

Meanings of HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality for young Catholics



Significados a respeito da prevenção ao HIV/aids e da sexualidade para jovens católicos
Representaciones sociales sobre el HIV/SIDA y la sexualidad según jóvenes católicos

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze the the social representations of young Catholics about HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality.

Method: Mixed study, based on the theory of social representations, held in 2015 with 84 young Catholics participating in the group “World Youth Day” on Facebook. The data were collected through the technique of free association of words and in-depth interview. For the information analysis, the software Tri-Deux-Mots and Alceste were used.

Results: Sexuality is processed in the representational field of young people as being associated with the sexual practice. In turn, the prevention of HIV, a phenomenon represented as intrinsic to sexuality, occurs through the use of condoms or fidelity within marriage.

Conclusion: Young Catholics represent the prevention of HIV/AIDS as a transverse phenomenon to sexuality, whose sexual practices are anchored both in hegemonic and progressive discourses.

Keywords: Religion and sex. Sexuality. HIV. Nursing

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar as representações sociais de jovens católicos(as) quanto à prevenção ao HIV/AIDS e à sexualidade.

Método: Estudo misto, com base na teoria das representações sociais, realizado em 2015 com 84 jovens católicos participantes do grupo “Jornada Mundial da Juventude” no Facebook. Os dados foram coletados através da técnica de associação livre de palavras e entrevista em profundidade. Para análise das informações, foram usados os softwares Tri-Deux-Mots e Alceste.

Resultados: A sexualidade é processada no campo representacional dos(as) jovens como sendo associada à prática sexual. Por sua vez, a prevenção ao HIV, fenômeno representado como intrínseco à sexualidade, ocorre com o uso de preservativos ou com a fidelidade dentro do matrimônio.

Conclusão: Jovens católicos representam a prevenção ao HIV/AIDS como fenômeno transversal à sexualidade, cujas práticas sexuais estão ancoradas tanto nos discursos hegemônicos quanto nos progressistas.

Palavras-chave: Religião e sexo. Sexualidade. HIV. Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar las representaciones sociales de los(as) jóvenes católicos(as) sobre la prevención del VIH/SIDA y la sexualidad.

Método: Estudio mixto, basado en la teoría de las representaciones sociales, llevado a cabo en 2015 con 84 jóvenes participantes del grupo de católicos “Jornada Mundial de la Juventud” en Facebook. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de la técnica de la asociación libre de palabras y la entrevista en profundidad. Para el análisis de la información se utilizó el software Tri-Deux-Palabras y Alceste.

Resultados: La sexualidad es procesada en el campo representacional de los(as) jóvenes como siendo asociada con la práctica sexual. A su vez, la prevención del VIH, fenómeno representado como intrínseco a la sexualidad, se produce con el uso de preservativos o con la fidelidad dentro del matrimonio.

Conclusión: Jóvenes católicos(as) representan la prevención del VIH/SIDA como fenómeno transversal a la sexualidad, cuyas prácticas sexuales están ancladas tanto en los discursos hegemónicos como en los progresistas.

Palabras clave: Religión y sexo. Sexualidad. VIH. Enfermería.

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■ INTRODUCTION

The Catholic religion, the most prevalent in Brazil and with a greater number of followers in its various streams, has been one of the main formers of opinion and representations on various everyday social issues, including those related to sexual and reproductive rights that interfere in the forms of HIV/AIDS prevention.

In this perspective, this study deals with contents that have emerged from the networks of meanings of Catholic youths linked to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR). This movement has reaffirmed, over decades, speeches aligned with the most traditional precepts of the Roman Catholic Church, with new strategies regarding the ways of grouping young people, bringing them to the church and, thus, proposing the renewal of practices, rites and the mystique of the church⁽¹⁾.

