

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE USE OF MEDICINES FOR THE TEACHER'S WORK ACCORDING TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS FROM THE MUNICIPAL NETWORK OF PETRÓPOLIS – RJ



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ABSTRACT

Daily, teachers are faced with situations of violence and demands in the school environment, in addition to the devaluation of the teaching work. These issues seem to produce more and more psychic suffering and, consequently, lead to the use of medication by some teachers. The objective of our research was to identify the social representations (SR) of the use of medication for the work of teachers according to elementary school teachers from the municipal network of Petrópolis - RJ. The study was carried out based on the theory of social representations (SRT), developed by Serge Moscovici, and on the central core theory (TNC), proposed by Jean-Claude Abric. 200 elementary school teachers who work in the municipal education network of that city participated in the research. As an instrument, we used a questionnaire that included a free association test, whose inducing term was 'use of medication for the teacher's work', in addition to exploratory questions on the theme and characterization of the participants. The data from this research were submitted to prototypical analysis, through the use of the EVOC 2005 software, in addition to descriptive analysis of the other data. The probable central core (NC) of the use of medications for the teacher's work included cognitions related to considering their use necessary (necessary) and to mental disorders and physical/mental symptoms (sadness, tiredness, anxiety and stress). The difficulties of the teaching work seem to be producing psychic suffering, and this is being increasingly medicalized.

Keywords: Social Representations. Use of Medications. Teaching Work. Medicalization. Elementary School.

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INTRODUCTION

The term medicalization, according to the propositions of Freitas and Amarante (2015) began to be used in scientific writings from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. The so-called therapeutic revolution, which encompassed treatments with hormones and antibiotics, the development of vaccines, as well as the triumph of the pharmaceutical industry, occurred mainly at the end of World War II and its impact significantly affected society at the time. This same society followed with interest the news that new medicines were being discovered, since they represented the hope of a cure. With regard to mental health, in this same period, there was the so-called *boom* in psychotherapies, as mentioned by the scholars in vogue. Until that moment, the treatment of questions of the mind was limited to psychoanalysis and treatments linked to behavioral theories. They also elucidate that the development of psychotropic drugs was considered by the society of the time as the emergence of miracle pills that would be able to definitively solve the psychic illnesses considered until that moment as incurable

Carneiro (2014, p. 13) indicated that "the abusive use of psychotropic drugs is a worldwide problem" and, according to him, one of the causes of this problem surrounds the "culture of immediacy of solutions", since in this context, anguish and sadness need to be overcome quickly and without much questioning, "as if these feelings were not part of the repertoire of the subjects' essence".

Carneiro (2014) also highlights a research that involves the use of fluoxetine. He mentioned that in 39,782 special or controlled prescriptions, fluoxetine was present in 10,000 of them, and that this medication is part of the new generation of antidepressants, used both to lose weight and to reduce or relieve pain. He also points to the fact that 80% of fluoxetine prescriptions were intended for women.

Reis Filho (2014, p. 78) reinforces this issue, since, for the author, people today "come to believe that it has become obsolete and out of fashion to feel distressed or face some suffering", because "psychiatry has a vast and growing arsenal of medications, increasingly precise and effective in its objectives of removing symptoms, with fewer and fewer unpleasant side effects".

Freitas and Amarante (2015, p. 12) point out that as a result of the fear faced by society today, the use of medication appears as a promise of attenuation or even overcoming.

The use of medicines has emerged with the aim of organizing people's lives, since, according to the researchers, although many consider that the current population is sicker than before, what actually happens is that "we are getting sicker due to causes inherent to civilization, among which the great villain would be stress, for example" (Freitas & Amarante, 2015, p.13).

