged interlocutor for the improvement of life and work conditions. **Conclusion:** the action research discussed mainly topics related to social rights context, claim of the young participants. It is necessary to expand the discussion beyond the citizenship rights sphere, which is only part of the debate about social inequalities inherent in capitalist exploitation and the necessary transformations to build equality policies.

Descriptors: Public Health; Teenager; Illicit Drugs; Health Communication; Health Education.

RESUMO

Objetivos: compreender as representações cotidianas de jovens sobre a periferia, com a finalidade de compor os temas para programas midiáticos de educação sobre drogas. **Método:** abordagem marxista, com pesquisa-ação emancipatória e participação em oficinas de 13 jovens de uma escola pública da periferia de São Paulo. **Resultados:** entre os jovens há representações cotidianas contraditórias sobre o papel do Estado, que, de um lado, se ausenta para os direitos sociais e se apresenta para exercer o controle social na periferia e, de outro, é colocado como o interlocutor privilegiado para a melhoria das condições de trabalho e vida. **Conclusão:** a pesquisa-ação discutiu centralmente temas que circulam na esfera dos direitos sociais, alvo de reivindicação dos jovens participantes. Nota-se que é preciso ampliar a discussão para além da esfera do direito à cidadania, que constitui apenas parte do debate sobre as desigualdades sociais inerentes à exploração capitalista e às transformações necessárias à igualdade.

Descritores: Saúde Pública; Adolescente; Drogas Ilícitas; Comunicação em Saúde; Educação em Saúde.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: entender las representaciones cotidianas de jóvenes acerca de la periferia con el fin de crear temas para programa educativos sobre drogas en los medios de comunicación. **Método:** enfoque marxista, investigación participativa y emancipadora en talleres de trece jóvenes de una escuela pública en la periferia de São Paulo. **Resultados:** los jóvenes mostraron representaciones cotidianas contradictorias sobre el papel del Estado, que, por un lado, está ausente en los derechos sociales, pero presente para ejercer control social en la periferia y, por otro, es el interlocutor privilegiado para mejorar las condiciones laborales y de vida. **Conclusión:** la investigación-acción planteó temas que son comunes en los derechos sociales, principal reivindicación de los jóvenes participantes. La discusión necesita ampliarse, ir más allá del derecho a la ciudadanía, que es una parte del debate acerca de las desigualdades sociales inherentes a la explotación capitalista y a los cambios necesarios a la igualdad.

Descriptores: Salud Pública; Adolescente; Drogas Ilícitas; Comunicación en Salud; Educación en Salud.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Elda de Oliveira

E-mail: eldadeoliveira@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Mass media campaigns for the prevention of drug use have been created by technicians or laymen without considering young people's opinions⁽¹⁾. For authors who study the subject, the educational messages should consider socioeconomic characteristics of young people and the specific contexts to which they belong⁽²⁾, finding resonance in reality and making sense to the target public⁽³⁾. It is known that young people tend to trust messages that incorporate their voices, something that would allow identification with sociability forms and with their social context⁽²⁾. A review study shows that successful interventions involve interactivity, at least in the case of Drug Prevention High School Programs⁽⁴⁾. Identification is expanded when, for instance, songs young people like are used, which are recognized as a communication means to share ideas, concepts, representations, and values⁽⁵⁾. The internet is highlighted as important media for drug education, since it is an instrument of interaction processes⁽⁶⁾. However, young people from lower classes are much more exposed to mass media⁽⁵⁾ than to the internet.

The aim of our research is to understand everyday representations of young people from peripheral areas, with the purpose of establishing topics to drug education media programs, particularly radio programs.

METHOD

Ethical aspects

The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Nursing School of USP.

Theoretical framework and type of study

This study is based on dialectical and historical materialism, an approach that puts forward that the construction of knowledge must articulate theory and social reality, considering the historic moment. The concepts used in collective health, from this perspective, allow us to understand the weight of social inequalities on the health-disease process, the forces that influence these inequalities and the possible ways of transformation⁽⁷⁾.

This is a qualitative research developed through an emancipatory action research (EAR) methodology. It is a research that stimulates reflection and assume a position regarding the phenomenon of interest. Being participatory and dynamic – and developed in several interaction spaces – this type of research involves transformations in the social practices of the participants who experience and exposed them throughout the process⁽⁸⁾.

Methodological procedures

Study scenario

The research was developed in a public school (primary and secondary school) in the peripheral area of São Paulo (SP), Brazil.

Data source

The average number of participants was 13 young high school students (nine male) interested in the topic and aged between 15 and 17 years old.