Within the CCR, there are also those young people who find themselves in the midst of the ethical crossroads and with various concerns, caused by divergent positions between the church and access to reified scientific knowledge released by the media. If, on the one hand, the church disseminates information that relates safe sex to chastity or virginity and the experience of sex restricted to marriage, reproduction and fidelity between husband and wife, on the other, the media propagates sexual freedom and the practice of safe sex linked to the use of condoms⁽²⁾.

Superficial, inconsistent and contradictory information about sexuality and safe sex enhances the vulnerability of young religious to sexually and infections, more specifically the HIV, as well as the dogmatization of issues that are at the forefront of scientific knowledge. It is considered that the situation of integrating religious groups is not a protective factor of HIV contamination, because it favors a sense of invulnerability by some groups of believers in the face of what they consider to be the preservation of sin and natural divine protection⁽³⁾.

The Ministry of Health reported that, in the period from 2003 to 2012, there was an increase in HIV/AIDS detection rates among young people aged 15 to 24 year⁽⁴⁾. In view of the foregoing, and considering that the future course of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is related to the behavior adopted by young people and the contextual factors of social and political orders, which influence prevention methods and emphasize safe sexual practices⁽⁴⁾, it is questioned: what are the social representations of young Catholics about HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality?

This study uses the theoretical-methodological contribution of the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) to understand the meanings of sexuality and HIV/AIDS for young

Catholics, revealing nuances and knowledge imbricated in the context of religious power that interfere in behaviors, exercise of sexuality, and in the health-disease process of young people. The objective is, therefore, to analyze the social representations of young Catholics about HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality.

■ METHOD

It is a quantitative-qualitative study, based on the TSR, which allows us to unveil mental constructs related to the common reality of a group of people - belonging group - that shares a set of everyday concepts, propositions and interpersonal experiences, constituting a theory of common sense⁽⁵⁾.

The production of empirical data took place on the Internet, in the period of February and March of 2015, on the virtual page of the World Youth Day (WYD) of the social network called Facebook. Participating in the study were young Catholic adults aged between 18 and 24 years old, both men and women, members of a parish, members of church groups linked to the CCR who participated in the World Youth Day (WYD).

At first, the Free Word Association Technique (FWAT) was used with 84 Internet users who composed an intentional sample for convenience, not requiring a sample calculation. The FWAT script was composed of four inducing stimuli: exercise of sexuality; Catholic religion and the exercise of sexuality; AIDS; Catholic religion and AIDS. Then, the in-depth interview was carried out with 19 youngsters, according to the data saturation criterion.

The data from the FWAT has been organized and processed by Tri-Deux Mots software version 2.2, resulting in a data-mapped (graph) factorial map that allows the visualization of approximations and distances of evocations (opinion variables) and sociodemographic characteristics (fixed variables), revealed in a factorial plan of two axes/factors analyzed by the Factorial Correspondence Analysis (FCA) technique.

The verbalizations from the in-depth interviews were copied entirely from the 'chat boxes', organized into a single corpus in the Microsoft Office Word 2003 document and processed using Alceste software version 4.5. Alceste performs the lexical analysis that allows the exploration of the structure, the organization of the social agents discourse and the visualization of the Factorial Plane Graph and the FCA⁽⁶⁾. In addition, it is based on calculations of co-occurrence of words in the text segments, seeking to distinguish classes of words that represent the topic of interest of the investigation⁽⁷⁾.

After analysis, the data triangulation was performed to capture the social representations. At the moment, the data from the different techniques, quantitative and qualitative, were integrated, confronting and discussing them in order to maximize and validate them.