Zorzanelli, Ortega and Bezerra Júnior (2014, p. 1860) discuss a relevant issue regarding the use of the term medicalization: they conducted a study in which they describe a history of the term medicalization since its first use in the works of Bárbara Wootton and Thomas Szasz, who limited the use of the term to the scope of medicine, to its scope in the current context, which, according to the authors, involve both cases that do not necessarily cover some type of disease, such as contraceptives, and those used to treat cognitive issues. Among these various forms of medication use, the authors highlighted that there is an extensive range of options to treat what they called "medicalizable objects, such as childhood, deviant behaviors, pregnancy and childbirth, shyness, aging, masculinity, overweight, sadness, memory", among others.

It is important to note that research on medicalization in the school environment usually focuses on students, and not on teachers, for example, Lima et al. (2021) researched the issue of how the medicalization of education is addressed in school and Ribeiro and Rodrigues (2020) made a cartography accompanying teachers with children with school difficulties. Despite this, some research on teacher medicalization has been carried out in recent years (Facci; Esper, 2020, Silva *et al.*, 2023).

The aforementioned works, related to the medicalization of society, make us believe that Education professionals - as part of this society - are making use of medication in the face of teaching work and, to understand this issue, we use Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations (SRT) and the central core theory (TNC) proposed by Jean-Claude Abric.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Serge Moscovici carried out an investigation on the social representation of psychoanalysis, believing that different social groups have different representations of this object: with this research, the foundations were laid for a psychosocial theory interested in analyzing common sense knowledge, which is a substrate for actions and communications between subjects (Moscovici, 2012).

For the creator of the theory of the central core (TNC) of social representations (SR), social representation is "an organized and structured set of information, beliefs, opinions

and attitudes; it constitutes a particular socio-cognitive system, composed of two subsystems: a central system (or central nucleus) and a peripheral system" (Abric, 2003, p. 38).

In TNC, her hypothesis is that SR is organized around a central nucleus (NC), which gives meaning to representation, around it, the peripheral system has more individualized aspects related to the context and acting as an agent of defense of representation (Abric, 2000). As for the types of elements present in the NC, they can be normative (related to the values of the subjects, their ideologies and history) and functional (related to the descriptions and practical character of the representation) (Abric, 2003).

In view of this understanding, aiming to shed light on the theme of teacher medicalization, the objective of the research is to analyze the social representations of the use of medication for the teacher's work according to elementary school teachers in the municipal network of Petrópolis - RJ.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative and exploratory research, using the framework of the central core theory (TNC) of social representations (SR) developed by Jean-Claude Abric, whose objective is to analyze the social representations of the use of medicines for the teacher's work according to elementary school teachers from the municipal network of Petrópolis - RJ.

The research included 200 teachers from the municipal school system of the City of Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro, who work in Elementary School, of both sexes and regardless of age or time of teaching.

We used a questionnaire with a free evocation question with the inducing term use of medications for the teacher's work. Questions related to the researched object and the characterization of the participants were also included in the questionnaire.

The data collected were analyzed from a prototypical analysis using the EVOC 2005 software (Oliveira *et al.*, 2005), for the construction of the four-house framework, which was carried out on the occasion of the interpretation of the results of this work.

The present study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Petrópolis (CEP/UCP), through registration in Plataforma Brasil under CAAE number 79329717.6.0000.5281, receiving the approval opinion on 11/01/2017 under number 2.363.264.

RESULTS

All 200 teachers interviewed (100%) are elementary school teachers, 164 of them (82%) female and 36 (18%) male.

As for the other results on the participants' experience in the area of Education, the following stood out: regarding the time of experience in teaching, 42 (21%) were between 16 and 20 years old; Regarding the weekly workload of teachers, 59 (29.5%) work 40 hours a week; as for the total number of students to whom they teach, 88 (44%) teach up to 50 students; as for the number of classes for which they teach, 52 (26%) work between four and 10 classes; and as for the number of schools in which they teach, 93 (46.5%) work in only one school.