Data collection and organization

The collection was performed at 13 workshops (2 hours each one). A group data collection technique was used in a participatory research that permitted to expose the everyday representations with opinions and convictions from a group with homogeneous characteristics⁽⁹⁾.

From the discussion of the central theme – drug education media campaign to young people – it was possible to synthesize other issues raised during the meetings. From the workshops it was possible to create several scripts of drug education programs, targeted at young people living in the peripheral areas, to be aired mainly by community radios. The scripts were validated by the young participants regarding form and content. The research stages and related developments are detailed in another publication space⁽¹⁰⁾.

Data analysis

The results were analyzed in the light of everyday representations. From this perspective, the speeches are analyzed dialectically, considering the social place of participants, dominant ideologies, meanings of words that are part of the participants' speeches, and also with the analysis of contradictions⁽¹¹⁾.

Everyday representations do not constitute mere description of reality. As a category of analysis it permits to denaturalize the set of ideas that subjects expresses about a particular phenomenon. It is an analysis in which the researcher feels the need to understand micro and macro social mechanisms that are related to the phenomenon, assuming a position, being thus consistent with the perspective of Science as a political means for research and social change propositions⁽¹¹⁾.

Everyday representations, as ways of representing the world and reproducing its features, are a set of ideas and conceptions marked by processes of: simplification, with individuals responding to events that surround them; naturalization, with the acceptance of routines without refutation; and regularization, with the repetition of actions that makes everyday practices predictable⁽¹²⁾.

Among everyday representations there are contradictory ones, with real and delusive elements about reality. Everyday representations of exploited and oppressed groups tend to be contradictory, full of elements of affirmation and negation of society. These ones must be collected and understood because they are important to understand society and can become congruent and even complex representations⁽¹²⁾.

RESULTS

The use of the term "community" to refer to peripheral regions and favelas was discussed by the young participants: the urban spaces where they live in would not be considered favelas by society in general – in regards to their simple habitations and precarious infrastructure –, but by joining "low class" families; their neighborhood is considered a favela, place of disorderly occupation, marked by the absence and precariousness of public services. They see themselves stereotyped and marginalized because are socially identified as favela dwellers. Everyday representations of young people are

constructions that reflect the concrete reality of social reproduction in the social group their families belong to and to the suburban reality, revealing their convictions concerning the true essence of the problem, namely, the condition of class.

It's not a community, it is a favela. Favela lives. We are the favela. You don't see shanties, you see normal houses, but the people are favela. Fancy favelas don't have shanties [...]. This is our reality: lack of water, homelessness, robbery, fights, there is no incentive to reading. Here we find things that lead us to wrong places [...]. We are talking about the everyday life. Violence begets violence, not only in [district name]. Serious violence, nobody here likes the police; there are gunfights. The cops invade our homes shooting. This is treacherousness. (Participants of the workshop 09)

The safety they know derives from the police and drug dealers. The police represents the State and deal with them in a violent and disrespectful way. They are certain that the police cannot be trusted, that police officers want to incriminate them and use violence against the dwellers because they belong to a "low social class". For these young people, police does not make any difference between public and private space: if officers suspect dwellers are involved with drugs or robbery, their houses are invaded. As they also tend to respond with violence to this approach, they call this situation "a circle of violence". Their everyday representations do not denote that they understand the very function of the State, as if the problem is the wrong attitude of police officers and not the role of the police in the peripheral areas. In relation to drug dealers, although the young participants think they have the power to make decisions to solve conflicts, they also consider that there is abuse of power with frequent curfews. In their opinion, some of them are unprotected because they are not part of the movement (the way they refer to the production, distribution, and consumption of drugs). They had contradictory opinions about drug dealers. They are reliable, but there is abuse of power, because they exploit poverty at the same time that offer "jobs" to adolescents from the "low social class". We could say that these are everyday representations that do not surpass the naturalized and repetitive perception of everyday life.

The young participants proposed a kind of normalization for drugs consumption in the territory, which could be accepted if specific spaces to use drugs were established; without these spaces they think that the situation would get out of control, i.e., improper use of drugs in the public space and disrespect with others. According to them, if specific spaces to use drugs are established – although in urban public spaces – there will be organization and respect with non-users. These spaces would protect distributors/consumers and residents against the violence related to the situation. These would be contradictory everyday representations, since they represent the violent reality in this context, but also ideological influences – in the case, related to the war on drugs that masks the causes of this kind of violence.

