76 - KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND RISK PERCEPTION: A VISION OF STUDENTS OF PSYCHOLOGY ON AIDS

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AIDS is currently considered a pandemic problem and occurs in different parts of the world, although it has regional characteristics (REBELLO; GOMES; SOUZA, 2011). The same holds true for Brazil, since AIDS reflects the social, economic and demographic inequalities of the country's population (FERREIRA, 2003). Considering that these aspects are not fixed, the phenomena related to AIDS also become dynamic because, according to Ferreira (2003), Pereira and Nichiata (2011) and Sampaio et al. (2011), new challenges arise in the epidemiological picture of the disease, such as: the spread of AIDS towards the countryside, its pauperization and its feminization (which refers to increased number of women with the disease), changing the epidemiological profile of AIDS in Brazil.

Some research results show that people have erroneous understandings as to the mode of transmission of the HIV virus. In a research carried out by Oltramari and Otto (2006), men and women in a marital situation perceived themselves as safe from the virus because they trusted their partners. The results of a research carried out by Guimarães, Martin and Quirino (2007) reveal that the subjects perceived AIDS as a disease of people from “big cities” and of “outsiders” and believed to be protected against the HIV virus because they were living in a rural area. This was also associated with the fact of knowing some aspects of their partner's lives. Another misunderstanding about AIDS transmission refers to the idea, described by Paiva, Pupo and Barboza (2006), that a virgin woman who gets married would not be infected by HIV, since she would have sex with only one partner, her husband.

These data may reflect the belief in the existence of the so-called “risk group”, in which only sex workers, homosexuals and drug users would be vulnerable to infection. This belief can also make it difficult for those already infected, as the subjects in Guimarães, Martin and Quirino's research (2007), to accept their condition, for the absence of symptoms makes it hard to believe in the existence of the disease and that anyone can be infected.

The term 'vulnerability' in relation to HIV/AIDS is important since it furthers our understanding of this phenomenon in its various dimensions, as opposed to the term 'risk behavior', which often refers to something individual and detached from the social context. The politic, economic, and sociocultural contexts may magnify or dilute the aspects related to the individual vulnerability (SCHAURICH; FREITAS, 2011).

Villela and Doreto (2006) consider that vulnerability can be understood as a product of the interaction between a person's inner characteristics – such as feelings and thoughts – and the social-economic variables, which affect the opportunities and the sense that one makes of him/herself and of the world. There are vulnerability factors, not determining factors. As the authors state, a critical reinterpretation and reframing of the messages conveyed to society enables the reduction of vulnerability.

According to Camargo and Botelho (2007), teenagers consider that health professionals, especially physicians, are the most appropriate professionals to approach this subject in their schools. Nevertheless, Camargo and Botelho (2007) and Romero et al. (2007) reported in their research that few adolescents seek information from health professionals. Romero et al. (2007) argue that this is probably due to the difficulty of access to healthcare and the brevity of medical appointments, especially in public health.

Oliveira et al. (2011) problematize about the conflicts between health professionals and patients in the daily care of people with HIV/AIDS. The authors advocate a theoretical perspective that understands health care as a relational and communicational perspective, in which there is a constant dialogue, always open to the agreements and disagreements that may arise therein. As for the difficulties relating to morality, this dialogue is supported by deliberation or deliberative bioethics.

Rebello, Gomes and Souza (2011) comment on the need to deepen the discussion on prevention, so as not to make the mistake of reducing it to the care of the disease. After all, prevention involves the promotion of healthier sexual-affective practices that consider the dimensions of pleasure and sexual rights. In this sense, there should be partnerships between the Brazilian Ministry of Education and the Brazilian Ministry of Health in order to offer courses that not only approach the reproductive system in its anatomical and physiological forms, but that consider it from a preventive and psychological perspective (REIS; SANTOS, 2011).

Therefore, the choice of working with Psychology students in this research is due to the fact that psychologists can contribute, according to Perucchi et al. (2011), to the identification of vulnerabilities, to the promotion of human rights and to the subjectivity of the person with HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the psychologist has a key role in the humanization of health care, aiming at minimizing hostile and prejudiced attitudes in human relationships.