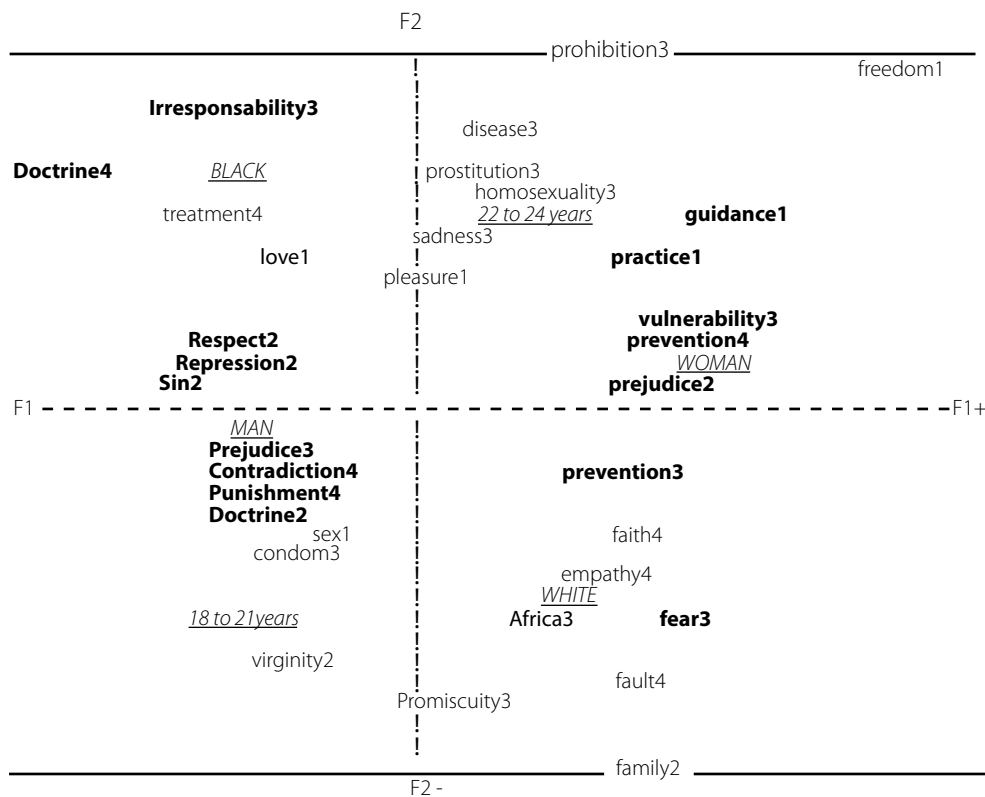
The research complied with the recommendations of the Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council, which was initiated after the approval of the the Ethics and Research Committee of the Nursing School of the Universidade Federal da Bahia, under the protocol No. 878.042/2014. It should be highlighted that the Free and Informed Consent Form was sent online through the tools provided by the social network, and after reading, the participants confirmed their participation through their digital signature.

■ RESULTS

A total of 43 men and 41 women participated in the study; the majority coming from Bahia (36), Minas Gerais

(12), Rio de Janeiro (07) and São Paulo (07); 22 reported having completed secondary education, 30 have incomplete higher education, and 32 have complete higher education; 41 self-declared themselves as white, 17 black, and 26 brown; 61 said they were single, and 23 were married; 58 referred to be heterosexuals, 18 homosexuals, and 08 bisexuals. Regarding the practice of sex with protection: 46 used a condom, and 38 did not use it; of these, 21 declared themselves virgins and 17 had unprotected sex. As for church attendance, 62 reported going between two to three times a week and 22 between four to five times.

The Tri-Deux Mots software version 2.2 demonstrates variations of the spatial organization of the variables, exposing approximations and distances of the fixed variables and opinion in the two factors, factor 1 (F1) and factor 2 (F2). Put in another way, it exposes the proximity and the distance between the characteristics of the participants and their responses.



Graph 1 - Factorial plan resulting from the analysis of the factorial matching plan, processed by *Tri-deux-mots* software version 2.2.

Source: Authors.