The discussion on ideology – originated in this case by the war on drugs – sought to address social problems related to the phenomenon of drug use. When the life conditions of drug

users were discussed, the focus changed from drugs to the society that produces, circulates and consumes drugs, that is, drugs were no longer responsible for the young participants' social problems – the discussion raised the capitalist system contradictions and the differences between social classes.

If we compare this place with other neighborhoods, ours is reasonable [...]. Some might think different. Near home there are some places where people spend all day using drugs. Sometimes you can't even cross these places [...]. But they usually don't disturb people. They have a little more respect. Here [near the school] everything is more exposed. But there they have more respect [...]. Like, there is a drug set. You have one at the street corner. Most of the people there are young [...]. So, the thing is selling drugs. We pass on the street [...] and see a guy smoking a joint [...]. (Participants of workshop 03)

The participants represent their public school as a marginalized, precarious institution, with negative stereotype because, in their opinion, former students commit offenses. On the other hand, they think the school is good for having resources and hard-working teachers. The everyday representations about the public school are contradictory and ideologically influenced, since they recognize that the institution in the country has been affected by bad educational policies – but the influence of ideological discourse on the need for education and job qualification persists. During the EAR, some convictions about public schools emerged: the institutions are marginalized because they are attended by young people from the "low-class" and, in the case of this specific school, because it is in the geo-social space of the periphery. They think they have no chance of getting into a university or changing their reality.

All that you say [they ask]... Where do you study? [Answers]. Oh, it's a very cray school, a real mess, who gets in goes from dumb to dumber. Everyone judges your school. It is a stereotype. And it's a good school. No one sees the good side of it, just the negative points. It's a good school, but sometimes the students spoil everything. The students are responsible for the school. This here [poster with a young man entering the university, with the inscription "one in a million"]. There are few, but they exist. As one can see: one in a million friends. Few, very few [...]. This represents the dedicated students, those that study a lot. Some teachers who have studied here say this school was good. The teaching is good. The teacher explains well, but the students are not interested. They are not polite [...]. So you have this prejudice. People say the school is not good anymore. But it has been worse. (Participants of workshop 02)

The participants stressed that the Brazilian public transportation is precarious, with few transportation option on weekends, and normally working beyond its capacity. They think the State is negligent regarding the residents of the region and believe this isolates them. There are problems such as the traffic in the region, broken headlights, lack of sidewalks, most of the time forcing residents to walk in the streets with the cars, putting their life in danger. For them, the public transportation problems in the district are caused by the State's negligence and omission.

Social rejection that young people from peripheral areas suffer is also represented by the lack of State investments in leisure. For them the Brazilian funk music is something that welcome all young people from the peripheral areas because funk parties happen on the streets. However, the police often treats them with violence in these parties. They also feel excluded from cultural activities in other parts of the city. To be segregated in a peripheral area brings feelings of abandonment and inferiority.

We need more public transportation, [especially] on Saturdays and Sundays. There is lack of leisure activities, access to culture, art, skateboarding, cycling. Here we only have one library and its system has problems. We can't borrow books. We need to communicate with each other, community groups. [Funk music] The society rejects it because people are having fun in funk parties. [They] will say [that] we are the excluded ones, but that's a lie, they are the excluded ones because they're not enjoying it. Funk is part of our leisure. [About funk parties in fancy neighborhoods]. Yes, even in the media, but these funk parties are different. They don't disturb anyone. They listen to funk in nightclubs. Funk music [...] portrays the favela reality. (Participants of workshop 10)

The participants emphasized the difficulties in getting good health services – the hospitals do not meet the demands of the region: do not have enough doctors and provide poor quality services; there is a lack of medical equipment and delay in attendance. Based on their everyday reality, these young people consider that health care in basic health units are based on complaints and conducts, surveillance of infectious diseases, and condom distribution; there is priority assistance for pregnant women and children and distribution of medicines. Vaccines are the priority for children. These are opinions that reflect their experience and indicate consistent representations.