The result obtained from the prototypical analysis of the use of drugs for the teacher's work according to elementary school teachers from the municipal network of Petrópolis - RJ can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Prototypical analysis referring to the inducing term 'use of medicines for the teacher's work'. Petrópolis, 2017. (n=200)

F >= 19/OMI < 2,9			F >= 19/OMI >= 2,9		
Core	F	IMO	First periphery	F	IMO
Sadness	54	2,833	Depression	36	2,19
Stress	53	2,509			
Need	51	1,569			
Anxiety	24	2,583			
Tiredness	23	2,870			
F < 19/OMI < 2,9			F < 19/OMI >= 2,9		
Contrast zone	F	OMI	Second periphery	F	OMI
Dependency	13	2,308	Frustration	13	3,231
Help	11	2,818	Devaluation	12	4,167
Antidepressants	11	2,000	Insomnia	11	3,364
Wear	11	2,727	Overload	11	3,364

Table 1 presents the result from the prototypical analysis referring to the inducing term 'use of medications for the teacher's work' in the four-box chart. The cognitions that emerged in the probable central core of this representation were 'anxiety', 'tiredness', 'stress', 'need' and 'sadness'. All these cognomas had a frequency greater than or equal to 19 and a mean order less than 2.9.

In the first periphery, in turn, 'depression' cognition appeared, with a frequency greater than or equal to 19 and an average order greater than or equal to 2.9. In the contrast zone, the cognitions 'help', 'antidepressants', 'dependence' and 'wear' emerged with a frequency of less than 19 and an average order of less than 2.9. In the second

periphery, the cognomas 'devaluation', 'frustration', 'insomnia' and 'overload' appeared, with a frequency lower than 19 and an average order greater than or equal to 2.9.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the classification of cognitions that figured in the probable central nucleus of the social representation of the use of medication for the teacher's work, according to the propositions of Abric (2003) about the constitutive elements of the NC, we could verify that all of them are functional elements, as they relate to practical aspects related to representation ('anxiety', 'tiredness', 'stress', 'need' and 'sadness').

Regarding the cognema 'anxiety' in the probable central nucleus, we believe that it was evoked because it is configured as a mental disorder for which medication is used. Regarding this involvement, Batista *et al.* (2016) identify in their study that among the 254 forms that contained diagnoses related to mental disorders recognized by the ICD-10, 6.3% corresponded to anxiety.

It seems to us, therefore, that in order to mitigate the effects of anxiety, teachers have made use of some type of medication. Hence the explanation of the presence of this cognition when they were questioned about the use of medication for the teacher's work.

The cognition 'tiredness' was also among those that comprise the probable central nucleus for the inducing term 'use of medication for the teacher's work'. We believe that this cognition was due to the fact that it is one of the causes that cause the mental disorders that have affected the teachers, disorders that we believe are responsible for the use of medication by the teachers.

Studies show that mental illness is a problem of significant relevance among teachers, both with regard to symptoms of mental fatigue, nervousness, and in the identification of common mental disorders (Araújo; Carvalho, 2009, p. 439).

Regarding the cognosis 'stress' in the probable central nucleus, we believe that one of the causes of the evocation of this cognition was the fact that teachers are medicalizing themselves in an attempt to mitigate the effects of stress. Freitas and Amarante (2015, p. 13) mention that just like our propositions that teachers are getting sick because of issues related to their daily lives, "we are also getting sicker due to causes inherent to civilization, among which the great villain would be stress, for example".

The cognition 'sadness' in the probable central nucleus, in turn, seemed to present itself both in the face of having to deal with so many difficulties in the profession, and also

because it was a symptom of 'depression', a symptom that appeared in the first periphery, but which, however, presents a frequency very close to those delimited in the probable central nucleus.

In this sense, Carneiro (2014, p. 13) points out that "the abusive use of psychotropic drugs is a worldwide problem", because, according to the author, one of the causes of this problem surrounds the "culture of immediacy of solutions", since in this context, anguish and sadness need to be overcome quickly and without much questioning. It seems to us that sadness, a feeling common to the human experience, is being medicalized by teachers in order not to avoid it.

