70 - PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NARCOTICS ADDICTS: CASE STUDY IN A THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY

ANA CRISTINA HEITELVAN; MAGALE KONRATH.
Centro Universitário FEEVALE - Novo Hamburgo / RS / Brasil
anaflesch@hotmail.com; magalek@feevale.br

INTRODUCTION

Talking about drugs has always been a controversial issue. The effects provoked by chemical dependency surpass the physical and psychological limits and intrude into the social, professional and family environments. To support their addiction to drugs, the users spend a large amount of money on it. Indeed, their serious and painful lack of emotional structure is great in extent.

A drug, broadly speaking, is any substance used in pharmacy, painting, chemical laboratories, etc. However, today there is a popular usage of this word, that refers to any hallucinogenic product that leads the user to chemical dependency and then to any substance or toxic product, which is a synonym for narcotics. According to Ferreira (2001), the term “drug” can be defined as a narcotic, hallucinogenic or exciting substance, with the intention of transitorily changing our personality. On the other hand, Vizzolto (1988) says that psychotropic drugs are chemical, natural or synthetic substances that cause changes in behavior and often in psychic activity, presenting depressive, stimulating and disturbing effects.

A drug addict, as this word suggests, is someone who depends on drugs to survive. He or she is not interested in any other activity and, thus, physical alterations are clearly evident. We call it narcotics addict. Drug addiction is understood as a state of physical or psychological dependence on a drug. In the first case, the organism does not work without the chemical substance; in the other, the user has an uncontrolled will to ingest drugs, resulting in continuous and periodic use.

Drug abuse and addiction is a matter of public health, which affects many people and has a wide variety of consequences, either social ones or in individuals' health. Even with accepted, tolerated and legalized drugs (in this case alcohol and cigarettes), it is possible to end up abusing drugs and becoming a chemical dependent person. Drug addiction starts with people abusing drugs, usually when they are aware of what they are doing. Nevertheless, drug dependence is not only "the use of a great amount of drugs", but how often the individual makes use of them. In the same way, any drug is potentially toxic and its poisoning degree depends on the intensity of its use (SEIBEL & TOSCANO JR, 2006).

Since physical activity deals with the body, affectivity, self-esteem and interpersonal relationship, we believe that it plays an important role in preventing and fighting the use of drugs - either the legal ones (such as alcohol, cigarettes, medicines) or the illegal ones (such as marijuana, cocaine, crack) - as people, through sports practice drills, can release their tension, fears, stress and the sufferings caused by unemployment and violence, that usually lead people to the drug path.

Therefore, practicing any physical activity could be seen as an alternative to help drug users in the rehabilitation process. Considered to be a practice that brings many health benefits, physical activity contributes to keep and to improve physical, cardiorespiratory and musculoskeletal capacities, besides bringing positive results in emotional and social aspects (GONZÁLEZ & FENSTERSEIFER, 2005).

When it comes to the drug addict in special, the benefits that physical activities provide to the people in recovery are more evident, because these drug users look for alternatives to overcome some difficulties, such as abstinence symptoms, the risk of drug relapse and the decrease in physical capacity, etc. Every physical activity must be regulated and guided according to the individual's physical capacity and, if possible, must be chosen by them, since the recovery is based on the pleasure of practice. Therefore, relaxing moments and socialization must be a premise.

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

We have used qualitative, descriptive and interpretative research, as well as case study in order to identify the narcotics addicts' perception of the effects that physical activity can bring in the recovery process. For collecting data, we have used half-structuralized interview, non-participating observance and documentary analysis. In this paper, we have also used a theoretical triangulation approach - data source, methodological and reflective (CAUDURO, 2004).

Research description

The experimental group was composed of seven drug users in chemical dependence treatment. Such individuals take part in a rehabilitation program in a therapeutic community in the city of Novo Hamburgo, open since 1994.

These therapeutic communities have a noticeable projection not only in the city of Novo Hamburgo, but throughout Brazil and abroad. In affiliation with Brazilian Federation of Therapeutic Communities - FEBRACT (Federação Brasileira de Comunidades Terapêuticas), they have been developing their proposal for treatment through three objectives: social reinsertion and recovery for addicts and alcoholics, family orientation and support to the relatives affected by this problem, and prevention of abusive use of psychoactive substances. The Therapeutic Program follows a nine-moth residential treatment, preceded by a detoxification period of approximately 21 days. It is based on a code of ethical/moral values, having spirituality, discipline and work (labor therapy) as a basis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In data analysis and interpretation, we have used a theoretical triangulation approach - data source, methodological and reflective, compiling information from many sources, such as theoretical fundamentation, interview answers and focal group (CAUDURO, 2004). From a thorough reading of all the collected material, we created some categories of analysis.