[...] we have a hospital but we need more doctors and equipment. Here, as you can see on the poster [a nurse sitting next to a patient in a wheelchair]; someone wrote Hospital [district name] does not have doctors and necessary equipment. There's nothing in that health care unit. The only thing you have there is medicine, little babies taking vaccines. They attend pregnant women and the elderly, but us... it takes a long time [...] a lady was distributing condoms at the health care unit [...]. (Participants of the workshop 09)

They expect that the State ensure social rights of individuals and promote social protection. They showed to know four ways to have fulfilled their social needs: work, the work plus State support, drug trafficking, and robbery. According to their convictions, unmet social needs – exploitation of the formal labor and lack of jobs – that lead young people to drug trafficking or robbery. Drug trafficking is simplified and naturalized, being what – with robbery – opens the door to the world of consumerism. According to them, the government should invest in the region to increase the number of jobs, avoiding the daily displacement of the residents, since there are work force and space available. They consider that the services in the region will be better, with more professionals and education if the State intervenes in the social reality, providing quality public

services, improving facilities – schools and hospitals –, buying equipment and the necessary materials for workers. These are contradictory everyday representations, since the needs are objective, but are ideologically influenced, given that the Brazilian State has never provided the expected social protection.

The participants are convinced that the voters from the peripheral regions are manipulated by politicians; that there are misappropriation of public funds for private benefits; that solutions for social needs are never put in practice and the politicians' promises are always the same; that the residents of peripheral regions forget this situation and vote again for them to try to solve the same problems and so on.

In an election year, they [politicians] promise you everything [...]. And then where are the promises they made? [...]. Slaves were not free, but they could buy freedom, and today this is not possible anymore. You can't buy freedom [...] We have little public transportation [...] A lot of people live here. They [referring to those responsible for public transportation] try to isolate us. It is the government's fault. How much money these people earn per day? Let's say a hundred people take the train, three reais [BRL] per person. Profit. What do they do? They bring more drugs to this place [...]. (Participants of workshop 06)

We also discussed the actions of Non-Governmental Institutions (NGO) and Social Organizations (SO). They showed naturalization and simplification regarding State partnerships with private institutions. In their opinion these actions compensate the precariousness of the services provided by the State, in comparison with the alleged improvements in private administrations. They also expressed conflicting issues: NGOs are necessary because they meet some of the social needs, but at the same time are exploitative and maintain the "cycle of poverty"; the State should be responsible for ensuring social rights, but at the same time is unreliable and its responsibilities should be transferred to private companies.

According to them, it is important to participate in social movements, this would be a way to have their needs attended to, but they have little experience in this regard, except for the participation in the Free Pass Movement to support the reduction of bus and train fares.

The community needs to join people in projects like this. [District name] needs to participate in more protests. People have to protest to claim their rights. We saw that we are capable, when the government wanted a 20-cent increase in bus and subway fare. We protested and won. In the same way we stopped that, we can do a lot of things. The giant woke up, but went back to sleep because nobody really cares. And without that there is only death, destruction and violence. (Participants of workshop 03)

DISCUSSION

They are convinced that the problems in their neighborhood derive from the forms of social reproduction and from the group to which their families belong to. Such problems are masked by the ideology of opportunities provided by

capitalism. This ideology advocates that if you want recreation, culture, health and education, you must be part of the market and buy things. A study on young people from peripheral regions concluded that they start to work early than others, generating the feeling of not having experienced youth. For these young people from peripheral areas, the purposes of the work are: to satisfy social needs and socialization⁽¹³⁾.

Working would lessen the stereotype that poor people are criminals and would avoid a criminal life. In this sense, young people should strive to win in life⁽¹³⁾. However, in many peripheral areas, the easiest work for young people is in drug trafficking and, therefore, they are taken as drug dealers, enemies of the society, people who must be stopped. For that matter the war on drugs reproduces the criminalization of poverty and social control⁽¹⁴⁾.

The organization of urban space strategies proposed by the participants demonstrates the existence of a proposal for a very specific organization of the peripheral area destined for the drug circuit. The youngsters elaborated criteria for space distribution aiming to protect themselves from possible acts of violence that revolve around the use of drugs, especially the illegal ones. When young people propose specific spaces to use drugs, they request from the State another way to deal with drug consumption, different from the current war on drugs.

Brazil is signatory of all punitive strategies related to production/circulation/consumption of international drugs, an example is the Educational Program of Resistance to Drugs and Violence (PROERD)⁽¹⁵⁾, which acts in public schools showing prohibitionists strategies. Although the statistical data indicate that the consumption of drugs has not diminished, even with the harsh criminal laws, Brazil continues with a prohibitionist approach. This position of the Brazilian State has led many poor, black, and mulatto youths, as the ones of this area, to jail⁽¹⁴⁾.

The youngsters denounce the several problems of the neighborhood. It is known that the State does not recognize, in peripheral areas, the set of social charges or public services necessary for the reproduction of social life, such as health, education, housing, public transportation etc.⁽¹⁶⁾. Health, specifically, is attributed to the difficult access of young people to private health services as they belong to families that do not have much money, and the public services are attributed to the structural issues of the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS)⁽¹⁷⁾.