We believe that the cognition 'need' in the probable central nucleus points to the fact that the use of medication to teach is represented as a need, something that needs to be done to continue acting, revealing a medicalized experience in an attempt to control/deal with reality. In addition, it seems that we are facing a psychological issue, since professionals believe that in order to act they need to use medication for their ailments. The use of medicines was therefore presented as an issue related to their teaching practice, since it seems to us that a significant number of teachers believe that they really need them to teach.

Freitas and Amarante (2015, p. 27) advocate that "medicalization is so incorporated into our lives that we can even consider it second nature. And we fight for it, as if by fighting for more medicalization we are aiming for more being."

In the first periphery, only the cognema 'depression' appeared, being another mental disorder that requires the administration of medication and, possibly, this disorder affects some of the participating professors, and seems to be related to the following cognema, since, in the face of depression, it is necessary to use antidepressants.

In the contrast zone appeared the cognema 'antidepressants', which are drugs known to be used to treat disorders such as anxiety, stress and depression. Zorzanelli, Ortega and Bezerra Júnior (2014, p. 1860) point out that among the various forms of medication use, there is an extensive range of options to treat what they called "medicalizable objects, such as childhood, deviant behaviors, pregnancy and childbirth, shyness, aging, masculinity, overweight, sadness, memory", among others. Freitas and Amarante (2015, p. 91) also proclaim, about the use of antidepressants and anxiolytics, that "in our daily lives, commercial advertisements reinforce this idea and transform it into a master truth".

Also included in the contrast zone was the cognema 'help' that we believe is related to antidepressants. Teachers possibly consider that the medications help them to develop their work better. Freitas and Amarante (2015, p. 12) indicated that as a result of the fear faced by society today, the use of medication appears as a "promise to mitigate or even overcome it".

The cognition 'dependence' in the contrast zone probably refers to the fact that many teachers depend on medication for their performance as teachers. On this issue, Freitas and Amarante (2015, p. 92) explained "that the available numbers show the epidemic of the medicalization of sadness in our society", and that, in 2007, "antidepressants became the most frequently prescribed drugs, surpassing high blood pressure medications".

The cognosis 'wear' in the contrast zone, in turn, leads us to think that the wear and tear caused by the teacher's work comprises one of the factors that favor the use of medication for the teacher's work.

The most visible reflections of the malaise that affects teachers can be observed in the high incidence of requests for leave for health treatment, in particular those attributed to psychic disorders that are being treated as professional exhaustion syndrome, also known as burnout syndrome (Xavier, 2014, p. 837).

In short, the SR use of medication for the teacher's work seems to be related to considering the use necessary and to the mental disorders and physical/mental symptoms that affect the professionals involved in the activity of educating.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the result of the research on social representations of the use of medication for the teacher's work according to elementary school teachers from the municipal network of Petrópolis - RJ, it seemed to us that the use of medication in this professional activity is a necessity to produce relief and promote a more satisfactory performance of the teacher and, at the same time, this demonstrates the latter's psychic illness, or in the face of the teaching activity itself, as well as other life experiences and relationships developed.

In the probable central nucleus of the SR of the use of medications for the teacher's work, the cognomas 'anxiety', 'tiredness' and 'stress' appeared: two of these cognomas ('anxiety' and 'stress') are considered mental disorders that probably affect some of the

professors participating in the research, giving rise to the need that can lead to medicalization.

We believe that this need for the use of medication for the teacher's work is caused by the mental disorders currently common in the teaching environment, such as anxiety, stress and depression, which are caused by fatigue, sadness, exhaustion common in the profession, interpersonal relationships inside and outside the classroom, among other factors.

We think that actions are needed to cooperate for the reduction of mental disorders and medicalization, and this involves valuing the teaching activity and support/treatment for teachers affected by mental health problems, but also analyzing and reducing the problems that plague school units from the point of view of work and relationships in the classroom and in the school environment as a whole. The government and civil society need to watch over teachers, considering that they are the ones who achieve many goals of Education and need to be valued and recognized.

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