Subtitle:

F1+ Young women	
F1- Young men	
F2+ Black people with ages ranging from 22 to 24 years old	Fixed variable contributing with F1
F2- White people with ages ranging from 18 to 21 years old	Fixed variable contributing with F2

In the axis of the abscissa, where F1 is located, there is the translation of the most significant objectifications, necessary for the formation of representations, showing 41.1% of the total variance of responses. In the axis of the ordinates, is the F2 that demonstrates 22.4% of the variance and composes the objectifications.

By adding the percentage values of F1 and F2, we explain 63.5% of the total variance of the answers, which demonstrates statistically reliable parameters and with internal consistency, that is, an analysis with significance is characterized. Regarding the minimum frequency of words for this study, it was considered 8 (eight), due to the vast and heterogeneous semantic field provided by the interviewees. In all, there were 1637 words, 313 of them were different.

In the Factor Map, we find the semantic fields that make up the social representations of young Catholics when they are stimulated by the stimuli (e): exercise of sexuality (e1), catholic religion and exercise of sexuality (e2), aids (e3), catholic religion and aids (e4). The stimulus that offered the greatest contribution of words to the game of oppositions was stimulus 4 (AIDS), possibly due to its greater diffusion, propagation and propaganda in the media and in social environments.

The fixed variables that contributed to the axes of the abscissa and ordinate were gender, age group and race. For the axis of the abscissa, they are in opposition to the sexes, masculine (F1-) and feminine (F1+). In the row of ordinates, young people of both genders, those of the black race aged between 18 to 21 years old (F2+), and those of white race in the age range of 22 to 24 years old in the (F2-) are opposed.

In F1- (one negative factor), it is noted that men did not emit words with statistical significance for the stimulus exercise of sexuality (e1), which possibly denotes an embarrassing situation for these youngsters. This happens because when this stimulus was associated with the catholic religion (e2), it is observed that they evoked the words repression, sin, respect and doctrine, which reinforce the evidence of defense mechanisms derived from the control of sexuality preached by the church that they integrate. For the AIDS stimulus (e3), they expressed irresponsibility and prejudice; however, when AIDS was related to the Catholic religion (e4), they mentioned doctrine.

Women collaborated with F1+ by evoking guidance and practices, understood as sexual practices when encouraged about the exercise of sexuality (e1). When they were asked about the Catholic religion and the exercise of sexuality, they evoked the term prejudice. When they listened to the AIDS stimulus (e3), they used the terms vulnerability, fear and prevention. On the other hand, when responding to the stimulus Catholic religion and AIDS (e4),

they referred again to prevention, however, accompanied by another meaning, that is, that Catholic principles also contribute to avoid this aggravation.

In F2+ factor, youngsters of both genders, who declared themselves to be black, aged 18 to 21 years old, evoked pleasure, freedom, love for stimulus 1, and the term forbidden to stimulus 2. When asked about the word AIDS (e3) they referred to illness, irresponsibility, homosexuality, prostitution, treatment and sadness. However, there were no statistically significant verbalizations for the expression catholic religion and aids (e4), possibly because it was a taboo subject, there was censorship of its cognitive system and the possibilities of association of terms.