Young people have been questioning the government, the police, the school, and the State itself, about the absence or scarcity of social rights or respect for the existing social rights. These questions destabilize the rules and institutional guidelines accepted by previous generations, confronting them and pointing out contradictions, threatening the established order.

*Rolezinhos*¹ are current ways young people found to participate socially, to consider themselves present, and to seek other forms of sociability. It is a social movement connected to the musical style called ostentation funk. Through this movement the young proletarians seek to challenge the boundaries of

social class and the spaces they occupy in the city. However, *rolezinhos* were strongly repressed by the police and considered by the oligopolistic media as a "disturbance"^(9,18). This repression represents, for young people from peripheral areas, the prohibition to occupy the same space as the richer population, being, therefore, a deliberate apartheid process⁽⁹⁾.

The languages brought by young people to claim their rights and participation cannot be disregarded⁽⁵⁾. Evidently, what is at stake is the search for the young people of the magnification of their sociability and participation in social wealth. Thus, the new perspective is to promote an education that considers the cultural practices of this population and the difficulties of social reproduction, inherent to the fractions of the class to which they belong.

Study limitations

The strict conduction of the emancipatory action research depends, to certain extent, on the process of participatory decisions in the completion of the steps, which encourage the participants to change social practices. Limitations on the school context favored this process only partially. Another limitation of the study concerns the category of everyday representations, as group techniques tend to mask convictions, which are more easily exposed through in-depth interviews^(9,19). We assume that the composition between the prolonged coexistence of the group and the analytic treatment of speech - as a group speech -, have been sufficient to minimize this limitation, by exposing the convictions on peripheral areas.

Contributions to the field of Nursing, Public Health

The study resulted in effective contribution of young people from peripheral areas to areas of communication and education about drugs, since they had a continuous and active participation in the process, validating the results obtained. This contribution departs from the strategies commonly used by public health, which promote messages in media without incorporating young people's voice and disqualify their perceptions about the reality, leading them to a simplified and distorted perception of the problem, and, consequently, to the decay. Thus, the strategies reiterate the continuity of illusory representations about reality. On the other hand, they help with communication and education about drugs in the field of public health, which seeks to expose the complexity surrounding the phenomenon of drug use in the peripheral areas of big cities, with the purpose to promote understanding and strengthening of young people. Thus, they propel congruent and complex representations about reality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Regarding the divisions of the peripheral space, young people seem to formulate contradictory representations. We observed that the divisions proposed would have the function of protecting the distributor, the drug user, and also the

1 Planned social gatherings, in which predominantly poor, black teenagers socialize, flirt, take pictures, and just generally hang out at shopping malls occupied mostly by wealthy, white consumers.

residents that are not related to drug trafficking; the divisions would be necessary in the violent reality of peripheral areas. We can also find in the perspective proposed some ideological component, from the dominant approach of war on drugs.

Regarding the police, young people expose everyday representations, which also reflect the daily life in peripheral areas, but they do not show the information needed to understand that to exercise social control is actually one of the tasks of the police. Regarding drug trafficking, the youngsters have conflicting opinions, and this can be explained because the exploitation of poverty for drug trafficking is, at the same time, the job offer in the region.

The representations about the school also have contradictions, given the strong ideological component, because although public school is specifically a dismantling target, the ideological discourse for the need of schooling and qualification for work persists. Regarding public transportation, young people consider the State negligent towards the residents of the region and believe that the State aims to confine them, which makes everyday representations consistent, since in fact their chances of leaving the neighborhood are limited.

In relation to the reality of young people's health in the region, they also expressed consistent everyday representations,

since they identified limitations well known in the literature that analyzes SUS. They expressed that the State is not reliable and its responsibilities should be transferred to private companies. However, paradoxically, they expect the State to guarantee the social rights of individuals and promote social protection, which shows contradictory everyday representations, because they are consistent with the concrete needs, though contaminated by strong ideological influence, because the State is not really willing to meet the expected social protection, but to respond to the social forces in dispute.

The preparation of guidelines for drug education media programs benefited from the participation of young people. The educational process, however, deserves further development on the understanding of the State's role, given that the right to citizenship only begins the debate on the mechanisms of inequality and of the transformations required for social equality. The study revealed that the most effective communication to reach young people from peripheral areas is through the cultural practices they value, which provide the means to support the discussion, beyond State and social rights, and ensure effective participation in movements concerning the structural capitalist contradictions and not only the non-structural ones.

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