Previous experience with physical activity and sports

During all the interviews, it was possible to notice that almost all study collaborators had already had some previous experience with physical activity. Nonetheless, due to constant use of drugs, they ended up giving up on sports. In the following statement, we can see it.

"I had always been a very active child. When I was a kid, I used to practice taekwondo. For four years, I traveled throughout Brazil; I was even the national champion. It was one of the things I liked most. All of a sudden, I lost interest in it..." (interviewed 1).

In the following stories, we will be able to understand how important it is to have a strong commitment to personal health and physical fitness in order to help people in need. Thus, we will be getting crucial hints for sealing our destiny as future PE professionals.

Sport and physical activity in a therapeutic community

In the searched Therapeutic Community, the main objective is to practice a sport in order provide body-strengthening and self-control. Physical exercise also develops concentration and self-confidence and enhances group therapy. Amongst the busy schedule they have to follow, the space designed for physical activities gains importance. Drug users have a weekly moment to relax, being monitored by a physical educator who works voluntarily. Also, in other periods, they take Karate and Tai chi chuan classes. Moreover, they have a fitness center (which is almost built) as well as a place where there are many gym apparatus, such as a bench

press, creatively made of lawn mower wheels, iron bars and cement-filled buckets.

As the interviews were being done, it was possible to perceive everybody's satisfaction and their interest in relation to the sports practiced there. We can show it through the statements below:

"After I do the exercises, I take a shower and I feel invigorated and completely refreshed, you know, it seems I'm just like new. (interviewed 2).

Soccer is one of the activities done by the study participants, considered to be the main sport in the world by Giulianott (2002). We notice different views on this sport. Some interviewed emphasize soccer as an integrative and relaxing practice.

"Here we learn - mainly through soccer - that we are a family (…) that it's not worth fighting, 'cause leisure and recreational activities just help us keep our health good." (interviewed 1).

On the other hand, others comment on the not so positive aspects, such as aggressiveness and the lack of self-control:

"Sometimes there is a quarrel between us, because soccer can make us angry, as I said before. If you're at a loose end, and you go play soccer, we are most likely to get into trouble: anything can be the reason for an argument. For example, if you hit me, we're gonna end up fighting (…) A fight has already broken out during a match, only because of one's emotional response." (interviewed 5).

"Soccer is just like this, you know, we show our flaws (…) sometimes monitors and instructors have to intervene in violent games. I don't play that much, 'cause I don't feel psychologically ready for it." (interviewed 4).

According to the stories and our observation, it is clear that many drug treatment patients are still not emotionally prepared to play soccer. However, this is only one of the activities and there are those who prefer tai chi chuan (or tai chi, as it is called). Its practice and the debate about issues such as moral, ethics and spirituality (directly concerning to this martial art) are indeed contributing to the recovery of these patients. During tai chi practice, we are used to applying breathing techniques and relaxing music as well as having disciplined concentration on slow motion routines (SEVERINO, 1991).

"Tai chi also helps me restore my equilibrium, it helps me calm down and meditate - one of the best things I learned here." (interviewed 2).

Tai chi chuan requires a calm state of mind, total devotion and spiritual focus on the movements during the exercises. The registered benefits are: better concentration, perception of reality, less irritability, fewer depression symptoms, self-esteem improvement, team spirit, better respiratory and digestive condition, improvement in psychomotor efficiency and better physical condition.

The fitness center, in this therapeutic community, is a high valued place, either the indoors or the outdoors area. As time goes by, they like it even more.

"Nowadays I get up at 5 a.m. I do some stretching exercises and then I go straight to the gym. Now my days are very busy, I feel fine and very well (…) that's the part of Physical Education I like most". (interviewed 4).

"I think that sports also help me get better even faster; it helps me restore my equilibrium and find peace of mind. Gym is only to keep my body fit and physically strong." (interviewed 7).

We can notice how well the individuals feel with physical activity practices. They can hardly wait for the PE teacher to come, because they like to have his or her company so that they can satisfy their doubts about the exercises. On the other days, the patients practice the exercises by themselves on their day off.

According to what they said, the patients like to have a beautiful and healthy body. This is important for their recovery because it gives them motivation and boosts their self-esteem. Physical activity is also for keeping their minds busy so that they can make through difficult times, replacing bad habits with good ones. Thus, the drug addicts start thinking positively, in such way that they make up for everything they have done wrong.