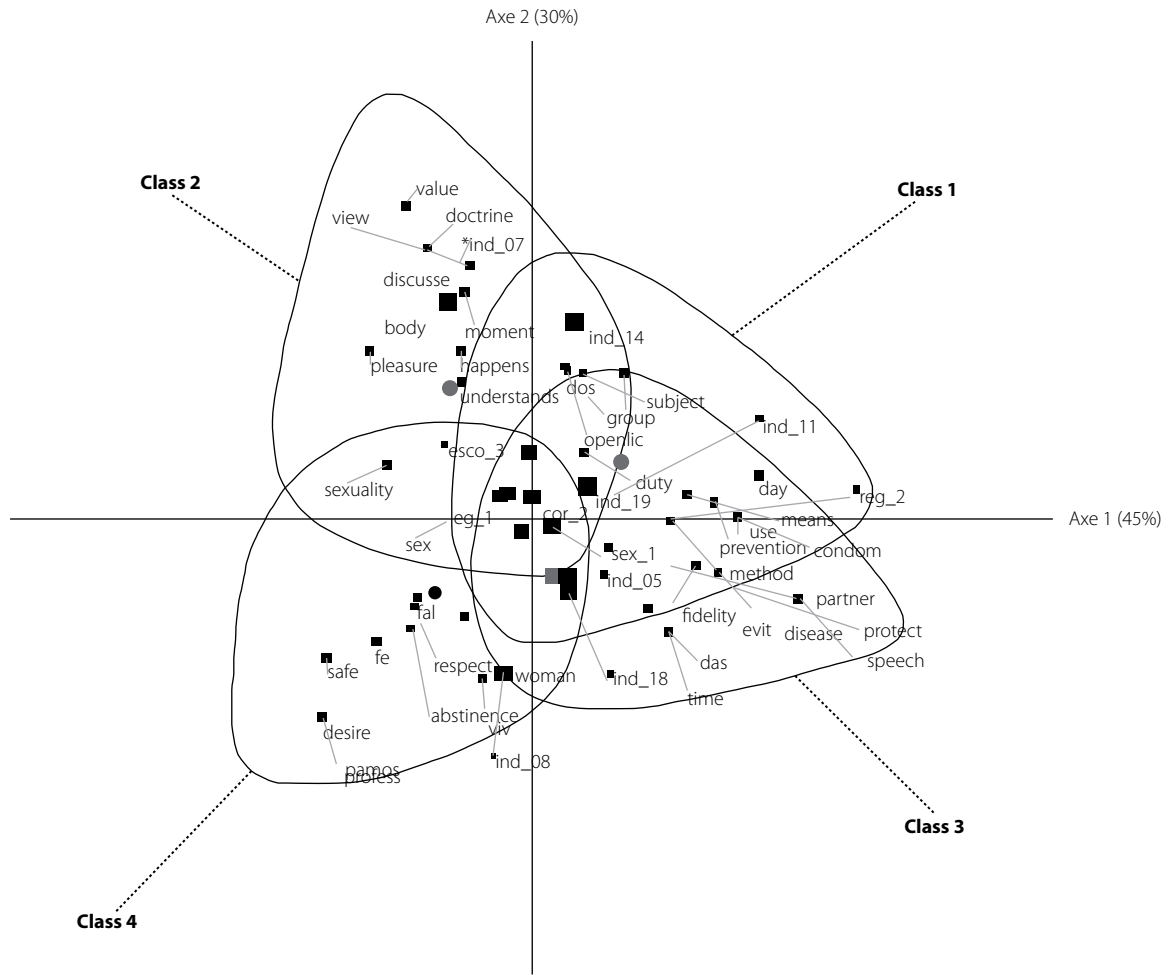
In the F2- factor, white youth in the age group between 22 and 24 years old defined the (e1) exercise of sexuality as sex. When they established relationship with the expression catholic religion (e2) they said virginity and family. The (e3) aids was represented by the terms Africa, promiscuity, condom. Finally, when asked about the expression catholic religion and aids they evoked words loaded with religious senses such as guilt, faith and empathy.

The responses from the interviews, also submitted to Factorial Correspondence Analysis (FCA), when processed by Alceste software, gave rise to graph 2. The responses were structured by reading the lexical content of the words and the attribute variables with higher factorial loads, arranged in the semantic fields, whose organization showed the degree of proximity between the classes' contents.

The data processed in the Alceste software, from the standard statistical analysis, originated a corpus of 19 initial context units (ICU), totaling 10,115 occurrences, 1855 distinct words and an average of 5 occurrences per word, with frequency equal to or higher than the average, and with $\chi^2 \geq 3.84$. After reducing the vocabulary to its lexical roots, 268 reduced and analyzable radicals were found, being 217 units of elementary contexts (UEC).