METHODS

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee in Research of Dom Bosco Catholic University, under protocol no. 101/2004. The Psychology Program Coordination and professors decided the best time to collect data. The participants in the study included Psychology students at a private university in the city of Campo Grande, Brazil. Participants signed an informed consent. All of them were informed that their data would be confidential and that they could withdraw from participating in the research at any time.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire divided into six parts, arranged as follows: (1) participation in events on HIV/AIDS; (2) knowledge about HIV; (3) forms of prevention and means of transmission; (4) attitude towards the disease and the HIV-infected individuals; (5) risk perception; and (6) social-demographic data. In the next step, data were entered and analyzed in Microsoft Excel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants included Psychology students at a private university in the city of Campo Grande, Brazil. The university has a total of 296 Psychology students, 84 in the first semester, of which 70 (83.33%) answered the questionnaire; 67 in the third semester, of which 56 (83.58%) answered the questionnaire; 48 in the fifth semester, of which 35 (72.92%) answered the questionnaire; 52 students in the seventh semester, of which 40 (76.92%) answered the questionnaire; and 45 students in the ninth semester, of which 31 (68.89%) answered the questionnaire, totaling 232 participants, which represent 77.13% of the

students in the Psychology program.

The average age of participants was 22.84 years, corresponding, according to Martins et al. (2006), to the age group most infected by the virus, since 25% of new infections occur to people under 22 years. With regard to the marital status of the participants, 81.03% were single, 14.22% were married, 1.72% separated/divorced and 3.02% gave other answers. More than half (51.29%) of the participants reported having enough information and understanding about the problem.

As to the HIV identity, there were 64.4% of correct answers. One result in particular stands out: only 11.21% of the respondents considered as true the statement: "In a health facility, all patients should be considered as potential carriers of HIV." The results of a study carried out by Vasconcelos, Nogueira and Coêlho (2006) showed that students of a Pharmacy Program have also presented a low level of agreement to the same statement. The Universal Security Measures from the Brazilian Ministry of Health recommend considering all patients as potential HIV/AIDS carriers. One of the possible reasons that led participants to respond in such a way may be their belief that considering all patients as potential carriers of HIV is a procedure that, rather than being perceived as an attitude to protect life – as recommended by the Universal Security Measures – it would be perceived as a prejudiced attitude.

In the questions related to prevention methods, participants achieved 70.10% of correctness rate. Participants demonstrated good knowledge regarding the use of birth control pills (86.21%), interrupted intercourse method (71.55%) and vasectomy (79.31%), recognizing that these methods do not protect them against HIV, which is consistent with the results of Martins et al. (2006), in which young people presented adequate knowledge about prevention methods.

Nevertheless, 40.09% of the participants consider that the knowledge of the partner's sexual history is an effective way of preventing AIDS and 41% consider it not very effective. To consider the knowledge of the partner's intimacy as a protective factor against AIDS is complicated, since one cannot be sure of knowing their partner's sexual history. Moreover, because there are other means of infection, it is not possible to determine the infection of a person based only on the sexual transmission of the virus. These results are similar to those found by Oltramari and Otto (2006) and Guimarães, Martin and Quirino (2007), in which the use or non-use of condoms during sexual intercourse as a way of protection against AIDS was associated with knowing and trusting in partners. These data show the importance of what was said by Villela and Doreto (2006), who commented that in addition to the cognitive aspect, the social structures and affection related to the meaning that people give to their experiences should also be taken into account.

In the questions about HIV transmission, participants achieved a correctness rate of 74.88%. When asked if blood donation is a means of HIV transmission, 12.5% of participants answered "probably" and 21.55% answered that infection via blood donation is very likely to occur. Camargo and Botelho (2007) also found similar results, in which 30% of participants were unaware that HIV is not transmitted by blood donation. This finding is concerning, since it can lead to the non-adherence of people to blood donation campaigns. Thus, it is possible to see that the lack of information on HIV/AIDS has a negative impact on other areas of health.

There was a decrease in the correctness rate regarding the non-use of condoms during vaginal, anal and oral sex, respectively, as a very likely mean of infection. This decrease corroborates what Martins et al. (2006) stated: that teenagers, even having oral and anal intercourse, do not recognize them as a source of transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. These findings were also mentioned in several studies, such as Colussi and Coêlho (2003, 2005), Vasconcelos Nogueira and Coêlho (2006) and Reis et al. (2004). The high level of knowledge regarding latex condoms is also in agreement with Martins et al. (2006) and Romero et al. (2007).