Physical activity contributions to drug users' recovery

According to Mendes (2006), many benefits are acquired through physical activity practices: anxiety reduction, self-esteem improvement, prevention of depression, better sleep quality, enthusiasm in daily activities, better concentration and significant mood change. Everyone is able to become aware of these improvements in physical and psychological state.

"Physical exercise was essential for me. It boosted my self-esteem and I got fit (…) I didn't use to exercise much because I consumed drugs, alcohol and cigarettes." (interviewed 6).

On chatting with the rehab patients, they say that they are satisfied with the results and want to continue practicing physical activities in order to keep a good quality of life, create a sense of well-being and be kept away from drugs.

"How can I explain… my days became less harsh, you know (…) you gotta make time to do your physical exercises and stuff like that (…) body workout, go jogging. Physical exercises have recovered my self-esteem… I wanna try to get my life back, not to make mistakes (…) You gotta fight against drugs, you know, I don't wanna stop this treatment till I'm rehabilitated. I'm afraid of slipping back into drugs, that's why I don't wanna leave this place. " (interviewed 5).

We understand all the interviewed patients' words because it was possible to see them working out and practicing all the activities described. In one of these practices, led by a PE professional, the instructor proposed muscular resistance training as well as motor coordination and attention exercises, playing many games. In this therapeutic community, the age group varies a lot as well as their physical capacity and, for this reason, we have been worried about their limitations. For them, it is important to restore their emotional equilibrium and to preserve their mental equanimity, since they are in search of their true ego, which is really important at this stage of recovery.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our main objective with this study was to identify the chemical dependents' perception of the effects brought by physical activity in the rehabilitation process. It has become noticeable their satisfaction and interest in relation to the practiced activities. On the other hand, it is clear that their preferences are diverse: some do not like soccer because it may cause a quarrel; others prefer working out, while the other ones practice tai chi. In general, they are pleased with the results. They feel alright, think carefully of their health and state that the developed activities contribute to their self-esteem and emotional equilibrium, besides helping them meditate and calm down.

In general, all of the rehab patients like to practice any physical activity, because now they feel well and their day is much better and pleasant. The interviewed said that they are in search of their true ego, which is really important at this stage of recovery. The stories make it clear that some get to the therapeutic community with depression symptoms and, as time goes by, they can get their self-esteem back. They also state that they have found pleasure in life, going along with physical activity, and emphasize how important mental health and well-being are.

All of them have also said that they feel like continuing to practice these sports and exercises as soon as they finish the rehabilitation program. Everybody wants to move along and stay away from drugs. In addition, they want to make up for the time lost in order to integrate into society again, getting closer to their family, friends and studies. Most of them carry on attending the therapeutic community as a way of not slipping back into drugs. Once at home again, having their families' support, they want to continue feeling the peace found in this place.

Finally, we conclude that there's no doubt about what physical activity can do for people in recovery, especially drug

addicts. We have it here a space for PE professionals to develop their practical knowledge. There is nothing more rewarding than helping other people, in order to improve their quality of life.

REFERENCES

CAUDURO, Maria Teresa (org). Investigação em Educação Física e Esportes: um novo olhar pela pesquisa qualitativa. Novo Hamburgo: Feevale, 2004.
FERREIRA, S. F. Neuroadaptação: uma proposta alternativa de atividade física para usuários de drogas em recuperação. Revista Brasileira de Ciência e Movimento. V. nov. N. 1, jan/2001, Brasília, DF.
GIULIANOTT, Richard. Sociologia do futebol: dimensões históricas e socioculturais do esporte das multidões. São Paulo: Nova Alexandria, 2002.
GONZÁLEZ, Fernando Jaime; FENSTERSEIFER, Paulo Evaldo. Dicionário crítico de educação física. Ijuí: Unijuí, 2005, 424p.
MENDES, Aluísio Menin. A Importância da Atividade Física para a Saúde <http://www.nutrimais.com/nutri/esporte/aluisio.asp> acesso em julho de 2006.
SEIBEL, Sergio Dario; TOSCANO JR., Alfredo. Dependência de Drogas. São Paulo: Atheneu, 2006, 586 p.
SEVERINO, Roque Enrique. Tai Chi Chuan. São Paulo: Ícone, 1991.
VIZZOLTO, S.M. A droga: a escola e a prevenção. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1988.