The lexical content of the interviews was divided into four conglomerates, in a non-random manner, and referred to the specific designs for each class evidenced in the graph. All classes contributed to the zero point, where the axes of the abscissa and the ordinate cross, although the opposition of the classes reveals discretely in the factorial plane, in both factors (F1 and F2); which together account for 75% of the total variance of the UECs.

In axis 1 or F1, we noticed the largest factor loads raised by Alceste, which explained 40% of the total variance of the UECs. On the negative (left) side of F1, there are words grouped into classes 2 and 4, represented in the discourses of young black men residing in capitals/metropolitan regions, with full tertiary education. In the spatial presenta-



Graph 2 - Factorial Plan of Correspondence issued by Alceste software.

Source: Authors

Subtitle for the interpretation of the Factorial Plane Graph

Class	Variables-Attributes
Class 1	Ind_5: Interviewee 05; Ind_11: Interviewee 11; Ind_14: Interviewee 14; Ind_19: Interviewee 19; Gender_1: female; Reg_2: Countryside Origin
Class 2	Ind_7: Interviewee 07; Sco_3: Complete Higher Education; Reg_1: Capital Origin / Metropolitan Region; Gender_2: Male; Race_2: Black race
Class 3	Ind_18: Interviewee 18;
Class 4	Ind_08: Interviewee 08.

tion of the factorial map the two classes are interconnected in the F1-, sharing the attribute variables and the word sexuality. Class 4 also contributed individually to the factor: faith, talk (meaning of dialogue), abstinence, living, following (doctrinal practices), desire, dating and professing.

In contrast, in the same axis 1, on the positive side (on the right side), the words with the highest factorial loads agglutinated in classes 1 and 3, apprehended by the interviews and, which are also superimposed, are positioned. Class 1 had the collaboration of women, from the interior

of their respective states, with complete higher education, with the words: use, prevention, method and day (referent in ICUs to the present day). Class 3 was constructed with the contribution of young Catholics of both genders, with incomplete higher education, whose words with statistical significance for the F1+ were: medium, condom, protect, partner, disease, speech, time and fidelity.

In relation to F2, in the vertical line of Graph 2, four groups of words are highlighted, which, together, explain 30% of the total variance of the UECs. In the positive axis 2, in the upper

part, classes 1 and 2 are juxtaposed. From class 1, which had the contribution of women from the interior of their respective states, with complete higher education, came the following semantic-lexical fields: duty, subject, group and opinion. In class 2, participants, black men, residing in capitals/metropolitan regions, the object of study was represented by the words: value, doctrine, discussed (discussion), body, pleasure, moment, events and understandings.

In contrast, in F2- (lower portion of the graph), classes 3 and 4 are categorized, which together and intersected, and contribute to the formation of this sector. It can be seen that in class 3, composed of young people of both genders, with incomplete higher education, there is the apprehension of the objectifications: time and fidelity. In contrast, class 4, which was interfered by class 2 variables, through an overlap in F1-, had an established relation with the words: faith, respect, women, abstinence, living, talk (meaning to dialogue), follows (doctrinal practices), dating and professing.

Thus, it can be inferred that the Tri-Deux-Mots FCA analysis of the semantic/lexical field emphasized the significant oppositions for the fixed variables gender, age group and race/color. On the other hand, the lexical analysis of the classes favored by the Factorial Plan generated by the Alceste revealed class 1 and 3 deformity, in relation to classes 2 and 4. Since, respectively, they dealt with issues related to condoms and HIV/AIDS prevention (classes 1 and 3), and the last classes (2 and 4) referred to themes related to the sphere of sexuality.

The reading of the words visualized in the factorial map produced by the Tri-Deux-Mots resembles and complements the lexical analysis carried out by the interpretation of the classes in the FCA of the factorial plan of Alceste. Thus, both the intersection of the classes and the proximity of the words with the central point of the axes/factors of both graphs converge towards the formation and confirmation of a group of belonging.