Regarding the statements concerning attitudes and perceptions of risk for HIV/AIDS, a total of 70.26% of the participants had doubts about the statement that government institutions are not telling everything they know about AIDS. This result reveals disbelief in the information provided by government and a sense of enigma regarding this matter. Analyzing this statement, along with the question relating to blood donation, one can consider that such disbelief may interfere so that people do not donate blood.

The results of this research revealed that only 3.45% of the students reported having the professional training needed to provide care to a person with AIDS. This finding might be reflected in the shortage of professionals qualified to work with HIV/AIDS (PAIVA; PUPO; BARBOZA, 2006). Furthermore, the lack of trained professionals can perpetuate the situation described by Fonseca and Iriart (2012). According to a research carried out by these authors, health professionals feel unprepared to accommodate the subjectivity of patients and end up neglecting the counseling for pregnant women who undergo HIV testing. The authors concluded that the location where the research was conducted does not follow the recommendations of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which implies a lack of educational and emotional support and of risk assessment.

This unpreparedness seems to contribute to the persistence of prejudice in relation to AIDS among health professionals, because, as stated by Reis et al. (2004), this disease still has an association with prejudice. Such situation is very worrying, since a large part of the population considers these professionals as a suitable source for obtaining information about AIDS, as revealed by Camargo and Botelho (2007).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to the results of this study, participants showed good knowledge about HIV/AIDS, HIV means of transmission, and forms of prevention. However, they showed many doubts, and concerning beliefs and risk perceptions regarding the matter. This research reveals the importance of treating the subject clearly, so that prejudice is not reinforced by misinformation.

The results revealed a lack of preparation of future psychologists to care for people with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, for such professionals become able to protect themselves and to guide their patients with respect to HIV/AIDS, providing a quality service to the population, it is necessary that this matter is treated as a cross-content within the academic courses.

Psychology professionals, when properly trained, can contribute to the development of effective public policies focused on AIDS and to evaluate government actions. In the scope of practice of psychologists in relation to AIDS, some actions stand out, such as: the psychological duty, the counseling, the actions of health education, the distribution of condoms, the time of testing, etc. The psychologist can accommodate the subjectivity of patients, facilitate dialogue between health professionals and other patients, and the dialogue between sexual partners living with an HIV positive diagnosis. Moreover, this professional can act to combat prejudice and contribute for the understanding of AIDS as a disease that, despite being contagious and having no cure, is not a death sentence. The psychologist, thus, has a wide range of activities in health promotion and prevention of AIDS, but for it to become real it is necessary that they are attentive to the implications arising from their practices and know how to turn them into subsidies for building policies that are really public and efficient.

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KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND RISK PERCEPTION: A VISION OF STUDENTS OF PSYCHOLOGY ON AIDS

ABSTRACT

AIDS is currently a pandemic problem that presents regional characteristics and reflects the psychosocial and cultural variables of the population. Considering this, the present research was conducted with the objective of verifying knowledge, attitudes and risk perception regarding HIV/AIDS of Psychology students at a Brazilian university. A structured questionnaire was used, divided into four areas: knowledge about the identity of the HIV, HIV means of transmission, forms of prevention, attitudes and risk perception, and socio-demographics data of the participants. The students presented a good knowledge in relation to the HIV means of transmission and the prevention measures related to HIV/AIDS. However, some data cause concern. An index of only 11.21% of the participants considered as true the statement: “In a health facility, all patients should be considered as potential carriers of HIV”, and only 3.45% of the students answered that they had the necessary professional training to provide care to a person with AIDS. These data point to the lack of preparation of these future health professionals to guide and take care of population, and to the risk of exposure to the HIV. Thus, it is necessary that this matter is treated as a cross-content during the academic years.

KEYWORDS: HIV; Psychology; Prevention.

CONNAISSANCES, ATTITUDES ET PERCEPTION DU RISQUE: LA VISION DES ETUDIANTS DE PSYCHOLOGIE FACE AU SIDA.