Centro Universitário FEEVALE
RS 239, 2755 / CEP 93352-000 / Novo Hamburgo - RS / Brasil
magalek@feevale.br

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND NARCOTICS ADDICTS: CASE STUDY IN A THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY

ABSTRACT

This study presents an issue that has been worrying parents and educators: the use of drugs. In order to expand the Physical Education field experience, we have gone in search of a theme that could relate physical activity to recovery from drug addiction. With this, we want to make a contribution to this field with theorical and methodological reflections on drug dependency. The method used was based on a qualitative research paradigm with case study. For that, we have also used half-structuralized interview, non-participating observance and documentary analysis. The experimental group was composed of seven drug users in chemical dependence treatment in a therapeutic community in the city of Novo Hamburgo. We have concluded that the activities practiced by the patients have contributed to their mental health, well-being, self-esteem, wellness and sleep.

KEY-WORDS: Physical Activity, Narcotic Addicts, Drugs

L'ACTIVITÉ PHYSIQUE ET LE DÉPENDENT CHIMIQUE : UNE ÉTUDE DE CAS DANS UNE COMMUNAUTÉ THÉRAPEUTIQUE

RÉSUMÉ

Cet étude présente un thème qui préoccupe de plus en plus les parents par rapport à leurs enfants : l'usage de drogues. À partir d'une motivation personnelle d'amplifier les domaines d'action de l'Éducation Physique, a été iniciée la recherche d'un thème rapportant les bénéfices que l'activité physique proportionne aux dépendants chimiques en phase de récupération. Par là, nous avons l'intention de contribuer par des réflexions théoriques et méthodologiques avec un domaine dont nous sommes encore très tendancieux et méconnaissants. La méthodologie employée est basée sur le paradigme qualitatif avec l'étude de cas. Pour celà, a été utilisée l'entrevue demi-structurée, l'observation non participante et l'analyse documentaire. Les collaborateurs de l'étude ont été 7 intégrants d'une Communauté Thérapeutique de la municipalité de Novo Hamburgo. Il a été aperçue la grande importance de l'activité physique dans la phase de récupération des participants. Nous avons constaté que les activités physiques pratiquées par les dépendants chimiques contribuent au bien-être physique et mental, à l'auto-estime, à la disposition quotidienne et au sommeil.

MOTS-CLE: Activité physique, dépendant chimique, drogues.

LA ACTIVIDAD FÍSICA Y EL DEPENDIENTE QUÍMICO: UN ESTUDIO DEL CASO EN UNA COMUNIDAD TERAPÉUTICA

RESUMEN

El actual estudio presenta un tema que cada vez más preocupa a padres en lo referente a sus niños que es el uso de drogas. De una motivación personal en extender los campos del funcionamiento de la Educación Física es que la búsqueda de un tema fue iniciada que relacionó las ventajas que la actividad física proporciona a los dependientes químicos en fase de la recuperación. Con esto, se piensa para contribuir con las reflexiones teóricas y de los metodológicas para un área donde nos todavía perjudican y muy ignorante. La metodología usada fue basada en el paradigma cualitativo con estudio de caso. Para en tal manera fue utilizado la entrevista de la mitad-estructurada, el no-participante del comentario y el análisis documental. Los colaboradores del estudio habían sido 7 integrantes de una comunidad terapéutica de la ciudad de Novo Hamburgo. La gran importancia de la actividad física en la fase de la recuperación las mismas le fueron percibidas. Fue evidenciado que las actividades físicas practicadas por los dependientes químicos lo contribuyen para el bienestar físico y mental y, auto-estima, la disposición diaria y sueño.

PALABRAS-LLAVE: Actividad física, dependiente químico, drogas.

A ATIVIDADE FÍSICA E O DEPENDENTE QUÍMICO: UM ESTUDO DE CASO EM UMA COMUNIDADE TERAPÊUTICA

RESUMO

O presente estudo apresenta um tema que cada vez mais preocupa os pais em relação aos seus filhos: uso de drogas. A partir de uma motivação pessoal em ampliar os campos de atuação da Educação Física, é que se iniciou a busca de um tema que relacionasse os benefícios que a atividade física proporciona aos dependentes químicos em fase de recuperação. Com isso, pretende-se contribuir com reflexões teóricas e metodológicas para uma área em que somos ainda muito preconceituosos e desconhecedores. A metodologia utilizada foi baseada no paradigma qualitativo com estudo de caso. Para tanto foi utilizada a entrevista semi-estruturada, a observação não-participante e a análise documental. Os colaboradores do estudo foram sete integrantes de uma Comunidade Terapêutica do município de Novo Hamburgo. Percebeu-se a grande importância da atividade física na fase de recuperação dos mesmos. Constatou-se que as atividades físicas praticadas pelos dependentes químicos contribuem para o bem estar físico e mental, a auto-estima, a disposição diária e o sono.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Atividade Física, Dependente Químico, Drogas.