As for the variable-fixed origin, this proved to be insignificant statistically for the oppositions with the words evoked and also for the attribute variables that contributed to the four classes.

■ DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that the content of the representations reveals the meanings, symbols and ideas about the investigated object, when they are shared and disseminated in social networks and in their groups of belonging and contextualized in the daily life where they are inserted.

The influence of Catholic doctrines and dogmas and THE participation in the World Youth Day, in general, appro-

ached several young people, favoring the emergence of a religious identity that determined the emergence of the consensus of young people from different places in Brazil and dissensions related to gender, race and age group of these young people.

Considering the dynamics of sharing and exchange of information in the network, the rapid dissemination and propagation of knowledge and ideologies in the formation of networks of relations between people of different localities, there was the identification of the group of belonging to this research. The formation of the group of belonging is related to the social identity developed by the people and refers to the self-concept derived from the knowledge of their belonging to a social group. This conformation is based on the assumption that interpersonal behavior is formed by the relationship established with intergroup behavior and vice versa⁽⁸⁾.

In this process of interindividual and intergroup exchanges, which are delimited in a certain historical and social context, the materialization of the memory and the representations on phenomena of society and, therefore, a certain social, structural organization of legitimacy and stability of the group take place. Therefore, such assumptions facilitate the understanding of the social identity associated with the sense of belonging, with which the groups of belonging are formed⁽⁸⁾.

In revealing a consensus about the doubts about the practice of 'safe sex', young people subtly get called attention to the need to approximate scientific discourses reified from the Catholic Church. Among the important themes, the safe sex practice advocated by science stands out, which would lead to the unveiling of the doubts of young practicing Catholics and the lesser exposure to health problems caused by unprotected sexual practice⁽⁹⁾.

Doubts, fears, habits and taboos are common among young people and adolescents, regarding the use of condoms, since there are those who do not like to use it in their sexual practices for fear of not reaching the pleasure, and also, there are others who do not have more information on the importance of its use for the sexual practice.

In a study carried out with adolescents from a municipal school in the city of Fortaleza (CE), the authors realized that power, gender, taboos and cultural issues, which adolescents are submitted to, have contributed to the structuring of their representations and, therefore, to the decision of adopting the condom for the practice of safe sex⁽¹⁰⁾.

Regarding sexuality, women presented social representations consistent with hegemonic theoretical and scientific discourses, as well as criticisms they made in their discourses on how the Catholic Church approaches and

conducts this theme. In addition, they pointed out that the free sexual practice is considered by the church as deviant (sinful), seen with prejudice and condemning eyes against those who practice it.

From the moment that sexuality is presented as a domain of knowledge, it becomes the object of power relations, since its application is to control the exercise of sexuality. The mechanisms of control are subjective, being activated by discourses and knowledge, that trigger processes of control in the social constructions of the individuals and they begin in the familiar coexistence⁽¹¹⁾.

Unlike women, men anchored their representations about the exercise of sexuality in the moral norms of the Christian-Catholic tradition, built historically, objectifying prejudice. In this regard, it is understood that the information was processed in the cognitive system of people starting from the way young people were taught from childhood to experience sexuality⁽¹²⁾.

These ideas that oppose traditional Catholic doctrines gain strength with the progressive ideals of Catholics for the Right to Decide when they propose that young people can be good Catholics, but they disagree with the Catholic Church's imposed position, inasmuch as all have the freedom to distinguish what is essential to their faith or not⁽²⁾.

The speeches of some interviewees reinforce hegemonic representations on HIV prevention, based on "risk behavior" and centralized on individual vulnerability. That is, it is only the conduct and sexual practices of each person that will favor or not the contamination by the virus that causes AIDS.

The speeches of the young people from the interview reflected the semantic universe objectified in the words evoked for the stimulus aids and catholic religion. Thus, by anchoring the terms irresponsible, prejudiced and doctrine, for example, to the dogmas of the church, they contribute to the maintenance of stigmas and prejudices against those who live with HIV and/or freely exercise their sexuality.