RÉSUMÉ

Le SIDA est maintenant une pandémie qui a des caractéristiques régionales et qui refléte les variables psycho-socio-culturelles de la population. Considérant cela, la présente étude a été menée afin de déterminer les connaissances, les attitudes et la perception du risque face au SIDA des étudiants de psychologie. Un questionnaire structuré a été utilisé, c'est divisé en quatre zones: la connaissance de l'identité du VIH, des moyens de transmission du VIH, la prévention, les attitudes devant du SIDA et la perception du risque de SIDA. En outre, des données démographiques des participants. Les étudiants ont une bonne connaissance des modes de transmission du VIH et des mesures de prévention du VIH. Toutfois, certaines données sont

préoccupants. Un indice de seulement 11,21% des participants a estimé que l'énoncé suivant est vrai: «Dans le contexte de l'établissement de santé, il faut considérer tous les patients comme des vecteurs potentiels du VIH" et seulement 3,45% des élèves ont déclaré avoir une formation professionnelle nécessaire de fournir des soins à une personne atteinte du SIDA. Ces données indiquent le manque de préparation des futurs professionnels de la santé pour orienter la population sur le risque d'exposition au VIH. Ainsi, il est nécessaire que le sujet soit traité comme un contenu transversal pendant la formation universitaire.

MOTS-CLÉS: VIH; psychologie; prévention.

CONOCIMIENTOS, ACTITUDES Y PERCEPCION DE RIESGO: LA VISIÓN DE LOS ACADEMICOS DE LA CARRERA DE PSICOLOGIA FRENTE AL SIDA

RESUMEN

El SIDA es actualmente una pandemia que presenta características regionales y refleja las variables psicosocioculturales de la población. Considerando esto, la presente investigación fue realizada con el objetivo de verificar los conocimientos, las actitudes y la percepción de riesgo frente al SIDA de los académicos de la carrera de Psicología. Se utilizó un cuestionario estructurado, dividido en cuatro áreas: conocimientos sobre identidad del VIH, medios de transmisión del VIH, formas de prevención, actitudes y percepción de riesgo frente al SIDA, además de los datos sociodemográficos de los participantes. Los estudiantes presentaron un buen conocimiento con relación a las formas de transmisión del virus VIH y a las medidas de prevención del VIH. Sin embargo, algunos datos causan preocupación. Un índice de apenas 11,21% de los participantes consideró como verdadera la afirmación: “En el ambiente de instituciones de salud, se debe considerar a todos los pacientes como potencialmente portadores del VIH” y apenas el 3,45% de los estudiantes respondieron tener entrenamiento profesional necesario para brindar atención a una persona con SIDA. Esos datos apuntan el despreparo de futuros profesionales de salud para orientar a la población atendida y el riesgo a la exposición al vírus VIH. Así, se hace necesario que el asunto sea tratado como contenido transversal durante la formación académica.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: VIH; Psicología; prevención.

CONHECIMENTOS, ATITUDES E PERCEPÇÃO DE RISCO: A VISÃO DOS ALUNOS DO CURSO DE PSICOLOGIA SOBRE A AIDS

RESUMO

A AIDS é atualmente uma pandemia que apresenta características regionais e reflete as variáveis psicossocioculturais da população. Considerando isto, a presente pesquisa foi realizada com o objetivo de verificar os conhecimentos, as atitudes e a percepção de risco frente à AIDS dos acadêmicos do curso de Psicologia. Fez-se uso de um questionário estruturado, dividido em quatro áreas: conhecimentos sobre identidade do HIV, meios de transmissão do HIV, formas de prevenção, atitudes e percepção de risco frente à AIDS, além dos dados sociodemográficos dos participantes. Os estudantes apresentaram um bom conhecimento em relação às formas de transmissão do vírus HIV e às medidas de prevenção do HIV Porém, alguns dados causam preocupação. Um índice de apenas 11,21% dos participantes considerou como verdadeira a afirmação: “No ambiente de instituições de saúde, deve-se considerar todos os pacientes como potencialmente portadores do HIV” e apenas 3,45% dos estudantes responderam ter treinamento profissional necessário para prestar atendimento a uma pessoa com AIDS. Esses dados apontam o despreparo de futuros profissionais de saúde para orientar a população atendida e o risco à exposição ao vírus HIV. Assim, faz-se necessário que o assunto seja tratado como conteúdo transversal durante a formação acadêmica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: HIV; Psicologia; prevenção.