The social representations of young Catholics are consistent with findings from a survey of aging people about the meaning of HIV/AIDS, in which respondents associated the infection and forms of contagion with male homosexual practices, to men who relate to transvestites, bohemia, promiscuity, pleasure and casual sex⁽¹³⁾.

The participants in this study reaffirmed widespread knowledge at the beginning of the epidemic by associating Africa with AIDS. It is possible that this idea still permeates the social imaginary, in which the virus may have been transmitted by the sexual relationship of humans with the monkey, as well as the ingestion of the flesh of this primate.

A study on social representations of people living with HIV has seized the representation that AIDS originated in

other peoples, such as Africa, which denotes an establishment of the disease to foreign and marginalized groups, represented by the poorest continent in the world, whose population present behaviors considered 'deviant' as the sexual practice with animals⁽¹⁴⁾.

The representations of AIDS as a treatable disease, perceived in this research, were also highlighted in other studies with several groups investigated as adolescents, women and people in the process of aging⁽¹⁴⁻¹⁵⁾. This fact evidences the consensus among the different groups of belonging in the understanding about the importance of the treatment for longevity with quality of life.

Another representation processed by the young Catholics was about homosexuality, associated with the word 'homosexuality' and prostitution, which were present in other studies on representations of AIDS. Such evocations referred to prejudice and discrimination to groups considered as 'risk', reflecting the widespread and naturalized stigmas at the beginning of the epidemic⁽¹⁶⁾. In addition, it has been observed that there is the relational construction of the representations about AIDS anchored in biomedical models and in some traditional social constructions derived from the reified knowledge⁽¹⁷⁾.

Through the dogmas of the Catholic Church, individual blame was perceived in the speeches, that is, the individual is the only culprit for contracting HIV, disregarding factors that point to social and programmatic vulnerability. In addition, there were reaffirmations of hegemonic social constructs such as the sexual freedom of men, virginity of the young, heterosexual marriage, trust and fidelity as preventive practices, increasing the vulnerability of Catholic youth to ISTs and AIDS.

■ CONCLUSION

Understanding the social representations from the comparison, through the analysis of two factorial maps of correspondence, allowed the understanding of the mental representations processed by the young Catholics on HIV/AIDS prevention as a phenomenon transverse to sexuality, whose networks of meanings are influenced by Catholic doctrines and dogmas, while reflecting the influence of scientific/modern mediatic knowledge through the use of condoms.

It should be pointed out that for the social group investigated, the representation about sexuality is processed according to normativity criteria, moreover, it is associated with a sexual practice - even if it is free to exercise it - loaded with moral values, whose pleasure must be enjoyed with love and respect between the couple (heterosexual).

The HIV/AIDS prevention has been anchored, above all, in traditional discourses, reverberating the hegemonic

representations, which translate into the ideals of sexual practice after marriage and fidelity. It should be highlighted that the awareness and knowledge of sexual rights as a universal right is fundamental for young people to exercise their religiousness with freedom, without, however, compromising the free exercise of sexuality, also, safeguarding their health.

The study was relevant since it sought to understand how young Catholics deal with sexual freedom, with the adoption of preventive behaviors and with the way they represent such phenomena, against religious principles, in view of the possibility of contributing to the knowledge of health professionals about the vulnerability of young religious to HIV/AIDS.

However, the study presents as limitations the low adherence of young people to the collection of information, when compared to the universe that are the social networks and the fact that there are scarce studies aimed at the sexual health of religious young people to subsidize the theoretical deepening in the research.

It is recommended that health professionals, specifically nurse, be concatenated with the daily life of young people enabling them to understand the functioning of religious systems that integrate the spectra of human subjectivities. Thus, it will be possible to operationalize care practices based on the knowledge that guides the behavior of the group.

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